CHAPTER THREE: LONELINESS AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Ambivalence of Generations

The diaspora's sense of alienation and rootlessness stem from geographical and social dislocation, and from cultural and emotional displacement. The Indian migrants to the West, first of all, have suffered a geographical displacement and hence there is a physical detachment from their country, but physical displacement need not necessarily mean that migrants are also emotionally displaced. Secondly, the diasporic Indians' sense of being outsiders in an alien land gives them a cultural detachment from Western society, but being cultural outsiders does not necessarily imply that they are also social outsiders in their adopted country. The anxiety arising out of these conflicting situations makes one ambivalent. In the introductory essay to the book, Theorizing Diaspora, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur give a beautiful analogy that befits the diasporic Indians perfectly:

Janus, the figure from the Greek pantheon whose gaze is simultaneously directed both forward and backward, suggests a certain temporality; the figure at once looks to the future and the past. Indeed this is a seductive metaphor for the immigrant, exile, refugee, or expatriate (Braziel 9)

The Indian diaspora, unlike some other diasporic communities, was not forced to flee their country of origin and never harboured any hostile feelings towards any regime there. Hence, the diasporic Indians' longing for their homeland is more acute.

Diasporic individuals face the dilemma of allegiance to their native country and to their adopted country. It is a tantalizing position and it accentuates the ambivalence. Adit and Dev, Anita Desai's characters from the novel Bye-Bye Blackbird, migrated to
England because of economic and educational reasons respectively. In the England of the late 1960s they face racial discriminations and insults but they also find acceptance from various quarters. Adit prefers to stay in England showing allegiance to his adopted country, whereas Dev wants to go back to India because of his allegiance to his homeland. The mixed reaction from the host society constantly keeps them undecided about whether to stay in their adopted country or to return back home. Ultimately after much arguments and cogitation when they do come to a decision, it is Adit who returns home and Dev who stays behind. In arguing for their causes they discover that their own arguments are not convincing enough and each concede to the other’s point of view. They change their stance but interestingly they still find each other on the opposite side. Together they represent the two faces of Janus – when one is turned towards the home country, the other automatically face the adopted country. Such is the ambivalence that individuals face as migrants.

In Sunetra Gupta’s novel *Memories of Rain* the protagonist Moni is torn between the pull of longing and belonging. Moni, a Bengali, belongs to India, but her literary leanings give her a romantic longing for England. She marries an Englishman, Anthony, and migrates to England. On reaching there, she finds a changed England; very unlike the image visualized through English literature texts she studied in college. She consoles herself in the fact that her romantic longing is there to sustain her. But when her husband betrays her, her personal tragedy taints her private imagination. Her romantic longing then turns towards her homeland and she decides to return to India. So it is seen that it is not only social and cultural aspects that cause alienation in diasporic life. Personal relationships and private imagination play as vital a role as any other extrinsic cause.
Globalization has ushered in a new world order where it is not always the big issues of racial or religious discrimination that affect the migrants. It is the small things that stoke the soft embers of non-belonging in the diasporic Indian's mind to keep it burning. Mrs. Sen, from Jhumpa Lahiri's short story “Mrs. Sen’s”, is the wife of a professor in Boston, and is not exactly a cultural pariah. She has made herself at home buying, chopping, and cooking vegetables and fishes. Yet a sense of loneliness gnaws at her being so she decides to baby-sit eleven-year-old Eliot. But she has to baby-sit at her own apartment because she does not know how to drive. She practices driving with her husband but is always afraid to go on road. Once on getting the information that some tasty halibuts have arrived on the boats, her desire to get a whole fish to cook overcomes her dread of driving. She drives only to meet with an accident. If Mrs. Sen were to be in Bengal her inability to drive would not have been a hindrance for her. But her being in Boston, it becomes her handicap and a cause of her sense of alienation. This is how little unacknowledged things gain in importance in the context of displacement.

Diasporic life gives an insight into “acculturation, which concerns the acquisition of the values, attitudes, beliefs, language, and behaviours of the host society” (Kivisto 28). Obviously, migrants coming from a different social and cultural background need to traverse some distance to meet the host society at a middle ground. It is not exclusively the host society that has to adjust itself to accommodate the migrants. Anita Desai depicts in her novel *Fasting, Feasting* the Indian migrant Arun. It has not been long since Arun arrived in the US from India. He lives with the family of his American host and despite being provided with plenty he finds it difficult to adapt. He cannot stomach the food overflowing from their refrigerator as much as he cannot stomach their lifestyle. In the
end he is seen discarding from his bag some of the contents brought from India. It is an indication that he is making room for the new. He has learnt to adapt. But adaptation does not resolve all positions of ambivalence. In the short story "Winterscape", from the book *Diamond Dust* by the same author, Rakesh is a diasporic Indian. When his aunt and his mother visit him from India and cook for him "the foods of his childhood [. . .] or retail the gossip of the village" (Desai, *Diamond* 44) he struggles in his effort not to disappoint them, for Rakesh "how completely [. . .] had transformed himself into a husband, a Canadian" (Desai, *Diamond* 44). Thus remains the ambivalence – the dilemma faced by the migrant Indian in the West.

The Indian diasporic community is quite unique because of its ever-changing and ever-growing nature. Any migrant gets automatically inducted into the community and helps in populating it without even getting actively involved in its growth. Naturally a sense of non-belonging arises from the passivity inherent in such a condition. Tara, from Bharati Mukherjee’s novel *Desirable Daughters*, finds herself passive and therefore an outsider in the social circle of diasporic Indians that her elder sister, Padma, introduces her to. Even if a migrant gets actively involved with the diasporic Indian community it simultaneously alienates the said migrant from the newly acquired nationality due to the counter influence of ethnocentrism. The hegemonic Indian, on becoming a non-resident Indian, gains a new nationality but at the same time also acquires the status of an ethnic minority in the new land of abode (Ref. Radhakrishnan 121). This conundrum gives rise to the sense of non-belonging. The case of Ashima, from Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake*, stands to prove the point. Ashima has spent most of her time in Boston giving parties for her Indian acquaintances in that area and enjoying the social circle of the
Bengali diasporic community there. Perhaps unknowingly she has fashioned herself with a “ghetto” mentality. Thus, when she is to face her son Gogol’s American girlfriend, she finds herself in an awkward position. Overwhelmed by her own life within the diasporic community she has somehow failed to realize that her son, brought up as an American, will probably choose to marry a girl from the majority population that is American.

The sense of non-belonging has different connotations for first generation immigrants and for second generation immigrants. The second generation diasporic Indians do not have any extrinsic cause to feel like outsiders because they live within a milieu in which they are born and bred. The second generation diasporic Indians have by birth one nationality due to their immediate ancestors’ immigration to the West, but by ancestry they can also identify themselves with their ethnic origin. Even if they have little emotional investment in the country of their parents’ origin they cannot deny the fact that they have inherited traits that give them their ethnic identity. It is this state of duality — when the mind is undecided about one’s place of belonging — that has the germ of the sense of rootlessness. It is as if the sense itself is inherited by the second generation diasporic Indians from their ancestors.

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s story called “The Third and Final Continent” the father brings his son home from Harvard University, every weekend “so that he can eat rice with us with his hands, and speak Bengali” (Lahiri, Interpreter 197). Naturally the father does not want his son to lose his link with his roots. But it puts the demand on his son to constantly keep switching on and off from one mode of living to the other. No doubt, the opportunities afforded and the experiences gained in living alternate lives is a source of rejoicing but, in this state of simultaneously living in two worlds, a kind of restlessness
creeps in. A number of characters like Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi from Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* depict similar predicament. At various stages of their growing up they encounter the questions of identity, belonging, and allegiance. They are restless because they cannot resolve their queries and come out of their ambivalent positions. In some cases they become misfits not only in the diasporic community but within their own family as well.

In a multicultural global society that strives to preserve discrete ethnic identities, the case of second generation non-resident Indians is really a peculiar one. They take pride in their cultural heritage yet are at odds with its stereotypical beliefs and, in distancing themselves from such cultural stereotypes, they partake of selective acculturation within the host society. It is an ambivalent position but it is the only position they can reconcile themselves to despite facing a crisis of identity in doing so. Being brought up in the liberal atmosphere of the West, albeit as representatives of an ethnic minority, they have a sense of claustrophobia when their ethnic identity curbs their Western lifestyle. Wracked by a tiring condition they seek refuge in the sense of freedom that the Western world affords – liberties of thought, speech, expression, lifestyle, sexuality, and so on. It is as Westerners then that the second generation diasporic Indians are most potent in expressing the angst of their dual identity. For Mrs. Das, in Lahiri’s short story “Interpreter of Maladies”, her adultery is the expression of her anxiety of displaced existence. But when she wants to relieve her guilty conscience, she finds her succour in India in the form of a passive listener Mr. Kapasi, the tourist guide. Therefore, it appears that one can never divorce oneself from any one of the two worlds in which they reside.
The innate human instinct is to identify oneself with one’s root. Duality becomes an inherent need, even if it is a painful one.

Diasporic Indians, both of first generation and second generation, are equally victims of the sense of alienation and rootlessness. Their hope of escape from such a situation is not by returning to their homeland because that will question the very purpose of migration. The only possible solution that seems at all credible is if the diasporic individual becomes an itinerant citizen of the world. Like Bharati Mukherjee’s eponymous heroine Jasmine the migrant may keep on traveling taking up different identities at various points of time. Or in extreme circumstances, like those of Debendranath and Niharika from Sunetra Gupta’s novel *A Sin of Colour*, they make a total escape from both the worlds into anonymity. Perhaps these are not solutions but they offer some sort of panacea or at least a consolation to people in dislocated existence.

The narrator of Jhumpa Lahiri’s story “The Third and Final Continent” says:

> Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.

(Lahiri, *Interpreter* 198)

It appears that the ambivalence inherent in displaced existence is both ordinary and bewildering. The diasporic Indian in its exilic state has to go through a perpetual process of self-fashioning to withstand such a paradox.

**Loneliness in Diasporic Life**

Loneliness is a manifestation of both inner and outer conditions and hence its sense can be evoked even in the middle of society. The diasporic Indian community is not
exempted from being a victim of the sense of loneliness. Since Indian independence, the UK has been a prime destination for migrant Indians. The earliest of such communities constituted either of “Anglophiles”, who loved the beauty of England and all things English, or of “Anglophobes”, who wanted to exploit the economic and academic opportunities in post-imperial Britain and perhaps take the proverbial “postcolonial revenge” (Ref. Mohanram 103). In England both these types of migrant Indians are pressed together and marked as “the Others.” Sometimes the blatant othering process becomes quite farcical, for example in the 1960s the London docks had three kinds of lavatories marked “Ladies”, “Gents”, and “Asiatics” (Ref. Desai, Blackbird 17). The sense of otherness is sometimes due to racism and sometimes it comes out from the individual’s own inner needs. It is in such a situation when both the Anglophobes and the Anglophiles find themselves in the same boat that their distinctions diminish for their purposes dilute. Being purposeless, they find themselves lonely.

Anita Desai’s novel Bye-Bye Blackbird is about migrant Indians in the England of 1960s. Adit lives in London with his English wife, Sarah. Dev is a newly arrived immigrant from India. Adit has well adjusted himself in the country of his adoption and has allayed his sense of loneliness by being nonchalant towards its various causes. Dev, on the other hand, is critical of Adit’s attitude. He gets disturbed and angry when someone whispers the word “wog” behind his back. Obviously Dev has more reasons to be lonely and thus when he ventures into the city he feels “like a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison” (Desai, Blackbird 169). But once Dev’s loneliness stops haunting him, he decides to stay in England. Adit, in the interim, suffers from a crisis of identity. He starts longing for the land and the people he has left
behind. He feels depressed of “Mrs. Roscommon-James’ sniffs and barks and Dev’s angry sarcasm” (Desai, *Blackbird* 176) as well as from the fact that Sarah “had shut him out, with a bang and a snap, from her childhood of one-eared pandas and large jigsaw puzzles” (Desai, *Blackbird* 176). He feels lonely and decides to return to India with Sarah. What this proves is that the sense of loneliness is not a phenomenon of overpowering presence but rather of intermittent overpowering, guided by circumstances incidental and always in flux.

The United States of America, just as the United Kingdom, has equally attracted Indians as a destination of academic and economic prosperity. The size of the Indian diasporic community in the US is gradually increasing in the post-globalization era. But it is quite debatable to assert that globalization has solved the problems of the diasporic Indians. No doubt, problems like racism are no longer as headstrong as before but the problems of the inner human condition still plague the diasporic community. Arun, from the novel *Fasting, Feasting*, is a very good example of an Indian in the suburbs of Massachusetts, USA, who succumbs to loneliness, being unable to adjust to a culture of freedom. He is not only bewildered by American college-life but also by the ways of the Patton family, his host for the summer. He cannot understand the passion with which Mr. Patton barbecues red meat himself after coming home early only to find his son Rod and daughter Melanie absent from the ceremony. He finds it strange that Mrs. Patton keeps her refrigerator always stocked to the full despite knowing that there are not many heads in her family to consume that food. Arun cannot even identify with Rod and Melanie. Though Arun takes up jogging like Rod, yet unlike him, he simply cannot devote himself to such physical exercise. Arun is appalled to find Melanie’s condition of bulimia amidst
the plenty that America provides. All dysfunctional indulgences of Americans make Arun puzzled and puzzlement accentuates his sense of loneliness. Faced with a seeming paradox of a new culture, he is lonely.

An inviting doorway does not mean that the hearth inside can make one feel like home especially when the idea of home and family differs from culture to culture. This difference is not fundamental; it is superficial. But so are all cross-cultural conflicts and paradoxes. The first encounter that migrants have with their country of adoption is with superficialities. It definitely takes time to scratch this surface of superficiality and till then it is only loneliness for company. Arun tries to seep in through the surface for he knows that the meeting place for two cultures can only be some middle ground. To reach this middle ground he has to assuage the distance that he has to travel, for which he has to know the distance of the other extremity. Arun does so by delving deep into the core of a suburban American family and invariably he is shocked at his first encounter. Arun takes the first step in overcoming his state of shock by giving to Mrs. Patton as parting gifts the parcels that have been sent to him by his parents from India.

Arun may travel that extra mile and transform himself into the like of the Westernized Rakesh, another of Desai's character from the short story "Winterscape". But Rakesh does not necessarily live without any sense of loneliness. What he has alienated himself from to become a Westerner gives rise to his sense of loneliness. This not only proves that loneliness is an inherent character of diasporic life but also that the sense of loneliness acts as an umbilical cord attaching oneself to one's native place, irrespective of whether such a space exists physically or politically, while living in a diaspora. It is perhaps consoling that loneliness is, in this sense, meaningful.
Of course loneliness and alienation are not merely diasporic conditions but rather part of the general human condition, and not merely in the Marxist sense. The great protagonists of classical English and Russian fiction – Catherine, Heathcliffe, Maggie, Dorothea, Eustacia, Raskolnikov, Anna Karenina – all are inherent embodiments of the essentially exilic alienated human condition. Anil Ramdas writes about Madam Bovary:

*Madame Bovary* can be read as an early allegory for what later came to be known as the immigrant experience. People [. . .] think that *Madame Bovary* is about love. But no [. . .] love is a metaphor for longing, and *Madame Bovary* is about the duality “boredom” and “disappointment.” Once alerted of this, you find evidence for it on every page. (Ramdas 17)

Displacement causes loneliness but individual actions may as well cause loneliness. Sunetra Gupta’s character Moni, from *Memories of Rain*, goes to London after marrying Anthony. The London of her imagination built on the study of English literature does not match the London she encounters for real. What Ramdas writes about Madam Bovary is equally true for Moni: “To read is to experience things in the imagination. And a person who wants to actually go through the imaginary experiences first-hand is bound to be disappointed” (Ramdas 17). Yet, it is not only the “unfriendly city” (Gupta, *Memories* 46), “cruel London” (Gupta, *Memories* 47), the main cause of her loneliness – rather it is Anthony’s betrayal and indifference. Anthony not only proves to be an unfaithful husband to her but also makes his mistress, Anna, virtually a member of their household, showing indifference towards Moni’s feelings. Moni suffers silently in her loneliness:
Silence her mute companion of lonely evenings, a discerning audience of her song, silence had been an elusive spirit in her metropolitan childhood, had befriended her in North London [. . .] (Gupta, Memories 96)

Moni's decision to return to Calcutta secretly with her six-year-old daughter is another pointer to her lonely state in displaced existence. Moni cannot confide about her escape to anyone in London because in that city she can find no confidante. It was Anthony who was to make Moni at home in London, so when Anthony betrays, London forever remains alien for Moni. It shatters her romantic notion of England that she had harboured because "no matter how much people love literature, they can never become literature" (Ramdas 18). This alienation isolates her in the English society and kindles a sense loneliness in her.

Moni is a passive character compared to Jasmine, the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee's novel Jasmine. Jasmine is a fighter, not only against her fate, foretold by an astrologer when she was a young girl in Hasnapur, but also against the sense of isolation she experiences in her migrant life in America. It is ironical that Jasmine who is constantly restless -- traveling from one place to another, meeting new people, engaging in new relationships -- should have any sense of loneliness. But, perhaps, it is the sense of loneliness that makes her restless just as loneliness made Moni silent. She starts her journey from India alone because her husband, Prakash, who was to take her to America, died in a terrorist attack on the eve of his departure. The death of her husband leaves her alone, but after landing on the gulf coast of Florida she is still alone. The difference is that Jasmine has rebelled against the loneliness imposed on her by fate for the loneliness of a self-imposed exile.
Jasmine's every new identity makes her encounter new forms of loneliness. When Lillian Gordon, the kind American lady who helps Kanjobals and other illegal immigrants, fashions Jasmine into Jazzy and sends her to New York, she finds the city “an archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens” (Mukherjee, Jasmine 140). Jasmine spends five months in the ethnic Indian ghetto of the Vadheras in Flushing that “was safe, a cocoon to hatch out of” (Mukherjee, Jasmine 142).

Then one night – I was unrolling my sleeping mat on the floor of the Vadheras’ living room – something came over me, and early next morning I picked up my bag and my pocketbook and took the #7 train out of the ghetto. One more night and I would have died. Of what? I might have said then, of boredom, but boredom is only a manifestation of something worse. (Mukherjee, Jasmine 142)

Jasmine was bored because living in Flushing was so much like living her widowed life in Hasnapur from where she had escaped challenging her fate. Boredom is a manifestation of her loneliness incurred due to the suppression of wants. It can be compared with “Flaubertian boredom that has nothing to do with idleness or laziness but with unfulfilled expectations, with longings [though in this case not aroused by literature as was the case with Madam Bovary]” (Ramdas 17).

Paradoxically, it is the familiar that makes Jasmine lonely and she seeks the unfamiliar to fulfill her wants. As a caregiver to Duff, the adopted child of Taylor and Wylie Hayes, she finds the warmth of an American family to ward off her loneliness. This shows that though migration causes loneliness due to displacement, it is the lack of familial warmth that aggravates it. Unlike living with the Hayeses, Jasmine is lonelier living with her
family in Hasnapur and living with the Vadheras in Flushing as there is a lack of homely warmth because home is something more than merely the soil on which one is born.

Jasmine leaves the Hayeses when she sights in New York Sukkhi, the terrorist who killed her husband. She goes to Baden and starts living with Bud, a banker, and Du, a Vietnamese youngster adopted by Bud. Bud accepts Jasmine in his life, but unlike Taylor, he does not want to know about her past. It is with Du that Jasmine finds herself in unspoken empathy and that is not just because both are Asians or both are immigrants in the New World. It is because both Du and Jasmine have suffered and survived, and they do not have to tell each other so to know their predicaments. They already know, as if they belonged to a family, as if they had a common home, and even in silence can allay each other’s loneliness. That is why when Du finds his sister and leaves them to go and live with her; for Jasmine his absence is gnawing. So, when Taylor and Duff arrive to take her to California with them, she leaves Bud even though she is pregnant with his child, for she is more pregnant with wants to escape from the sense of loneliness. It may be that migrants have taken the American ethos that “nothing lasts” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 181) to constantly seek new relationships or waver between relationships to ward off their sense of loneliness.

In the novel *Desirable Daughters* Tara, who is divorced from her husband, Bishwapriya (Bish), lives with her teenage son, Rabi, and a live-in partner, Andy -- a “balding, red-bearded, former biker, former bad-boy, Hungarian Buddhist contractor/yoga instructor” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 25) and carpenter. Bish hires Andy “for work on his Atherton house. He considers the fact that Andy sleeps with his ex-wife the best possible guarantee of quality work” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 25). It is this
convenience of American lifestyle, where temporality of relationships is not seen as a blemish, which helps to dispel the sense of loneliness to some extent. Tara and Bish have not told their parents in India about their divorce. Tara separated from Bish because she felt that “the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 82). She was experiencing what Ramdas might call the “Flaubertian disappointment” because Bish used to spend “fifteen hours a day in the office, sometimes longer” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 82) in the US. Whereas when they visit their parents in India Bish was “the Indian husband” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 82) and Tara never felt lonely in India the way she felt in the US. So, in India Tara and Bish remained as husband and wife, and in the US as divorcees.

Tara’s elder sister Padma has had a even more restless existence where she had been constantly in and out of relationships with Ron, Sohrab, Danny, and Harish, while traversing from Calcutta to Switzerland, to London, to New York, and then to New Jersey. Displacement tears away one from the known to the unknown and it is through forging new relationships – both with the places as well as with humans – that one can prevent oneself from succumbing into as overpowering sense of loneliness brought by that encounter with the unknown. Her involvement with the diasporic community keeps her busy and she gets little time to feel lonely. Indeed, it may even perhaps be argued that the diasporic condition to some extent and on some occasions alleviates and lessens the fundamental human loneliness by providing the cushion of diasporic community. Diasporas are as much about community as about loneliness.

No doubt, diasporic life is predominantly lonely but not essentially in the conventional sense of the term implying solitariness: diasporic life exhibits solitude in the middle of
society. Theoretical consideration of the issue raises a mountain of terminology to climb upon, but from a literary artist's point of view there appears enough props to uphold the edifice of this theory. Jhumpa Lahiri has sought out loneliness as an inherent part of exile and has given it a universal appeal. Lahiri's diasporic characters are relieved when they adjust themselves to the New World but they also regret the separation from their original cultures. The world as a global village facilitate people coming from differing cultures to assimilate in new surroundings but social and even cultural assimilation does not mean that there will not be a sense of loneliness. It is the evocation of solitude in the middle of society that gives a distinctive quality to diasporic literature.

Mrs. Sen and Ashima Ganguli, among various diasporic characters of Jhumpa Lahiri, come to the forefront as victims of loneliness. Mrs. Sen, from the short story "Mrs. Sen's", is the wife of a mathematics professor and she lives alone in the university apartment while her husband is at the university. So she decides to baby-sit eleven years old Eliot at her apartment. It is in relation to Eliot's loneliness that Mrs. Sen's acute sense of loneliness comes forward. Eliot is lonely because he lives alone with his mother who works in an office and comes back only at night. After school he spends his time alone in the beach house because there is no one nearby to befriend. That is until he starts going to Mrs. Sen's. Everyday Eliot sees Mrs. Sen busy with her cooking, and in Eliot, Mrs. Sen finds a ready audience. Gradually it dawns upon the reader that Mrs. Sen keeps herself busy by cooking and talking just to ward off her loneliness: "Here, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence" (Lahiri, Interpreter 115). Then again:
Eliot, if I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs, would someone come? [. . .] At home that is all you have to do. Not everybody has a telephone. But just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements. (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 116)

And again while practising driving:

“You could go places,” Eliot suggested. “You could go anywhere.”

“Could I drive all the way to Calcutta? How long would that take, Eliot? Ten thousand miles, at fifty miles per hour?” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 119)

It is Mrs. Sen’s naivete allied with her longing for “home”, India, that makes her lonely. Later, when Mrs. Sen realizes how lonely Eliot must be, she acknowledges that Eliot is better prepared to tackle loneliness from a tender age.

Jhumpa Lahiri evokes Mrs. Sen’s loneliness not when she is alone but when she is with Eliot. She does this to show that Mrs. Sen’s loneliness is not exactly solitariness but something more. It is a manifestation of her inner emotional needs and hence cannot be corrected by external modifications in terms of society or surrounding in a foreign country. Mrs. Sen lives in America but sustains herself on the remnants of the life she left behind in India – cooking Indian food, getting lost in letters that came from India, buying a whole fish to cook, and even not knowing how to drive.

Ashima Ganguli, from the novel *The Namesake*, is also as lonely as Mrs. Sen. Like Mrs. Sen she keeps herself busy by cooking Indian meals. She often throws parties on various occasions for the enormous circle of Bengali acquaintances from in and around Boston. But despite having a society whose members are of her ilk, Lahiri evokes a
gnawing sense of loneliness in Ashima Ganguli. At first Ashima is lonely because she
does not “want to raise Gogol alone in this country” (Lahiri, Namesake 33). But when she
starts taking the child Gogol out to buy things from the supermarket “she is repeatedly
stopped on the street, and in the aisles of the supermarket, by perfect strangers, all
Americans, suddenly taking notice of her, smiling, congratulating her for what she’s
done. They look curiously, appreciatively, into the pram” (Lahiri, Namesake 34). Ashima’s loneliness is averted for the time being in looking after Gogol until they move
to the suburbs: “For Ashima migrating to the suburbs feels more drastic, more distressing
than the move from Calcutta to Cambridge had been” (Lahiri, Namesake 49). Ashima had
somehow felt connected with Cambridge, albeit superficially, after the incident where she
forgot her shopping bags in the subway train but everything was retrieved by her
husband, Ashoke, the next day from the lost and found department. Her Bengali friends
said that such a “miracle” can take place “only in this country” (Lahiri, Namesake 43).
But in the suburbs Ashima feels her condition of being a foreigner as a “sort of lifelong
pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts”
(Lahiri, Namesake 49). Physical distances can never measure emotional distances.

Ashima’s loneliness is compounded when Gogol and Sonia grow up and start living
away from home either for study or work. Ashima had kept herself busy with her children
– inviting guests at their rice ceremony, at their birthdays and so on. But without her
children to care for she feels a vacancy in her world and so she employs herself in a
library. The real crisis arises when Ashoke has to go to Ohio on a nine months’ research
grant. Ashima then has to live surrounded by a security system instead of her family.
Even mock busyness cannot prevent her from succumbing to loneliness. She spends her
time addressing Christmas cards, re-reading her parents’ letters and crying over them, and at nights double-checking “all the window locks, making sure that they were fastened tightly. [..] At forty-eight she has come to experience the solitude that her husband and son and daughter already know, and which they claim not to mind” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 161). Definitely they all feel the sense of solitude despite being in the circle of their friends and acquaintances but except for Ashima, they “claim not to mind.” When Ashoke dies in Ohio, Ashima makes a profound statement: “Now I know why he went to Cleveland,” she tells people, refusing even in death, to utter her husband’s name. “He was teaching me how to live alone” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 183).

Ashima’s loneliness comes out in the straightforward narration through the whole length of the novel, whereas Ashoke’s loneliness is evoked indirectly through suggestive incidents. When Ashima is pregnant with Gogol, Ashoke is on his own, as well as he has to take care of his wife, and when Ashima is pregnant with Sonia, he has to take care of little Gogol also. Ashoke does not mind doing these things, but he would have been pleased to share his burden and happiness with relatives. In fact Ashoke’s death, far away from family, friends and home in a hospital where he himself drove to alone, seems like an indictment on the life he chose to live as an immigrant. He dies lonely because he chose to live with a sense of loneliness.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s short stories have many suggestive incidents where the diasporic character’s sense of loneliness comes out to the fore. In the short story “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, Lilia’s parents invite Mr. Pirzada, a stranger from the university, to share their meals with. Lilia’s parents harbour a sense of loneliness because in New England the “supermarket did not carry mustard oil, doctors did not make house calls,
neighbors never dropped by without an invitation” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 24). To allay this loneliness is their kinship with an unknown person, who is neither of their religion nor of their country but comes from their part of the world – a world where life starts eleven hours earlier than where they live. In the short story “The Third and Final Continent”, the first place rented in Boston by the narrator of the story is an apartment whose landlady was a hundred and three years old woman called Mrs. Croft, who lives there alone. Lahiri makes the narrator feel connected with Mrs. Croft because in America “hers was the first life I [the narrator] had admired” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 196). Mrs. Croft and the narrator shared something common: the sense of loneliness – though Mrs. Croft’s loneliness had a physical manifestation and the narrator’s an emotional one.

Shoba and Shukumar’s loneliness has a physical manifestation in the short story “A Temporary Matter”, because Shoba has had a miscarriage and they have lost their child. Shoba’s mother stayed with them for two months after Shoba’s return from the hospital but since her departure they have become estranged. They now “systematically” avoid friends as well as each other because they feel that the persons who gave them company during their happy days are inadequate companions to share their grief with – thus the inevitability of loneliness in their American lives. In comparison, Sanjeev’s loneliness crops up at a happy moment in the short story “This Blessed House.” Sanjeev is hosting a housewarming party at his newly bought house for his “acquaintances, people from office, and a number of Indian couples in the Connecticut area, many of whom he barely knew, but who had regularly invited him, in his bachelor days, to supper on Saturdays” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 144). Sanjeev’s wife, Twinkle (Tanima), is new to all the guests in the party but she somehow hijacks Sanjeev’s party and leads all the guests in a relic hunt.
into the attic of the new house that has a lot of hidden Christian paraphernalia left behind by its former occupants. Sanjeev at his moment of pride and happiness, hosting a party for his friends and colleagues, finds himself deserted, "alone [ . . . ] at the top of the winding staircase" (Lahiri, Interpreter 154). Sanjeev’s acquaintances are just a crowd and hence the evocation of loneliness in their midst.

Lahiri successfully evokes solitude in the middle of society in her diasporic characters because the society the diasporic Indian community associate themselves with is but an inadequate replacement for the society they long for. The society acts as a cover from loneliness but the cover is porous in parts and the sense of loneliness seeps in through those pores. Basically loneliness is a common factor in all lives lived in a diaspora. In the short story “Sexy”, the Midwestern character, Miranda, has an affair with a married Bengali NRI, Dev. What brings them together is what they have in common – loneliness. Similarly in the short story “Interpreter of Maladies”, Mina Das’s sexual encounter with her husband’s friend happens because of loneliness.

Even in the novel The Namesake, Gogol and Moushumi get intimate with each other, more because of their loneliness than due to their parents’ machinations. No doubt the intimacy afforded by sex is a potent weapon against loneliness but it acts as a temporary shield, until the shine of newness fades off. Moushumi’s is a typical case in point. Living in three different continents since childhood, she is perennially lonely. In her fight against loneliness, she goes to Paris where she loses all her sexual inhibitions. It is here that she gets into a serious relationship with Graham but the relationship sours just before it was to culminate in marriage. She finds herself lonely again. Later she marries Gogol and when their marriage starts gathering dust – plummeting them towards boredom and
loneliness — she cuckold Gogol for Dimitri. Moushumi has learnt her lesson and she will shield herself from being a victim of loneliness further, however transient that shield may be. Lahiri thus paints a rather grim picture of sexual liaison, presenting it as not something inherently pleasurable but rather as a refuge from loneliness; and a fragile and precarious one at that.

Gogol and Sonia have a sense of loneliness, but unlike their parents, they grow with it since their childhood. As children they visit India as tourists but on returning home “they are disconcerted by the space, by the uncompromising silence that surrounds them” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 87). Gogol’s loneliness has an extra dimension because of his first name, which, except for him, no one else possibly has in this world. He does not even share his first name with his namesake because the Russian writer is Nikolai Gogol. Gogol’s name gives him a unique identity and stands as a metaphor for any identity that impedes one from identifying with anything else. When Gogol is at home with his family and their Bengali acquaintances, his American identity proves to be a hindrance and makes him lonely. When he is with his American friends, his ethnic Indian identity becomes a hindrance and makes him lonely. As Gogol grows up, like Moushumi, he gets involved in a number of relationships, but unlike her, he does not become insensitive at the failure of his relationships. Even when he has a brief affair with a married woman called Bridget, he feels guilty.

Gogol engages in two serious relationships with Americans — involving Ruth and Maxine. Both the relationships end without marriage but they prove productive in a sense that they give him nostalgia for a different kind of life spent. Thus the relationships not only helped him to avert loneliness for the time being but in their aftermath they left
behind nostalgia that prevented him from succumbing to loneliness and waste his life. Gogol's marriage with Moushumi and her subsequent betrayal would have had a catastrophic effect on Gogol had it not been for his prior experiences of failed relationships that sustained him in the crisis. Gogol's sense of loneliness comes to the forefront only at the end of the novel when the reader finds him sitting alone, upstairs in a room, and reading a book, which was gifted to him by his father on his fourteenth birthday, while a party goes on downstairs. Gogol reading Nikolai Gogol's short stories alone is not lonelier than Gogol in the midst of all the guests in the party.

Jhumpa Lahiri's evocation of loneliness is not a by-product of living in exile for the Indian diaspora. It is the general condition of the Indian diasporic community and indeed the general human condition. Since India's independence the dispersal of Indians from the sub-continent to the English speaking countries of Europe and the Americas has taken place mainly due to economic and academic reasons. Compared with political, religious, and war exiles, the aforementioned reasons for migrations are not enforced but are of choice and opportunity. These reasons give better leverage to the Indian diaspora to assimilate into their new society and culture. With time when their children grow up as products of Western socio-cultural milieu, it is then that they realize that the sacrifice they made in leaving their homeland is still taking its toll on them. The second generation on realizing their parents' perplexity find themselves in a dilemma. It is in this tantalizing position between the lure of the West and the longing for one's roots that has the germ that gives rise to the sense of loneliness.

In Sunetra Gupta's novel *A Sin of Colour*, Debendranath wants to be alone and takes up the chance afforded by displacement to a foreign country. Debendranath migrates
from Calcutta to Oxford because he wants to isolate himself from Reba, his elder brother’s wife whom he hopelessly loves. But in Oxford he ends up marrying a kind English woman called Jennifer. Debendranath sought loneliness as an antidote for his sinful love for Reba. His marriage with Jennifer seems to deprive him of that antidote. Jennifer’s devotion to him does not make him feel alienated like Moni. Yet, like Moni, he also makes a secret escape, though not back to Calcutta, but forward into more loneliness, in the Himalayas. Diasporic life causes loneliness of estrangement and/or loneliness of isolation. In Oxford Debendranath has the loneliness of estrangement but he fears that his emotions might betray his feelings one day and so he craves for the loneliness of isolation that he achieves by disappearing.

About twenty years after Debendranath’s disappearance his niece Niharika goes to Oxford for research study. Niharika does not suffer any loneliness of isolation in Oxford because in that foreign locale she has the acquaintance of her aunt Jennifer whom she had befriended as a child when Debendranath had brought Jennifer for a year’s visit to Calcutta after their marriage. In Oxford Niharika falls in love with a married man called Daniel Faraday. They have to separate from each other when Daniel goes with his wife to Australia and Niharika goes to New York and subsequently returns to Calcutta. A few years later when the two lovers again meet in Oxford they know the loneliness of estrangement that they have suffered and now seek the loneliness of isolation. Like Debendranath they also disappear, but unlike Debendranath, they escape together, not away from their love. This escape into loneliness of isolation gives them freedom – freedom from constraints and propriety of society, family, and relationships. Loneliness
due to displacement, in this sense, becomes a kind of freedom. Loneliness is a dominant theme of all modern fiction, but the diasporic context makes it especially prominent.

**Parent-Child Relationship in Diasporic Life**

Human relationships are an enduring theme in all literature because it never gets dated. Any literary text that deals with relationships remains relevant for all times and this is possible due to the fact that relationships can be studied both in isolation as well as in context without losing any vitality in each case. The value of a literary text, especially the novel, stems from characterization and it is the depiction of relationships through which characterization develops. Thus the study of relationships forms the key to the critical study of that work. The sense of displacement or dislocation taxes the human mind and its strains are felt very clearly on human relationships. In fact relationships best showcase the conditions of being in exile, of diasporic living, of migrant population, and even temporary dislocation. The study of relationships in the context of displacement gives the sociological concept a literary base. Be it the migrant Indians Adit and Dev in Britain, or Jasmine and Tara in USA; their conditions can best be explored by examining the various relationships they get into. Relationships can be studied in social settings, in sexual wants, within familial ties, among friends, and so on. It is not necessary that relationships should be permanent – even temporary, intermittent relationships have their distinct place in the larger jigsaw of immigrant experience. The forging of new relationships and the demise of certain other relationships give a dynamic quality to the enriching effect of relationships on individuals. The emotional wants in diasporic life are enormous and relationships are the most tangible expression of such emotions.
The parent-child relationship is the fundamental relationship in human life. It is a relationship that a child is born with and by virtue of which certain other relationships come into existence. Unlike all other relationships, the parent-child relationship bears a vertical structure because of its hierarchical quality. From a historical point of view the parent-child relationship marks ascendancy, a progress from one generation to another, hence its vertical nature. Lisa Lowe suggests that—

To think of Asian-American cultural politics as a struggle between first and second generations within a familial framework overlooks the multiple ways in which histories of exclusion and differentiation have traditionally placed Asians apart from America. Instead of thinking of culture as something that is unchanging and transmitted “vertically” from one generation to another, she argues that culture is also worked out “horizontally” between communities and across lines of gender, race, and national origin. (Lowe 132)

But from a sociological perspective the parent-child relationship appears to be horizontal since both the parent and the child are members of the same society at least for some length of time. The parent-child relationship is thus not only multi-layered but also multi-dimensional and when it is viewed in the colouring of the diasporic condition it appears as multi-faceted. The relationship between two immediate generations – the progenitor and its progeny, is given an added emphasis in the context of displacement. Diasporic life heightens the conflict between generations by adding the socio-cultural differences between the two generations. But diasporic life also heightens the sense of longing between the parent and the child especially when the generation gap is given a concrete reality in the form of physical distance. Thus the tension arising out of the antagonism
between conflict and longing makes the parent-child relationship a very important aspect in the study of human relationships in the context of displacement.

Anita Desai in her novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* "addresses the cross-fertilization of cultures" (Mohanram 102) by dealing with familial and social relationships of Indian immigrants in Britain. Adit Sen, the protagonist of *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, is a migrant Indian in the UK who has an English wife, Sarah. Adit has left behind his parents and come to reside in a new country. For the major part of the novel Adit shows no inclination to go back to his parents in India or even pay a brief visit to them despite Sarah’s suggestion to do so. Adit is seeking surrogate parents in the country of his adoption. This fact is not blatantly stated in the novel but a few incidents indicate that Adit really seeks parental succour. Adit makes it a point to go to visit Mrs. Miller, his former landlady, in Harrow, once every year without fail. The Millers are German migrants in England and this fact could have proved as a point of bonding between Adit and them, except that Mrs. Miller’s attitude shows that she is not exactly happy with these visits of Adit. Adit’s relationship with the Millers is nowhere close to any parent-child relationship in actual fact, but is nevertheless fired by a subliminal desire to have one.

This relationship is in fact in a continuum with Adit’s other attempt in his search, this time with Sarah’s parents, the Roscommon-James. Adit, with his wife and friends, on a visit to his in-laws, makes himself at home there. He seems to be exuberant – invading the kitchen, frying “pakoras” – as if at his own home, only to excite Mrs. Roscommon-James’s “sniffs” and “barks” (Desai, *Blackbird* 176). That Adit did not find in Sarah’s father and mother any sense of attachment hurts him. It ignites his latent longing for his country – to be back with his parents. It revived memories of the Bengali feast that his
mother used to prepare for him and his mother’s white sari bordered with vermilion. In Indian culture, unlike in the Western one, a man is expected to live both with his wife and his parents. Adit’s nostalgia is brought about because in England he could find a wife but not parents. The lack of this fundamental relationship makes him nostalgic for his country. “The ferocity of his growing nostalgia broke that stone dam that had silenced him for so long” (Desai, *Blackbird* 183) and he decides to return to India and erase the distance that has hyphenated the parent-child relationship.

The parental longing of Adit proves that in matters of human relationships there is no fundamental distinction between the Orient and the Occident. Edward W. Said in his book *Orientalism* says about “filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness” (Said, *Orientalism* 6). Such passage into the Western consciousness in Oriental settings has been done successfully since the time of E. M. Forster, Kipling, and Conrad. But it is not only the Western consciousness that is worth exploring. The advent of postcolonialism has seen a reverse trend whereby writers have delved into the Eastern consciousness filtered through the Occident. Anita Desai’s novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is a study in that regard. Basically what is being done is that displacement is used as the key to enter into the human consciousness. It is then employed to lay bare the fact that there is no essential difference between the “Orient” and the “Occident” because, as in the words of Edward W. Said, they “correspond to no stable reality that exists as a natural fact” (Said, *Orientalism* 331).

Parent-child relationship or rather the lack of it affects all individuals alike irrespective of their geographical location and cultural background. Even if the displacement is temporary and the parent-child relationship does not have any
pleasantness for the concerned parties, the relationship does not lose its significance. Indeed the relationship is arguably most traumatically significant in this form. Arun, from Anita Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* is given no choice by his parents but to go to Massachusetts for higher studies. Arun has no liking for his overbearing parents and should have been elated to be away from them but on a number of counts he feels betrayed. Firstly, it is according to the dictates of his parents and not on his own will that he has come away from home to USA. Secondly, since he is dependent on his parents, he feels obligated to fulfill their wishes. Thirdly, staying with the Patton family in the suburbs of Massachusetts, he is made to reassess parent-child relationship anew. The parent-child relationship in the Patton family is based on freedom and license and yet there is something troubling about it. When Mrs. Patton starts taking special care about Arun’s food he wants to tell her “that he is not her family. He considers saying something about Melanie’s needs” (Desai, *Fasting* 197). Arun finds that Mr. and Mrs. Patton’s son and daughter, Rod and Melanie respectively, are in much need of parental care and guidance. Arun’s migration into the American society makes him realize that lack of restriction damages the parent-child relationship as much as too much restriction does.

Living in exile or in a diaspora or as a migrant does not necessarily mean that one has to pine away in longing for one’s parents, especially when the world is seen as a global village, and human beings as global citizens. Displaced existence does have its benefits in terms of economic prosperity, educational opportunities and a detached perspective that is so important for intermingling of people of differing cultures, societies, backgrounds, and origins. This distancing also gives charm to relationships that are otherwise taken for granted. The non-resident Indian Rakesh in the short story “Winterscape” is a case in
point. Rakesh is married to Beth and on the occasion of the birth of his child his mother and aunt visit him from India. Rakesh is happy with their visit but he is so well grooved in Western society that he finds little fascination in the gossips and stories they bring from India. He has not much appetite for the Indian food they cook for him and he finds himself not quite accustomed of their presence in his house. Rakesh, in his diasporic existence, has no doubt psyched himself into making adjustments and has got used to a new lifestyle. The arrival of his mother and aunt demands him to make readjustments, albeit temporarily, which he cannot do because it will mean that he has to come out of his groove and be in limbo as an easy target for the gnawing sense of non-belonging, ambivalence, and longing. But this does not mean that diasporic life has brought about any fundamental change in the parent-child relationship. Diasporic life brings about only cosmetic changes in human relationships so that one can survive away from home.

Anita Desai in depicting parent-child relationship in the context of displacement has explored the themes of longing, emotional wants, and non-belonging in her fiction. Desai's forte has been the study of isolated characters but by delving into their minds and through their actions she brings out either concretely or symbolically the relationships they engage in, their want of relationships as well as the memory of relationships. If Arun's displacement leads him to see parent-child relationship in a new light, Rakesh's diasporic life displays the adjustments made in parent-child relationship, and for Adit it is the want of such a relationship that is preponderant.

The depiction of parent-child relationship in diasporic life by Bharati Mukherjee shows that such a relationship can be helpful to fashion oneself and create a sense of belonging. In the novel *Jasmine*, after Jasmine lands in the US, it is the Quaker lady
Lillian Gordon who fashions her physical attributes as an American. But for Jasmine, Lillian Gordon is more than merely a facilitator of illegal immigrants. Lillian Gordon gives Jasmine her daughter’s vacant bedroom to sleep in and her daughter’s high-school clothes to wear because she considers her “a very special case” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 135). Later, when Jasmine is in Baden, Iowa, looking for a job, it is Mother Ripplemeyer, “a woman with the curtness and directness of Lillian Gordon” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 196), who takes her home for lunch and gets her a job in her son’s bank. Mother Ripplemeyer, who takes Jasmine to the core of American life, is also not only a facilitator for her. Both Lillian Gordon and Mother Ripplemeyer teach Jasmine to belong and once Jasmine fashions herself as an American she says that one day she wants to “belong to that tribe” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 197) represented by Lillian Gordon and Mother Ripplemeyer. It is a wish of self-fashioning but it is equally a daughter’s wish to be like her mothers because the two American women have acted as surrogate parents to make possible Jasmine’s identification with a world in which she has to live.

In New York Jasmine is employed in the Hayes’ household as a caregiver to Duff, Wylie and Taylor’s child. It is predominantly through parent-child relationships that Jasmine’s transformation into an American takes place:

> I became an American in an apartment in Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory. I lived with Taylor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years. Duff was my child; Taylor and Wylie were my parents, my teachers, my family. (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 165)

When Jasmine goes to Iowa and starts living with Bud, it is her relationship with Du, the Vietnamese teenager adopted by them, that gives her sustenance. As Du’s mother she
visits his school and notices his progress. So when Du decides to leave the Ripplemeyers and go and live with his sister, Jasmine is aghast: “How dare he leave me alone out here? How dare he retreat with my admiration, my pride, my total involvement in everything he did? His education was my education” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 223). Jasmine had “started identifying herself with Du because he is an immigrant like herself. Both are in a great hurry to become American, to forget the nightmares of their early lives. But Du’s sudden departure shatters her world she has been so delicately nursing” (N. Kumar 116-7). After Du goes away Jasmine also decides to leave as Taylor arrives with Duff to take her to California. Jasmine, pregnant with Bud’s child and as mother to Duff, will continue her education by maintaining the parent-child relationship.

Jasmine’s relationship with Du and Duff show how parent-child relationship can act as a bridge between cultural differences because of its fundamental nature. But even if no cross-cultural paradigms are involved, as is the case with Tara and Rabi in Bharati Mukherjee’s novel *Desirable Daughters*, differences do appear and have to be confronted. Tara’s relationships with her parents in India and her teenage son, Rabi, in America, often appear in paradoxically contrasting forms. Tara calls her mother and father as “Mummy” and “Daddy” respectively, whereas Rabi never calls Tara “Mom, always Ma” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 61). Rabi thinks that his mother is “pathetically clueless about colonial absurdities” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 61). The paradox that a second generation diasporic Indian calls his parents in vernacular nomenclature while the first generation uses the anglicised form is only apparent. Rabi, living in a diaspora, has a strong sense of ethnic identity and feels it as a colonial hangover what for Tara, who is born and bred and convent educated in India, appears as the normal way of life. The real
contrast lies in Tara’s and Rabi’s degree of openness toward their parents. Tara, who is divorced, does not reveal her marital breakup to her parents; on the other hand Rabi, who is a gay, does not keep the truth of his sexual orientation a secret from his parents. Rabi is able to be open towards his parents because he knows that his parents will reconcile with the fact and take it as a way of life. Tara is unable to reveal her secret to her parents because she fears that her parents will probably attribute the cause of her divorce to the corrupting influence of the West and will not be able to reconcile with the fact. Living in a diaspora within Western society somehow redefines parent-child relationship.

The parent-child relationship is the basic human relationship, and when it forms the premise for discussion and is redefined it does not lose its inherent characteristics despite being coloured by diasporic situation. In Sunetra Gupta’s novel *Memories of Rain* the character Moni’s relationship with her six-year-old daughter is poignant in this respect. The novel is seen as “a post-colonial reinterpretation of the Greek Medea” (Sage 296) with a twist to the tragedy. Like Medea Moni uses her child as a tool to punish her unfaithful husband though through less extreme means. Moni is betrayed by her English husband, Anthony, who is having an affair with a woman called Anna. Anthony’s infidelity impels Moni to “take her destiny into her own hands” (Gupta, *Memories* 23) and she decides to return with her daughter to India from England. Moni’s decision to estrange the father and the daughter is mainly to hurt Anthony, to cause him pain in order to ease her painful situation. But Moni’s decision of escape is not solely based on her situation but equally on her daughter’s situation. Moni, in England, not only feels insecure for herself but also for her daughter. As a mother her concern for her daughter is natural, irrespective of any diasporic or non-diasporic circumstances, but displaced
The existence does heighten her concern. In this way diasporic life gives an added depth for exploration of the fundamental human relationship.

Jhumpa Lahiri in both her novel and her short stories has depicted the parent-child relationship in diasporic life and explored how the parent-child relationship, qualified by the diasporic condition, goes through gradual stages of evolution over time. Lahiri has brought out the sense of displacement, rootlessness, alienation, and non-belonging that besiege all diasporic communities in her exploration of the parent-child relationship. The parent-child relationship is very important in this context because it is a relationship between two immediate generations – one harboring a sense of dislocation and the other finding themselves rootless. The first generation diasporic Indians have spent a part of their lives in India and then migrated to the West whereas the second generation ones are born and bred in the West. So, it is quite evident that because of their different upbringing the relationship between the first and second generation of non-resident Indians is bound to be a testing one.

Even when the child in the parent-child relationship is literally a child, it does not diminish the tension in the relationship. Lilia is the child-narrator of Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, and it is through her eyes that her parents come into focus. Lilia’s parents have accepted the fact that Lilia being born in America will celebrate Halloween with her American friends. Lilia’s parents are sensitive to her needs so that Lilia does not find herself as an outsider in American society. Her mother buys a “ten-pound pumpkin” (Lahiri, Interpreter 35) and it is carved into a jack-o’-lantern and she is dressed as a witch and allowed to go trick-or-treating with her American friend Dora, without any escort. Lilia’s relationship with her parents is a happy
and affectionate one but even little Lilia realizes that her parents are different from other parents. She cannot comprehend why her mother does not “seem particularly relieved” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 39) on hearing that she has reached Dora’s house safely as much as she cannot comprehend her father’s and Mr. Pirzada’s discussion of civil war torn Bangladesh. Lilia’s father on the other hand, despite knowing that Lilia learns American history and American geography, cannot comprehend that his daughter is ignorant of the fact that India was partitioned at the time of its independence. Hence are the little incomprehensions that arise in the parent-child relationship due to their diasporic status.

Affection is the basic raw material in any parent-child relationship and even if the parents show some indifference towards their children it is often not because they love them less but because of the strain in the relationship between the parents themselves. In the short story, “Interpreter of Maladies”, the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Das, a diasporic Indian couple born and bred in the US, is strained. Both the parents care for their children dearly but the rift in their relationship adversely affects their attitude towards their children:

At the tea stall Mr. and Mrs. Das bickered about who should take Tina to the toilet. Eventually Mrs. Das relented when Mr. Das pointed out that he had given the girl her bath the night before. (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 43)

The children are also sensitive enough to understand when the relationship between their parents has soured. Even if a parent tries to prevent the bitterness from getting into the child’s mind by physically distancing the child from the crisis, the child can make out the change from normalcy. In the short story, “Sexy”, the seven years old Rohin’s parents are on the brink of divorce because his father has fallen in love with another woman. Rohin
is being taken by her mother to her parents’ house in California “to try to recuperate” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 100). What Rohin’s parents might not know is how much Rohin knows about the crisis in their relationship. Rohin innocently divulges to Miranda, who acts as a surrogate parent when she baby-sits him for a day:

“*My father met a pretty woman on a plane ...*” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 102)

“He sat next to someone he didn’t know, someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother.” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 108)

“My mother has puffiness. She says it’s a cold, but really she cries, sometimes for hours. Sometimes straight through dinner. Sometimes she cries so hard her eyes puff up like bullfrogs.” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 104)

Miranda imagines how Rohin must have overheard the quarrels between his mother and father and how it is going to alter his relationship with his parents.

Compared with Lilia and Rohin, the ten-year old American boy, Eliot, from the short story, “Mrs. Sen’s”, is also lonely but he does not show any incomprehension about the cause of his loneliness. He is neither wracked by the fact that his father lives away from his mother. He is “wiser” and has come to know “the way things must be” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 123). But for the children of the Indian diaspora, it is a sterner test. Indian sensibilities in Western society not only put stress on the parent-child relationship but also on all allied relationships. In the short story, “A Temporary Matter”, Shoba and Shukumar are a non-resident Indian couple well assimilated in Western society. But when their baby is born dead the tragedy becomes unbearable for them; it puts cracks in their relationship because in their diasporic life they had formed a strong bonding even
with their unborn child. Such is the intensity of parent-child relationship in diasporic life
or, in this case absence precisely of such a relationship.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel, *The Namesake*, shows the growth of Gogol since childhood
and the development of his relationship with his father and mother over time. Gogol’s
relationship with his parents is not a streamlined one; it goes through a number of
upheavals, ups and downs and is redefined a number of times. This reiterates that the
parent-child relationship is not static – it is dynamic, ever-changing. The changes in the
relationship reflects the changes in the character and attitude of the individuals
concerned, especially in the diasporic context that taxes both the first and the second
generation Indians in their exilic existence. Even before Gogol’s birth, when his mother
Ashima is in the last stage of her pregnancy, Gogol’s presence is made to feel from the
womb itself. In the hospital Ashima wonders if she is the only Indian person present, “but
a gentle twitch from the baby reminds her that she is, technically speaking, not alone”
(Lahiri, *Namesake* 3 – 4). Before Gogol’s birth, though it is Ashima who carries the
child, the father, Ashoke, “too feels heavy, with the thought of life, of his life and the life
about to come from it” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 21). So, even before Gogol’s birth his
procreators acknowledge his presence that marks the onset of an enduring relationship.

After Gogol’s birth, Ashima’s initial glimpse, before the umbilical cord is cut, “is of a
creature coated with a thick white paste, and streaks of blood, her blood, on the
shoulders, feet, and head” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 22). When Ashoke looks at Gogol, he is
reminded of the first miracle of his life where he was rescued from a massive train
wreckage and “now, reposing in his arms, weighing next to nothing but changing
everything, is the second” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 24) miracle. Ashima’s case indicates a
physical bonding between the parent and the child, whereas for Ashoke it is a mental bonding between him and his child.

Ashima’s loneliness in a foreign land is quelled for the time being in taking care of child-Gogol. The parent-child relationship invariably modifies the diasporic experience. It is Gogol who brings Ashima close to her American environs when she takes him out in a pram. It is Gogol who helps in increasing the number of her Bengali acquaintances. It is Gogol who gives her occasion to celebrate – be it his birthdays or his rice ceremony. But Gogol is not just a medium for her to adjust in Western society. A symbolic incident indicates that the mother-son relationship is something more than that of convenience:

One day she lifts him high over her head, smiling at him with her mouth open, and a quick stream of undigested milk from his last feeding rises from his throat and pours into her own. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 35)

The umbilical cord connecting Ashima and Gogol has been clipped but there remains an intrinsic contact between them that can never be severed. If Gogol’s relationship with his mother is close from the start, his relationship with his father is quite aloof to begin with, especially when Ashima is pregnant with Sonia and Gogol is in his father’s care. When Gogol and his father eat together, “alone” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 54), he does not feel like eating; he wishes his mother “would emerge from the bedroom and sit between him and his father, filling the air with her sari and cardigan smell” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 55).

Gogol’s first show of dissent occurs with his parents very early in his life when he is admitted to school. In school Gogol prefers being called “Gogol” instead of “Nikhil”, the formal name his parents gave him. It is a faint dissent but it indicates Gogol’s assertion of his individuality as a mark of his Western upbringing. Although Gogol goes to Bengali
class every other Saturday to learn Bengali language and culture, his parents are more accommodating and know about his needs in a Western society:

In the supermarket they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, but not they, consume [. . .]

For Gogol’s lunches they stand at the deli to buy cold cuts, and in the mornings Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef. (Lahiri, Namesake 65)

Thus, since his childhood, Gogol finds himself adjusting with two cultures; he is forever at the crossroads where he has to choose either one or the other. When one day Gogol comes home from his school field trip with rubbings on paper of the names from gravestones, his mother is horrified. But Gogol is attached to these names of “very first immigrants to America” (Lahiri, Namesake 71). So, “in spite of his mother’s disgust he refuses to throw the rubbings away” (Lahiri, Namesake 71), and hides them behind his chest of drawers, “where he knows his mother will never bother to look” (Lahiri, Namesake 71). The chasm between the first generation, represented by the parent, and the second generation, represented by the child, is slowly but surely widening due to their diasporic status.

On Gogol’s fourteenth birthday his parents throw a party for all their Bengali friends, but Gogol as an American cannot identify with such a crowd. Over the years Gogol’s relationship with his parents has changed from that of love to that of mere acceptance. After the party is over, when his father comes to his room he is listening to an album, “a present from his American birthday party, given to him by one of his friends at school” (Lahiri, Namesake 74). His father presents him The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol, but he would have preferred The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy or The Hobbit. Gogol has no
interest in reading any Russian writer and "it dismays him that his parents chose the weirdest namesake" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 76) for him among all the Russian writers. The child who insisted to be called Gogol and nothing else as a child now hates his name. Since the parent-child relationship has become of mere acceptance, it flavors everything else in Gogol's life — he simply has to accept them, he cannot love them. Even Gogol's sister, Sonia, shows sparks of insolence with her parents when she threatens to color a streak of her hair blond or having additional holes pierced in her earlobes. No doubt, adolescents' relationship with their parents are shaky but the diasporic condition adds tumult to it and the forms of defence are different too — the arguments are violent, parents cry, children slam doors, and so on.

As Gogol grows up he gets more disillusioned with his parents. He cannot understand why his parents disapprove of his romantic relationships with American girls; he cannot understand why his parents do not accept his American girlfriends as their parents accept him; he dislikes his parents when he compares them with the parents of his American girlfriends. When Gogol is involved with Ruth, his parents refuse to give him money to fly to England where Ruth has gone for a semester. Afterwards when he gets involved with Maxine he comes to know Maxine's parents, Gerald and Lydia. Gogol distances himself from his parents and starts living in New York, away from his parents. He avoids going home on weekends excusing himself on the false pretext of work and spends his time with Maxine and her parents with whom he feels "none of the exasperation he feels with his own parents. No sense of obligation" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 138). He thinks of the terms of his parents' arranged marriage as something at once unthinkable and
unremarkable. When he goes on a vacation with Maxine and her parents “he feels no nostalgia for the vacations he’s spent with his parents” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 155).

Three incidents help to bring about a gradual reconciliation in the relationship between Gogol and his parents. The first occurs after his break-up with Ruth when once on his weekend visit to home he is late because of a minor train accident. His father picks him up at the station and on their way home tells him the secret behind his name. He tells him about the major train accident in India that almost killed Ashoke Ganguli twenty-eight years ago and the page of Nikolai Gogol’s short stories that he held in his hand, which ultimately revealed him to his rescuers. Gogol is stunned and paradoxically a momentary sense of alienation initiates the reconciliation:

> [Gogol feels that] for an instant his father is a stranger, a man who has kept a secret, has survived a tragedy, a man whose past he does not fully know. A man who is vulnerable, who has suffered in an inconceivable way [. . .]

Against instinct he tries to imagine life without his father, a world in which his father does not exist. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 123)

The profoundness of the revelation, that his name is linked with his father’s brush with death, takes full effect when the second incident occurs. Gogol is vacationing with Maxine when he gets the news of the sudden death of his father in Ohio. Gogol flies alone to Ohio, traveling for the first time in a world in which “his father does not exist”.

In the hospital he is asked to identify his father’s body:

> He wonders if he should touch his father’s face, lay a hand on his forehead as his father used to do to Gogol when he was unwell, to see if he had a fever. And yet he feels terrified to do so, unable to move. Eventually, with his index finger, he
grazes his father's mustache, an eyebrow, a bit of the hair on his head, those parts of him, he knows, that are still quietly living. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 172)

Before leaving he asks to see the exact place in the emergency room his father was last alive. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 173)

It is a poignant moment because the parent-child relationship is undergoing a change now from dislike to longing. After his father's death when the sacred rites are over, Gogol goes back to New York, but he longs to talk to his mother and sister, to be with them, and at every opportunity rushes home. It is this intense, private longing that leads Gogol to breakup with Maxine. Just like before Gogol was born the parent-child relationship was established, even after Ashoke Ganguli's death the relationship endures.

The third incident is the childhood memory of Gogol of one of the many times “he had driven with his family, on cold Sunday afternoons, to the sea” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 185). He and his father had walked along the breakwater to the lighthouse where his father told him: “Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 187). Like the narrator of Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story, “The Third and Final Continent”, Ashoke Ganguli has traveled in three continents – Asia, Europe, and North America. He has journeyed from the east to the west and as the title of the short story suggests, America marks the finality of that journey. Ashoke Ganguli has brought his son to be born and bred at a place from where he can journey back and forth but go no further because “there was nowhere left to go” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 187). It is because of their diasporic condition that has somehow glued them together in a way that is beyond comprehension. Parents choose to migrate not only for better prospects for themselves but also for their progeny. In doing so they
make a lot of sacrifices but they also, quite unawares, narrow the choices for their children. The children know that they cannot emulate their parents because there is no El Dorado beyond, and they cannot possibly go back because that would not only entail much sacrifice from them but also belittle their parents' sacrifices. Hence in their diasporic life the parents and children share a bonding that is peculiar to their condition.

Gogol's relationship with his parents goes through the phases of love, acceptance, dislike, and longing. The parent-child relationship is put to test because of adolescent angst, generation gap, and also because of the challenge of living in a diaspora. At the end of the novel when Ashima throws the last party at the Pemberton Road house before she leaves for India alone, Gogol discovers the book that was presented to him by his father on his fourteenth birthday — *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol*. “Until moments ago it was destined to disappear from his life altogether, but he has salvaged it by chance, as his father was pulled from a crushed train forty years ago” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 291). He starts reading the book for the first time — at a time when the “givers” and “keepers” of his name “are far from him now. One dead. Another, a widow, on the verge of a different sort of departure” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 289). This does not mark the culmination of the parent-child relationship but a rejuvenation of it: the relationship will now be purely of love and is going to last beyond mere physical presence.

Diasporic life colours human relationships such as they appear anew as if the eye, by changing its perspective, sees things in a new light. Among all human relationships, the parent-child relationship is the basic relationship and it has acquired an aura of enigma since Freud made it the basis of his psychological theory. The psychological theories like Oedipal complex and Electra complex have given a new focus to the study of parent-
child relationship. The relationship between Jasmine and Du acquires Freudian overtones when Du gives Jasmine a ladybug shirt pin as a gift saying that she was “meant to have pretty things” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 30). As Du pins the ladybug on Jasmine’s shirt, “for a moment his face glows” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 30) and Jasmine thinks that he is going to kiss her. Jasmine conjures Du as a “phantom lover”:

> But as I lie awake this night, the first night that gives signs of not cooling down, Du joins the ghosts of men. He is a phantom lover, he watches me; perhaps he has been watching every night in his secret, inventive ways.

(Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 30)

It is not only the proximity of their ages that attracts Jasmine and Du towards each other. Jasmine acknowledges that “secrets roll like barbed wire between us” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 30) – and the secrets keep them separate as well as bring them together. The unmentionable facts of survival and passage into the American continent and society form dark secrets for both the migrants. Hence they are attracted towards each other by virtue of having similar pasts. It is their subtle sense of intimacy with each other that show psychological underpinning of parent-child relationship in the context of dislocation. But even if the parent-child relationship is considered without the moorings of its psychological interpretations, it is found that the relationship between parents and children forms the cornerstone of all civilized societies.

**Emotional and Sexual Wants in Diasporic Life**

Human relationships are grounded on emotions. Mary Warnock in the “Preface” to Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions* cites Sartre’s definition of emotion as “a specific manner of apprehending the world” (xii). Hence emotional wants are the
particular ways through which individuals acquire the ability to confront the world. In the
diasporic context, since the world itself is alien, the recognition with such a world
demands fulfillment of heightened emotional needs. The feelings and behaviour that
constitute the emotions strain human relationships thereby. To ease the tension in
relationships migrant individuals readily form communities and pool together for each
other’s emotional wants. The tension in human relationships lessens as it gets divided
among the increasing number of relationships. A very important method to increase the
number of human relationships is through the satisfaction of sexual purposes. Sexual
relationships provide the intimacy that social relationships cannot and are therefore more
potent in fulfilling emotional needs. Both emotional and sexual wants are at once very
personal needs in a person’s life and at the same time are coloured and qualified by the
social and cultural mores prevalent in one’s environment.

In the diasporic context, the society and culture are new and hence emotional and
sexual wants also appear anew. The diasporic Indian character Adit Sen in Anita Desai’s
novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* has an English wife and a number of Indian friends with whom
he shares his feelings of love, happiness, pride, concern, and so on. Yet he is seen to be
emotionally starved because he cannot find the warmth of a family like the one he left
behind in Calcutta. In England he comes in contact with three families – the Millers, the
Roscommon-James, and the neighbourhood Sikh family. The Millers, who came from
Germany, simply want to forget that Adit Sen had ever lived with them in Harrow: “It is
as though she [Mrs. Miller] wishes to reject the fact of Adit having lived in their house
for three years” (Desai, *Blackbird* 81). The Roscommon-James, Adit’s in-laws, cannot
accept Adit totally as their son-in-law. So, when Adit, with Sarah and his friends, land at
his in-laws’ place, Mrs. Roscommon-James cannot make herself very welcoming to them. What the Indians’ presence in her house offers her is “many miles beyond the comprehension of her naturally restricted curiosity” (Desai, *Blackbird* 137). The Sikh family, on the other hand, is friendly and “eager to be neighbourly” (Desai, *Blackbird* 116) but Adit wants to keep his distance from them. Had Adit been in a similar situation in India, it would not have been of much concern to him; but being in England has heightened Adit’s emotional demands and the lack of the familial warmth he wants makes him emotionally starved.

Arun in *Fasting, Feasting*, very unlike Adit, is not in search of familial warmth in Massachusetts. Mr. and Mrs. Patton, with whom Arun lives, try to make Arun comfortable in their own ways but Arun cannot identify with their ways because they cannot satisfy his emotional needs. Interestingly, the Pattons’ bulimic daughter, Melanie, who regards Arun as an intruder in their house, is the one with whom Arun shows any emotional attachment. It is because Arun finds that the ever-feasting Melanie has needs similar to that of his ever-fasting sister, Uma, in India.

Then Arun does see a resemblance to something he knows: a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against inattention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest.

(Desai, *Fasting* 214)

It is this emotional identification, not necessarily warmth, that is Arun’s want in his exilic state and that is why Arun shows concern towards a person who is not very welcoming of
his presence in the Patton household. Arun has discovered that at some emotional level even unhappy families do resemble each other.

Bharati Mukherjee's character Jasmine searches for a family in America that will resemble to some extent the family she had dreamt of having with Prakash. Between the Ripplemeyer family and the Hayes family, Jasmine chose the Hayeses—Taylor and Duff—because they were closest to her ideal of “Vijh & Wife!” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 96). Jasmine may have progressed in life: she has travelled from India to America, she has left behind the tragedies of her husband’s death and the incident with Scarface, and she has fashioned herself as an American. Yet her sentiments, feelings, and emotions have not changed fundamentally. With Taylor, Jasmine wants to revive what has been snuffed out with Prakash’s death. Her decision to lead an American life with Taylor is nothing new but a reiteration of the resolve she made with Prakash.

Taylor satisfies Jasmine’s emotional needs but Anthony in *Memories of Rain* by Sunetra Gupta, despite being Moni’s husband, cannot satisfy her emotional needs. Anthony provides Moni with all sorts of physical and material comforts but wants her to compromise on the emotional front: “he [Anthony] had long come to terms with his infidelity, he implored her silently, ever, to accept it, to reconcile the poetry of his passion for Anna with his deep affection for her and her child” (Gupta, *Memories* 11). Anthony fails to understand that it is his indifference to Moni’s emotions that gives her more pain than his actual infidelity. So, when Moni breaks her favourite blue bowl, it is “her first concrete recognition of approaching disaster, her first rebellion” (Gupta, *Memories* 94). It is also a secret sacrifice that foreshadows the greater sacrifice of leaving Anthony and England that she is going to make. Moni’s emotional craving has given her
complex feelings of anger and frustration, and she has to escape from such mental turmoil.

Moni, since her marriage with Anthony and her migration to the UK, has been on a constant process of realization and compromise. In the act of love it becomes clear to Moni that Anthony must have made love to many other women before her. She wonders "why she has not come to terms with this obvious fact before" (Gupta, Memories 33). Later, Anthony realizes "that the unadulterated passion he had felt for her [Moni] under tropical skies was not to last forever" (Gupta, Memories 82) and Moni appears to him as "a small, soft bird, in his arms, he does not dare to attempt to make love to her" (Gupta, Memories 17). Hence, while Moni spends her evenings alone, Anthony makes "violent love" (Gupta, Memories 18) to Anna in her studio flat. Moni in her loneliness seeks refuge in "darkness, her first lover, engulfing her in secret embrace, grainy kisses upon her burning lips, darkness, her accomplice" (Gupta, Memories 30). Moni committing adultery with darkness is a representation of the extremity of her emotional and sexual wants. The idea of the sanctity of love has been lost on Moni. Even when she recalls the memory of "the frustrated eyes of a young American who had pleaded with her to follow him across the Atlantic" (Gupta, Memories 95) she muses not on the happiness of love but on "what new pain might have awaited her in that vast land" (Gupta, Memories 95). Anthony's betrayal has made Moni's diasporic condition painful. Anthony's lack of response to Moni's emotional needs makes Moni's alienation due to displacement more complete.

For Moni the thought of displacement becomes associated with the divorce of love. But the opposite is the case with Niharika in A Sin of Colour. For Niharika the concept of
love is intrinsic to the concept of displacement. Displacement provides an escape that frees love of the shackles of propriety and society. Niharika faces the choice between Rahul Mitra and Daniel Faraday. Rahul Mitra is a bachelor, Daniel Faraday is married; Rahul is Indian, Daniel is English; Rahul lives in India, Daniel abroad; yet Niharika chooses Daniel. For Niharika, being in love with Daniel gives her a sense of freedom, of breaking barriers, of committing a sin, and it is precisely these emotional experiences that she craves for. Thus for Niharika displacement becomes a necessary means of satisfying her emotional aspirations. The instance clearly shows that the diasporic condition need not necessarily be a given for the characters, but rather may actively be embraced, and that too for emotional reasons.

Niharika’s definition of love matches with Daniel’s definition of love. But love becomes “a slippery word when both partners bring their own definition” (Mukherjee, Daughters 27) as Tara realizes in the novel Desirable Daughters. Love for Tara’s ex-husband, Bish, is “indistinguishable from status and honors” (Mukherjee, Daughters 27) and Tara has also grown up identifying love with “duty and obedience” (Mukherjee, Daughters 27). Andy, the Hungarian, brings a new, Westernized definition of love in Tara’s life. For Andy, “love is having fun with someone, more fun with that person than with anyone else, over a longer haul” (Mukherjee, Daughters 27). Tara leaves Bish and moves on in life with her lover, Andy. But at the time of crisis Tara ultimately hinges on Bish for emotional support. Bish satisfies Tara’s emotional wants and Andy her sexual wants. For Bish, the breakup of his marriage is a failure on his part. He admits that he did not understand the loneliness that Tara felt in their marriage.
Two people are together; they have come from the same place; they share the same values, the same language. Practically speaking, they are two halves of one consciousness. They eat the same food; they have a child; they sleep in the same bed, how can they be lonely? " (Mukherjee, Daughters 266) Tara understood it all too well: “What you eat, what language you speak, where you sleep — in our world they meant everything, but we’re not there anymore” (Mukherjee, Daughters 266). Being “not there”, the displacement, brings about the difference — the greater demand for emotional and sexual succour especially to ward off the acute sense of loneliness. The demands of the body and the mind become intrinsic with the demands of the environment and the surrounding. Such integration shows that the displacement-induced self-fashioning is not only external but equally internal. More often than not, it is not only the dress and language of the place of migration that the migrants adopt but they also start wearing a different attitude and mind.

Had Tara’s mindset not changed after her migration she would have been devastated to hear that her son, Rabi, is gay. As a Westerner, Tara can accept Rabi’s sexual orientation but it is doubtful whether she would have been able to do so if she had never migrated. Emotional parameters of the same person can change with change in society and lifestyle. The change is not exactly radical but it certainly affects the degree of acceptance or rejection according to one’s fundamental emotional inclinations. The change does not come overnight, however. Just as is the case with Arun in Fasting, Feasting when he sees Mrs. Patton sunbathing: “She is wearing clothes so minimal that they cover only a few inches of her chest and hips. The rest of her flesh is bared to his gaze [. . .] He does not even want to glance in her direction. It is like confronting his
mother naked” (Desai, Fasting 213). It is because Arun has recently come from a society where the idea of “baring of flesh in public” (Desai, Fasting 215) is appalling.

Similar is the case with Dev in Bye-Bye Blackbird. Dev on seeing the numerous lovers in Hyde Park cannot comprehend the unself-consciousness of the English people. But Sarah explains to him: “They are really quite unself-conscious when it comes to things like that. Unlike Indians who are not in the least bit self-conscious about their persons but very much so in their relationships. I think the English are just the other way around” (Desai, Blackbird 65-66). Gradually, as Dev becomes emotionally attached to things English, it starts balancing his emotional leaning for India. Dev first had to come out of the culture shock before he could start accepting the alien culture. It definitely brings about an emotional turmoil that gradually modifies his wants. Emotional wants arise out of feelings and feelings change over time, from place to place. It gives an insight into acculturation.

Especially with relation to love, sex, marriage, and other personal needs, the second-generation expatriates do not want themselves to be straitjacketed by the Indian value system. Being brought up in the liberal atmosphere of the West, albeit as representatives of an ethnic minority, they have a sense of claustrophobia when their ethnic identity curbs their Western lifestyle. At the same time breaking sexual taboos and inhibitions differentiates physical wants from emotional wants as well as shows the interdependence of the body and the mind. The lifestyles of first-generation Indian immigrants and their progeny are radically different when emotional and sexual issues are considered. It is especially the sexual liberation of the West that provides a ready lifeline as an emotional succour from the state of being in exile.
It is not to be assumed, however, that the second-generation migrants use their sexual freedom just as an instrument to dispel their sense of rootlessness and loneliness. The primary purpose of sex is to satisfy a bodily want but in the diasporic context it satisfies an added want, just like the main purpose of spices is to give flavour to the food but in certain preparations they have the added purpose of being medicinal. Jhumpa Lahiri in her short story *Interpreter of Maladies* depicts the diasporic Indian character Mina Das’s sexual infidelity towards her husband, Raj thus: “She made no protest when the friend touched the small of her back [. . .] then pulled her against his crisp navy suit. He made love to her swiftly, in silence, with an expertise she had never known” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 64). It was the novelty of the intimate experience amidst the boredom of Mrs. Das’s lonely life that allowed her to succumb to it. She definitely got pleasure from the act, both physical and from the awareness of the fact that she was breaking the monotony of her life. Nothing is more exciting than doing what is forbidden either by society or by morality.

The cause of Mrs. Das’s infidelity was boredom, which arose from loneliness that was a product of her diasporic condition. But to infer that diasporic condition begets infidelity would be a preposterous statement. The real pangs of the diasporic condition arises in Mrs. Das’s next eight years of guilt-ridden existence, where she could not even confide her secret to anyone. Mrs. Das needs, as a confidante, someone who is close as well as distant at the same time, just like the country of her origin. She is emotionally so close to India that its value system smothers her by giving her an intense sense of guilt for what she has done and yet the country is so far off that it takes her eight long years to reach out to it. At last she confides in Mr. Kapasi, an Indian, in India; giving back to the symbolic
source of her sense of guilt her confession. Mr. Kapasi is the tour guide; he is also an "interpreter of maladies" in a doctor's chamber, but for Mrs. Das he is symbolic of India—close enough to confide but far enough not to keep any contact with. The slip of paper with Mr. Kapasi's address slipping out of Mrs. Das's bag and flying away unnoticed by the Das family bears testimony to the fact.

Mrs. Das's confession does not imply any lasting imprint of emotional contact but rather precisely the reverse. No doubt Lahiri mentions, not Mr. Kapasi's wish, but "his dream, of serving as an interpreter between nations" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 59) while corresponding with Mrs. Das. "Dream" is too vague a word to be fulfilled. Lahiri also makes a number of metaphorical allusions to the dichotomy of the propinquity of India's distant cultural past. Near the dried-up Chandrabhaga river the Das family, along with Mr. Kapasi, observes the cradle of India's cultural past at the Konarak temple. The medallions in the spokes on the wheel of life bore "countless friezes of entwined naked bodies, making love in various positions, women clinging to the necks of men, their knees wrapped eternally around their lovers' thigh [. . .]. [But] it was no longer possible to enter the temple, for it had filled with rubble years ago" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 57). When Mrs. Das stops to look at the carved "topless female musicians beating on two-sided drums" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 57), Mr. Kapasi sees them anew with Mrs. Das's perspective and it occurs to him "that he had never seen his own wife fully naked. Even when she made love she kept the panels of her blouse hooked together, the strings of her petticoat knotted around her waist" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 58). It seems to him that India has transgressed from its ancient liberal culture and become a land of closed closets. It is a sentiment that finds echo even in a first-generation migrant Indian to England like Adit:
“In India, too much goes on in the dark” (Desai, *Blackbird* 67). It is the closet-mentality inherited by Mrs. Das that gives her the sense of guilt. The second generation non-resident Indians in giving way to the sexual liberties of the West are perhaps actually, though unconsciously, retracing their way back to their ancient cultural lineage.

In the short story *The Third and Final Continent* Lahiri’s diasporic protagonist is the narrator of the story. He was in London when his marriage was arranged and at the same time he was offered a job in America. So, “I first flew to Calcutta, to attend my wedding, and a week later I flew to Boston, to begin my new job” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 174). Later when his wife, Mala, arrives in Boston he realizes how little he knew of her. One day he takes her to meet Mrs. Croft, a hundred and three years old woman, the landlady of the place where he resided when he first came to Boston. The woman born in 1866 inspects Mala who is wrapped in a sari from top to toe with “a dot painted on her forehead and bracelets stacked on her wrists” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 195), and remarks: “She is a perfect lady!” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 195). In the presence of Mrs. Croft they share conspiratorial looks and smiles with each other and the narrator declares:

I like to think of that moment in Mrs. Croft’s parlor as the moment when the distance between Mala and me began to lessen. Although we were not yet fully in love, I like to think of the months that followed as a honeymoon of sorts [. . .]

At night we kissed, shy at first but quickly bold, and discovered pleasure and solace in each other’s arms. (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 196)

For the tradition-bound first-generation diasporic Indians, the Western culture is like an assault on their feelings and convictions but the acquaintance of Mrs. Croft consoles them. They realize that they are not as “ancient and alone” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 196) as
Mrs. Croft whose Victorian mindset cannot conceive of the fact that astronauts have landed on the moon. Hence they become “quickly bold”.

The sexual wants and experiences of first generation non-resident Indians are not much different from those of Indians in India but their conventionality is not stereotypical. Their sexuality is basically a manifestation of love. The second generation migrants discover the other dimension of sexuality – a craving of the flesh that can be satisfied without feeling guilty of doing so. The intrinsic link between sex and love is traditional; sex as a bodily want is universal; but sex as a refuge from loneliness, from crisis of identity, from emotional conflict is perhaps a special quality of the diasporic experience. The second-generation migrant Indian couple Shukumar and Shoba in the short story *A Temporary Matter* are the ones who reach “for each other’s bodies before sleeping” (Lahiri, *Interpreter 5*). During happy days Shoba used to whisper Shukumar’s name in such moments of intimacy but after their baby is born dead, their moments of intimacy do not have that tenderness. Previously they had sex because of love but now it is just to satisfy their carnal want. In their Western lifestyle, Shoba and Shukumar have recognized the dual function of sex. In their hour of grief, Shukumar and Shoba, despite having a number of Western acquaintances, find themselves lonely, because they cannot relate to those acquaintances. As members of the diasporic community they find themselves in exile at their moment of sorrow and hence their loneliness. Their reactions to the situation are contrasting – Shukumar cannot concentrate in his work whereas Shoba immerses herself in her work. At a time of crisis, living Western lives aggravates their want of emotional support. On the fourth night of their confessions, in the dark they
make love “with a desperation they had forgotten. She wept without sound, and whispered his name” (Lahiri, Interpreter 19).

Shoba whispers Shukumar’s name but also cries because this time sex satisfies an additional purpose – it acts as a succour for their diasporic condition. The intimacy that sex offers has the potential to cure the maladies of exile, albeit temporarily. Shoba’s and Shukumar’s want of emotional comfort is allayed temporarily by their sexuality. Even if such relationships are not between spouses or between persons who belong to the same diasporic community, like the adulterous Bengali migrant Dev and the Midwestern Miranda, in Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story Sexy, the arguments still hold good. Sexual wants and emotional wants get entwined with each other in diasporic life.

Jhumpa Lahiri depicts in her novel, The Namesake, how the sexual wants of first generation migrant Indians differ from those of the second generation and in general how the sexual wants of the Indian diaspora is distinct from those of the native Western population. Ashoke and Ashima are first-generation non-resident Indians in Boston. When Ashima is pregnant with Gogol she is admitted to a hospital where she finds herself “alone, cut off by curtains from the three other women in the room”:

She wishes the curtains were open, so that she could talk to the American women.

But she has gathered that Americans, in spite of their public declarations of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other at the Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy. (Lahiri, Namesake 3)
When she overhears a husband consoling his wife by saying, "I love you, sweetheart" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 3), she realizes that these words she "has neither heard nor expects to hear from her own husband; that is how they are" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 3).

Ashoke and Ashima’s relationship is intimate yet not explicit. The closest thing that Ashima had ever experienced “to the touch of a man” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 8) before her marriage was when she secretly stepped into her would-be husband’s shoes and the “lingering sweat from the owner’s feet mingled with hers, causing her heart to race” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 8). When Gogol observes Maxine’s parents, Gerald and Lydia, “kissing openly, going for walks through the city, or to dinner, just as Gogol and Maxine do” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 138), he is reminded “that in all his life he has never witnessed a single moment of physical affection between his parents. Whatever love exists between them is an utterly private, uncelebrated thing” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 138). When Maxine says that that was so depressing, Gogol is upset at her reaction but he cannot help but agree as a Westerner. Gogol since childhood has identified himself more as an American than as an Indian but through his number of sexual liaisons he comes to realize that he simply cannot have a single identity. Being in a diaspora, he is forever exiled.

Gogol’s first sexual urges come when he is in high school where “he suffers quiet crushes, which he admits to no one, on this girl or that girl with whom he is already friends.”

His parents do not find it strange that their son doesn’t date, does not rent a tuxedo for his junior prom. They have never been on a date in their lives and therefore they see no reason to encourage Gogol, certainly not at his age.

(Lahiri, *Namesake* 93).
But Gogol cannot be what his parents are. So,

One Saturday, soon before he is scheduled to take the SAT, his family drives to Connecticut for the weekend, leaving Gogol at home alone overnight for the first time in his life. It never crosses his parents’ minds that instead of taking timed practice tests in his room Gogol will drive with Colin and Jason and Marc to a party. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 93-94).

In the party he meets a girl called Kim to whom he introduces himself by his other name, Nikhil. It is as Nikhil he kisses her; “the first time he’s kissed anyone, the first time he’s felt a girl’s face and body and breath so close to his own” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 96). “Gogol” becomes his Indian self while “Nikhil” his American other and thus he is initiated into the sexual mores of the Western world.

By the time Gogol is in the middle of his sophomore year, he has already lost his virginity and is involved with Ruth. He keeps it a secret from his parents, confiding only in his sister, Sonia, who herself has a secret boyfriend. The progeny of the first generation migrants keep their sexual preferences secret from them because they know that their parents would be “not in the least bit proud or pleased” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 116) of their sexual accomplishments. When Gogol’s parents come to know about Ruth, “he wishes his parents could simply accept her, as her family accepts him, without pressure of any kind” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 116-117). Ashima and Ashoke tell Gogol instances of Bengali men, whom they have known, who married Americans and ended up divorcing. But when Gogol answers that marriage “is the last thing on his mind” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 117) it makes matters worse. What Gogol and his parents cannot understand is that their experiences of being young and in love are different because of their upbringing.
After graduating, Gogol starts living and working in New York where he gets involved in a relationship with Maxine. He admires the sexual liberalism of Maxine’s parents, Gerald and Lydia, and even her grandparents, Hank and Edith. In comparison his parents’ sexual conservatism seems as a hindrance to him in recognizing himself as an American. Gogol knows his mother will never put on a bathing suit and swim as Maxine’s mother does. But a change occurs in Gogol after the sudden death of his father. His Indian self starts gaining prominence over his American self. Maxine tolerates this initially:

his silences at the dinner table, his indifference in bed, his need to speak to his mother and Sonia every evening, and to visit them on weekends, without her. But she had not understood being excluded from the family’s plans to travel to Calcutta that summer to see their relatives and scatter Ashoke’s ashes in the Ganges. 

(Lahiri, *Namesake* 188)

Maxine admits that she felt jealous of Gogol’s mother and sister, Gogol finds the accusation absurd and walks out of the relationship. After his break-up with Maxine, Gogol has a brief affair with a married woman called Bridget but it is he who starts feeling guilty. Gogol’s sexual preferences are undergoing a change and ultimately he agrees with his mother’s proposal to meet a Bengali NRI girl, Moushumi Mazoomdar.

Like Gogol, Moushumi also grew up in a conservative Indian home amidst a liberal Western populace. Like Gogol she “had always been admonished not to marry an American” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 213). But unlike Gogol, Moushumi being a girl, since her adolescent years “she’d been subjected to a series of unsuccessful schemes” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 213) of arranged marriage:
She had rebuffed the Indian men she wasn’t interested in, and had been forbidden as a teenager to date. In college she had harbored lengthy infatuations, with students with whom she never spoke, with professors, and TAs. In her mind she would have relationships with these men [. . .] she associated a particular year in college with the man or boy she had silently, faithfully, absurdly desired [. . .]

Sometimes she wondered if it was her horror of being married to someone she didn’t love that had caused her, subconsciously, to shut herself off.

(Lahiri, *Namesake* 213-214)

A rebellion was brewing in her to dispel her loneliness. While she majored in chemistry she secretly pursued a double major in French and then moved to Paris against her parents’ wishes, where “she began to fall effortlessly into affairs. With no hesitation, she had allowed men to seduce her in cafes, in parks, while she gazed at paintings in museums. She gave herself openly, completely, not caring about the consequences” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 215). Moushumi’s reaction is a bit extreme because she could not discover her convincing other self like Gogol. After the period of sexual excesses, Moushumi falls in love with Graham and back in America she impulsively asks him to marry her. Graham accepts her proposal and even agrees to a Hindu wedding and goes to Calcutta to meet her extended family. On returning to New York, a few weeks before their marriage they go out to dinner with friends and Graham after getting drunk starts complaining about his time in Calcutta, “commenting that he found it taxing, found the culture repressed [. . .] She had listened to him; partly sympathetic, partly horrified. For it was one thing for her to reject her background, to be critical of her family’s heritage,
another to hear it from him. She realized that he had fooled everyone, including her” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 217). They argue, they fight, and separate in bitterness. Both Gogol’s and Moushumi’s sexual relationships end because of their subconscious emotional leanings towards their culture and ethnicity. It is as a kickback of their individual situation that they start loving each other and have an arranged marriage.

After a year of their marriage Moushumi wonders “how long she will live her life with the trappings of studenthood” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 254), when will she get a “real full-time tenure track job” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 254). She wants to make a fresh start in a new place but Gogol cannot leave New York because of his job. It is in such a situation when boredom and loneliness are creeping into her life that Dimitri, the first man to touch her when she was only seventeen, turns up in her life. She calls him and they start having their clandestine rendezvous on Mondays and Wednesdays. Dimitri “regards their time together as perfectly normal, as destined, and she begins to see how easy it is” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 264). If Gogol is a victim of Moushumi’s cuckoldry, Moushumi is also a victim – of repressive diasporic adolescence, especially because of her gender.

Gogol’s relationship even with a diasporic Indian, despite marriage, ends in failure. It is not Gogol who has failed in any way but rather the circumstances and the dilemma of being a second-generation non-resident Indian is what that has failed him. The sexual and emotional wants in diasporic life are challenging and it needs fortitude to overcome the challenge. Perhaps Sonia is best placed to make the transition. Sonia’s relationship is with Ben and they are engaged to get married in India. Ben is half-Jewish, half-Chinese – a true example of a multicultural union, of hybridity personified. Once such melange is taken into account self-fashioning becomes relatively easy and hybrid existence less
painful. Human relationships not only satisfy sexual and emotional wants but equally teach individuals to self-fashion themselves in order to overcome the sense of loneliness, alienation, rootlessness, and ambivalence.