CHAPTER FOUR: IDENTITY AND SELF-FASHIONING

Defining selves is the process that leads to the construction of identities. When a child is born he/she is already defined by certain physical characteristics like weight, size, gender, and so on. Part of the child’s self-definition, like religion and nationality, is acquired by virtue of parentage and the place of birth. Then the child receives certain identifications like name and birth certificate. As the child grows up, actions, conduct, and practices add qualifiers such as relationships, character, morality, culture, social status, educational qualification, and financial condition to the individual’s self-definition. The sum total of all these characteristics, that add up to define the self of an individual, constitutes the identity of that person. It is to be noted that one’s identity is not fixed and is constantly changing because many characteristics that help to construct that identity, for example weight or financial position, are themselves variable in nature. Therefore, defining selves is an ever-changing process of self-fashioning and it is this dynamism that causes a crisis of identity in the individual when considered in the context of dislocated existence.

The movements of migrants, refugees, or exiles demand such people to define themselves anew. It is not merely modifying old identities but creating new identities. Stuart Hall in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” defines identities as “the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (236). Hence, when the migrants do not have a shared past, shared history, with the host nation, it becomes virtually impossible to define their selves newly. It becomes a process seeped in artificiality where cosmetic identities are created as a façade to veil their ethnic leanings, longings, and devotions. Even if the migrants share a
part of their historical past with the host nation, it is invariably plagued with master / slave, colonizer / colonized binarisms. These binarisms beget biases, either racial or religious or in any other form. The migrants’ reaction against a discriminatory, hostile host society is to instinctively clutch at their ethnic identities in defiance as well as for solace. This instinctive reaction of the migrants defines them by default in terms of their old identities but made rigid and impermeable because the new definitions have originated as a defence against hostility. Thus there seem to be two predominant ways by which dislocated populations can define themselves — either cosmetically or defensively.

The post-globalization, postmodern world, in its aim to become a global village, has become very accommodating, accepting and facilitating and has somehow given a new meaning to identity by replacing "shared past" with "shared present" in its definition. Migrants are eased into new definitions of their selves in terms of a shared present by the host society itself. Shared present being real does not leave room for any artificiality and the general absence of any hostility does not necessitate any defensive reaction by the migrants. Therefore, in this context, the migrants neither define themselves in cosmetic terms nor in defensive terms, and yet they define themselves in new terms. This phenomenon of defining selves takes place in globalized terms.

These three ways of defining selves in different situations is not exclusive to first generation migrants and is required by their progeny too. The children of the migrants are born and bred in the country of their parents’ adoption and hence technically they are not migrants but they still need to define their selves because they inherit from their parents the sense of displacement, non-belonging and alienation. The migrants in defining themselves do not discard their original identities. In fact, the second generation diasporic
people inherit, like everything else, the root identities of their parents as well. This causes the diasporic population to juggle with multiple identities and therein arises the crisis. A diasporic individual is in an ambivalent position and cannot put oneself under a singularly exclusive definition of self. The hyphenated presence between two defining selves accentuates the identity crisis making it an inherent characteristic of diasporic life.

The case of migrant Indian English writers, either of the first generation or the second generation, is very poignant because their expatriate condition gets reflected in their writing and their characters’ concerns in varying degrees are, more often than not, the reflections of their own concerns. In his recent book *A Writer’s People* V. S. Naipaul argues that every Indo-Anglian writer writes one and only one significant novel, which is autobiographical in nature. The very act of writing becomes an exploration to redefine their selves. C. Vijayasree writing about the Indian women writers settled in the West in the essay “Alter-Nativity, Migration, Marginality and Narration” writes:

> When one identifies oneself as a Hindu by religion, Bengali by region, brahmin by caste, American by choice, immigrant by status, one is not defining one's 'nativity' but projecting a state of alter-nativity, even altering nativity.

(Crane 123)

This “altering nativity” is the process of defining oneself anew and creating alternative identity. Diasporic Indian writers of the first generation like Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee, and of the second generation like Sunetra Gupta and Jhumpa Lahiri have shown that the diasporic characters in their fiction redefine themselves by projecting this state of “alter-nativity”.
One of the most potent instruments of defining oneself is the name. It is not merely a proper noun to identify an individual but is rather a multi-faceted identifier denoting many things like gender, religion, ethnicity, race, and even the condition of hybridity. Hence, by changing one's name, which is by adopting a suitably new name, an individual can define oneself newly and to some extent very easily. Salman Rushdie in an interview with "Newsweek" magazine says, "Trotsky" was Trotsky's jailer's name. By taking it for his own, he symbolically conquered his captor and set himself free" ("Newsweek", 12 February 1990, p. 54). More or less a similar purpose, to set oneself free, lies in many of diasporic characters' adoption of certain names. In Anita Desai's novel Bye-Bye Blackbird the Millers are German migrants in England but in this new country they have discarded their German surname and adopted the English surname "Miller" to free themselves from the stigma of being Germans from Hitler's Germany. In Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "This Blessed House", Tanima, the diasporic Indian in USA, prefers to be called as "Twinkle" even though her American acquaintances find the name quite "unusual". Tanima by taking up a name that rhymes with Dimple and Simple, two actresses of the Bombay film industry asserts her characteristic as a believer in the fantasy world of simulated reality.

Bharati Mukherjee's character Jasmine, from the novel of the same name, is a character whose names and identities are intricately linked with each other. At the start of the novel Jasmine is Jyoti, a village girl in the Indian village called Hasnapur. After marriage with Prakash Vijh she comes to Jullandhar and is renamed Jasmine. When she comes to Florida, in America, she is called Jazzy. In New York with the Hayes family, she becomes Jase. Again in Baden, Iowa, she is known as Jane to Bud and others.
Jasmine's various names mark the journey undertaken by her from Punjab to California. Nagendra Kumar writes:

Her journey through life leads Jasmine through many transformations — Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane via divergent geographical locales like Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and finally California. At every step Jasmine revolts against her fate and the path drawn for her. (N. Kumar 107)

He further writes that Jasmine's journey is a "struggle" and it "symbolizes the restless quest of a rootless person piqued by a depressing sense of isolation all around" (N. Kumar 107). Jasmine's journey is a struggle from the onset because she is traveling in a pre-globalized world and more importantly she is an illegal immigrant carrying forged papers. Jasmine knows about it and she is wise to surmise the general condition of her likes:

We are the outcastes and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tarmacs, ferried in old army trucks where we are roughly handled and taken to roped-off corners of waiting rooms where surly, barely wakened customs guards await their bribe. We are dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season, the witted plumage of intercontinental vagabondage. We ask only one thing: to be allowed to land; to pass through; to continue.

(Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 101)

It becomes imperative for Jasmine to live with different names at different points in time because the link with the past has to be severed each time she takes up a new identity, thus accentuating her rootlessness.
Each name that Jasmine gets is symbolic of her state of being. It is not only her geographical presence that establishes her identity but equally her emotional states, her social states, and her cultural states do the same. Jasmine’s “name changes as well as her shifts in places of residence become metaphors for an immigrant woman’s ‘process of uprooting and rerooting’” (N. Kumar 118). It is interesting to note that Jasmine herself does not name herself newly each time she fashions herself but others give her the new names. Jasmine is named Jyoti, which means light, by her grandmother. The name Jyoti stands for a village girl, born without a dowry among a number of siblings, and is cursed since childhood. But she is also rebellious, intelligent, and self-assertive. After marriage her husband, Prakash, gives her a new name, Jasmine, of the fragrant flowers. Jasmine stands for the beginning of a new life of a city woman. In America Lillian Gordon fashions her as a self-confident American woman and calls her Jazzy. Later as a caregiver of Duff, Taylor Hayes shortens her name Jasmine to Jase. Jase is a prowling adventurer. In Iowa it is Bud who renames her as Jane, a fighter and adapter. That Jasmine accepts all the names given to her shows how she readily accommodates herself at different places, in different situations. It stresses on the point that an immigrant’s life is “a series of reincarnations” (N. Kumar 116).

It is not always that Jasmine is laden with a name to live by. At the end of the novel she faces a choice between her identities represented by the names Jane and Jase. As Jane, she can live in Iowa with Bud, a crippled banker who wants to marry her and whose child she is carrying. As Jase, she can choose to be an adventurer and go with Taylor and Duff to California. Jasmine chooses the latter option indicating her itinerant character that becomes intrinsic to her self-definition. Being labeled by others and being able to choose
a label for oneself are very different experiences. Once she has the facility to choose, she
gets the freedom to create her identity the way she wants to. It is this self-fashioning that
is to sustain her in her dislocated existence.

The case of Gogol Ganguli from Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* is quite
poignant in this regard. Ashoke and Ashima, the Bengali couple living in Massachusetts,
USA, has “Gogol” as the pet name and “Nikhil” as the “good name” for their son. But
their son, as a child in school, responds only to his pet name with which he is familiar and
so “Gogol” becomes his official name. As Gogol grows up he realizes that –

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

When Gogol goes for a freshman party with his friends he meets a girl called Kim to
whom he does not want to introduce himself as Gogol and “endure her reaction, to watch
her lovely blue eyes grow wide” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 95). He introduces himself as Nikhil
for in the globalized world he feels more comfortable to define himself by a name that
has some link to his ethnicity than by an obsolete name; even if that obsolete name is a
metonym for classic European literature. Later, he goes to the Middlesex Probate and
Family Court and officially changes his name to Nikhil. By changing his name Gogol
defines himself anew. As Nikhil, in America,

it’s easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas [. . .]
It is as Nikhil, that first semester, that he grows a goatee, starts smoking Camel Lights at parties [. . . ]

It is as Nikhil that he takes Metro-North into Manhattan one weekend with Jonathan and gets himself a fake ID that allows him to be served liquor at New Haven bars [. . . ]

It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles [. . . ]

There is only one complication: he doesn’t feel like Nikhil.

(Lahiri, Namesake 105)

The complication is because people who know Gogol as Nikhil “have no idea that he used to be Gogol” (Lahiri, Namesake 105) and so by redefining his self Gogol has given precedence to his present over his past. No doubt, he feels like “acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different” (Lahiri, Namesake 105) because he has created a double identity for himself. Change of name is an easy way to define oneself but it is difficult to live by that definition and get used to it. Gogol occasionally has to “hear Nikhil three times before he answers. Even more startling is when those who normally call him Gogol refer to him as Nikhil” (Lahiri, Namesake 106).

Gogol’s name is not only a nomenclature but it represents a history. It is not only that Gogol’s father’s favourite author is Nikolai Gogol: the name meant more for Ashoke. It was “a single page of ‘The Overcoat’ [from the book The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol] crumpled tightly in his fist” (Lahiri, Namesake 18), that helped the rescuers spot the young and unmarried Ashoke, in the wreckage of the Jamshedpur-bound train that met with a terrible accident. For Ashoke the name Gogol reminds him everything that followed thereafter – his recovery, his marriage, and his migration to the US. Gogol
comes to know about the history behind his naming much after he has changed his name officially back to his good name Nikhil, but what he does know from his history class is that “European immigrants had their names changed at Ellis island” (Lahiri, Namesake 97). “Though Gogol doesn’t know it, even Nikolai Gogol renamed himself, simplifying his surname at the age of twenty-two from Gogol-Yanovsky to Gogol upon publication in the Literary Gazette” (Lahiri, Namesake 97). As a child Gogol had known that names die over time when he had gone on a school field trip to a graveyard and brought home the rubbings of obscure names from the gravestones of “these very first immigrants to America, these bearers of unthinkable, obsolete names” (Lahiri, Namesake 71). It is only when the “givers and keepers of Gogol’s name are far from him [...] One dead. Another a widow, on the verge of a different sort of departure, in order to dwell, as his father does, in a separate world” (Lahiri, Namesake 289) that Gogol has some realization that his name stands for something more than merely as an identifier of his self.

Bharati Mukherjee shows how the history behind a name initiates a quest for identity in the novel Desirable Daughters. Tara Chatterjee (nee Bhattacharjee), ex-wife of the rich and famous Bishwapriya Chatterjee, living in the US with her son Rabi, is faced with a crisis of identity when she becomes a victim of a terrorist attack. The terrorist, Abbas Sattar Hai, takes the name of Tara’s sister Padma’s illegitimate offspring, Christopher Dey, to get close to Tara’s family. Like Jasmine he constantly takes up and discards names but unlike Jasmine his discarding of names is not because they are associated with pain but rather they are merely his camouflage. In exploring the identity of the terrorist and the subsequent bomb attack, Tara becomes involved in the quest for her own identity—leading her to examine the history of her namesake Tara Lata Gangooly, also known as
the Tree-Bride, who lived and died in Mishtigunj, in British India long ago. When names enmesh with the past, often nomenclature becomes complicated and the dynamics of possessing multiple identities frictional.

In such circumstances identities become intrinsic to names. Gogol is upset with his name because he is upset with the complexity of his identity. When Gogol comes to know of Moushumi’s affair with Dimitri, he realizes that now somebody else’s name upsets him more than his own. This shows that what upsets Gogol is not exactly the names in themselves but the association of the names that create multiple identities. In comparison the cases when Bishwapriya becomes Bish or when Christopher becomes Chris or even when Devanand Jagtiani becomes Danny and Jasbir Sidhu becomes Jack it is not as is the case with Gogol or Jasmine. Here the change in names is superficial and is not associated with any radical change in identity. It may be that sometimes an ethnic identifier gets altered externally like when Rabi mistakes the Indian “Dey” for the Western “Day”. The name as an ethnic identifier is crucial for Indians. In Lahiri’s short story “When Mr. Pirzada Came To Dine”, Lilia’s parents search the university directory “circling surnames familiar to their part of the world” (Lahiri, Interpreter 24) to invite for dinner. Similarly, in the short story “Mrs. Sen’s”, Mrs. Sen gets a call from the fish market in Boston, from where she regularly buys fish, about the arrival of some fresh fish. The person who called did not know her telephone number but he found it in the telephone book because it has “only one Sen” (Lahiri, Interpreter 124) listed there. So a name or, as here, a surname, becomes an important identifier in dislocated lives because names often convey more ethnicity than the persons themselves do. Salman Rushdie
writes in a similar vein on one of his visit to Bombay after a long absence to stress on how names evoke identities:

Shortly after arriving, acting on an impulse, I opened the telephone directory and looked for my father’s name. And, amazingly, there it was; his name, our old address, the unchanged telephone number, as if we had never gone away to the unmentionable country across the border. It was an eerie discovery. I felt as if I were being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions and that this continuity was the reality. (Rushdie, *Imaginary 9*)

It is an inherent human disposition to maintain a continuity of identity and even if an identifier, like the name, is changed, the identity of an individual does not exactly change. It is often just cosmetic changes in lifestyle that accompany a change in name. But in case of dislocation it is the contingency inherent in displaced existence that begets the notion of the creation of identity. This action of creating an identity, though guided by circumstances, quintessentially stems from one’s will in an attempt either to bring out the irreconcilability between or to make consistent native lives and dislocated lives. Stephen Greenblatt in his book titled *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* voices his opinion about the overwhelming need to sustain the illusion that a person is the principal maker of his own identity. He says: “Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other [. . .] must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked or destroyed” (Greenblatt 9). The context of displacement provides such a point of encounter between an authority and an alien. The difference between modern and Renaissance ideology is that the “Other” is not necessarily “threatening” and does not need to be “discovered” or “invented” for it is ever
present. Self-fashioning is at once the mental adjustment to combat the pangs of physical dislocation and at the same time is the physical adjustment to allay the sense of alienation and rootlessness. Under such conditions self-fashioning becomes essentially an act of volition.

The recurrent use of the first person personal pronoun “I” by the narrator of Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “The Third and Final Continent” — “I have remained in this new world”, “I have traveled”, “I have eaten”, “I have known”, “I have slept”, “I am bewildered” — confirms his act of volition in fashioning himself. It also confirms that self-fashioning is an ongoing process because displacement introduces dynamism in the relation between past and present and identities have to be defined continuously. As explicated by Greenblatt, fashioning of the self as an artifact becomes a manipulate and artful process. Displacement places the choice before the dislocated population either to adapt within the host society or to withstand the forces of assimilation. The choice is an ethical conundrum for it puts the people in dilemma between their debt to the country of origin and their obligation to the country of migration. The option not chosen — the debt not repaid or the obligation not fulfilled — becomes the millstone of guilty conscience. Hence, self-fashioning because of its voluntary, ever-changing, and somewhat artificial nature is an efficient process of constructing and reshaping human identities over time not just to suit circumstances but to rescue one’s self-respect from the mire of guilt-ridden mental landscape.

In an unwelcoming and intolerant host society the damage to the migrants’ self-respect is evident. Here the construction of identity becomes a willful but reactionary self-fashioning — as a defence against hostility. The obligations towards a discriminatory
host society seem minimal and so does the identification. Dev and Adit, two diasporic Indian characters from Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, find themselves in the midst of a discriminatory English society of the late 1960s and as a defensive strategy they assert their Indian-ness. Adit and Dev define their selves by belonging to diasporic Indian communities. It is not that they do not have Western acquaintances but they like to be in the company of their own ilk; their friend circle, except for a few Westerners like Sarah, Bella, and Emma Moffit, is made up of Indian immigrants like them. By belonging to such communities they find an anchorage to allay their sense of non-belonging and at the same time they define themselves explicitly as Indians in the West. The Indian diasporic communities, especially those that are made up of first generation migrants, are often quite hegemonic in their attitudes. They are isolated pockets of Indian culture within Western society. They are exclusively made up of migrant Indians who constantly stoke the embers of longing for their left-behind motherland and they negate any thought of assimilation. They represent little Indias in the West.

This creates problems for the first generation diasporic Indians, especially in relation to their own progeny who, being born and bred in the West, define themselves as Westerners of Indian origin and cannot identify with their parents' ethnic ghettoization. Defensive self-fashioning is thus an obstacle to integration into the host society but it is the natural and defiant reaction against hostility, and even more so when a colonial perspective is taken. Fawzia Afzal-Khan in the essay “Anita Desai: The Morality of Realism and the Aestheticism of Myth” writes about the colonial encounter as a “fundamental imbalance” (Afzal-Khan 89). It is perhaps this imbalance that hinders the diasporic Indians, even after the Racial Equality Act (1976) and globalization, to define
themselves as British, and instead use diluted terminology of having British citizenship. Adit and Dev can acquire British citizenship but they do not become British.

Dev and Adit present two contrasting pictures of self-assessment and self-acceptance in a discriminatory host society. Dev is angry at being insulted but Adit is indifferent to all such insults meted out by the host society. They criticize each other's attitude, they argue to justify their positions, but ultimately it becomes clear that they were trying more to convince themselves than anyone else. In the end Adit realizes that he can no longer hide his injured self-respect behind a façade of nonchalance and decides to return to India with his English wife Sarah. It is Dev who stays in England, for he realizes that those who call him "wog" do it because they fear the loss of their own self-respect by the intrusion of an alien culture in their midst. If Mrs. Roscommon-James, Adit's mother-in-law, is very unwelcoming towards him, it is because she is threatened by the intrusion of Indian culture. Adit's self-respect is battered more by Mrs. Roscommon-James' snobbishness than by any direct insult from unrelated individuals. Dev notices this rift and goes on to discover in the vestige of the romantic English countryside the England of the future.

Identity and self-respect are intricately linked with each other. In Anita Desai's short story "The Man Who Saw Himself Drown", the "drowned" man cannot bring himself in front of his family because by losing his identity he has lost his self-respect as well. The "drowned" man's self is now nothing more than a fictitious entity — a kind of Greenblatt's Renaissance representation of the self as an individual, expressive subject that requires explanation. The explanation comes through self-fashioning. The loss of identity damages self-respect and to repair the damage there is the need for self-
fashioning. Self-fashioning is the process, the need for self-respect the impulse, and the construction of identity the result.

Belonging to a diasporic community does affect the characters’ self-assessment and self-acceptance, but social discrimination does not always cause as much damage to one’s self-respect as does personal betrayal. In the former case one can always fall back on the refuge of one’s ethnicity by asserting it even strongly in defiance. Like Dev and Adit, Moni, from Sunetra Gupta’s novel *Memories of Rain*, also has romantic notions of Englishness. Before she falls in love with Anthony, she is already in love with an England as depicted in the literature of that land. The England to which Anthony brings her does not match the England of her imagination formed by the study of English literature. She takes her disappointment like any of her disappointed literary heroines. Even in the aberration in her relationship with Anthony, caused by Anthony’s ongoing affair with Anna, she hopes for love mixed with pain from a divided heart. It is not necessarily by infidelity but rather by indifference to Moni’s situation that Anthony betrays her and denies her self-respect. Shorn of the adornment of anguished passion, Moni, the eternal romantic, makes her escape back to India with her daughter. Moni’s diasporic status avails her the moral choice to return to her homeland. The return is not a mark of any failure but the maintenance of self-respect by Moni through her romantic longing, albeit not for her homeland but for her love. Her defensive reaction of going back to India causes estrangement that seems to cure the blight in her love.

Estrangement is equally important in another Sunetra Gupta novel called *A Sin of Colour*. Here Debendranath uses estrangement to save himself from stooping to his forbidden love for his elder brother’s wife, Reba. Debendranath leaves India, goes to
Oxford, and marries Jennifer, without being able to diminish his longing in any way. He has displaced himself physically from his forbidden love but is wracked by the sin of his longing. To redeem himself he has to make his displacement more complete – an escape into anonymity, into oblivion. Years later his niece Niharika does precisely the same thing. Niharika and the married Englishman, Daniel Faraday, love each other and to allay their scandalous affair they first seek estrangement and ultimately they also enter a punt on the Cherwell River in Oxford never to return. They have escaped into new identities where not even the shadow of their old identities will pursue them. Niharika has left Mandalay, the ancestral house in Calcutta, because it stands for stasis and hence is in ruins. Assisted by Daniel, she has made her choice for the flow of the waters, an indication of the tendency of the world – the world of migration, movement, change, and the perpetual process of self-definition. If Adit and Moni took decisions to self-fashion themselves towards their roots, Debendranath and Niharika took decisions to self-fashion themselves, not necessarily away from their roots but away from their previous identities. This reactionary self-fashioning by self-negation is best displayed in the pygmy whose life and death was the topic of research for Niharika. Niharika had come to Oxford to “research the life of a pygmy who had been kept in the same cage as an orang utan in the Bronx Zoo in 1905, who had eventually been released but then had committed suicide in Virginia” (Gupta, *Colour 71*), in a house where he was finally living as a human. The pygmy in the zoo was devoid of volition but the pygmy who killed himself did an act of volition. The pygmy takes his life and this willful act proves his human identity. By denying his existence he creates his own identity, rather like the heroine of Tagore’s
famous short story “The Living and the Dead”: “By dying, Kadambini had given proof that she was not dead.”

Reactionary self-fashioning can push an individual into a cocoon existence, or force to return back to one’s native place, or negate one’s existence. But the case of Dev shows that one can subtly seep into the host society without hindrance if one can find the right channel to do so. Often such channels are blocked and in such cases it requires intrusive self-assertion to open them. In Bharati Mukherjee’s novel *Jasmine*, it is self-assertiveness that forms the root of self-fashioning in a host society that is not very accepting of immigrants. Jyoti Vijh, seeking refuge in America, is raped on her arrival in the land of opportunity. This does not deter her from chasing her American dream despite being an illegal immigrant. She kills her ravisher and wipes out her ignominy by continuously refashioning herself as Jasmine, Jase, and Jane Ripplemeyer. She rescues her self-respect by asserting her new identities at a time when USA was rapidly changing into a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. Jasmine’s changes of identities become a continuous process of self-definition just like breathing, and the sooner she stops counting her breaths, the easier becomes the process. Nagendra Kumar writes:

Jasmine’s every movement is a calculated step into her Americanization and with each development a vital change is marked in her personality. Jasmine’s flight to Iowa and her renaming as Jane is indicative of a slow but a steady immersion into the mainstream American culture. Here we encounter a changed Jasmine — one who has murdered Half-Face for violating her chastity, now not only willingly embraces the company of an American without marriage but also is carrying his child in her womb. (N. Kumar 115)
Jasmine starts to fashion herself as an American and it does not involve a limited number of changes at a particular time. It is not a reaction of an instant but an ever-changing and continuous process. Jasmine herself acknowledges as much: "Once we start letting go — let go just one thing, like not wearing our normal clothes, or a turban or not wearing a tika on the forehead — the rest goes on its own down a sinkhole" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 29). But Jasmine is trying to integrate herself into a society that is not very tolerant, where even a beggar can abuse her and call her a "foreign bitch" (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 139), and so she maintains her doubts and keeps a vital part of her Indian self intact in her identity.

She dresses like an American, puts on an American name, but she can trust only Asians: 'I trust only Asian doctors, Asian professionals. What we've gone through must count for something' [Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 32]. She is loved by all for her Indianness, which has made her a lovable and caring wife, an affectionate mother. (N. Kumar 120)

Nagendra Kumar points towards a sweeping possibility that "had she been purely guided by the American values, she should have abandoned Bud at the time of his disability" (N. Kumar 121). Jasmine's urge is to belong to America but the American society has still not traversed the full distance to meet her at a middle ground for assimilation. In such a situation she finds herself getting accepted in American society to some extent partly due to her adopted Americanness and partly due to her retained Indianness. So despite Jasmine being very unlike Dev and Adit, who at different points in time do not want to belong to England, she finds herself in more or less a similar hybrid existence. Although Jasmine has changed much, much still remains to be changed in her. Jasmine's self-
fashioning of self-assertion often produces cosmetic changes in her personality while retaining her native self. Even though she starts to think like an American it is only to overcome the part of her Indianness that oppresses, like the thought of committing “sati”, otherwise it is her Indian identity that essentially sustains her.

The idea of having to make merely cosmetic changes to adjust into a society that is not exactly hostile is an inviting proposition because it seems easy. But a non-discriminatory host society paradoxically produces a greater problem of the loss of self-respect, for it brings the migrants into the multi-ethnic melting pot of hybrid existence. Resisting integration into hybridity brings out a sense of duty not done towards a welcoming host country. Not resisting such integration implies severing ties with the country of origin. In both the cases there is loss of self-respect. Self-fashioning becomes all the more complex. R. Radhakrishnan in his essay “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora” gives the example of an Indian in America to illustrate the dichotomy:

Take the case of the Indian immigrant. Her naturalization into American citizenship simultaneously minoritizes her identity. She is now reborn as an ethnic minority American citizen.

Is this empowerment or marginalization? This new American citizen must think of her Indian self as an ethnic self that defers to her nationalized American status. The culturally and politically hegemonic Indian identity is now a mere qualifier: “ethnic”. (Radhakrishnan 121)

Radhakrishnan sees migrants’ integration into the host society taking place in three phases. “During the initial phase, immigrants suppress their ethnicity in the name of pragmatism and opportunism. To be successful in the New World, they must actively
assimilate and, therefore, hide their distinct ethnicity” (Radhakrishnan 121). The adjustments made by Ashoke and Ashima, in The Namesake, after arriving in the US showcase this phase.

And yet to a casual observer, the Gangulis, [. . . ] appear no different from their neighbors [. . .] They purchase a barbecue for tandoori on the porch in summer [. . .] For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati. (Lahiri, Namesake 64)

It is in this phase that cosmetic changes like one’s name and the way one walks and talks, are made by the migrants to enter into the host society and to comply with its norms. Such immigrants “manage to live at some level in two worlds at once, their homeland and their immigrant destination” (Kivisto 37-38). At an exclusive level they are faithful to both the societies. They are regarded by sociologists as “transnationals” because they “increasingly attempt to define their identities in terms of both their point of origin and their destination. They are prepared to participate in social, political, and cultural life in both the host society and the sending state” (Kivisto 39). But this type of assimilation is superficial and does not give immunity against the conflicts arising in non-exclusive activities. Hence this phase becomes temporary and has to give way to the second phase that “refuses to subsume political, civil, and moral revolutions under mere strategies of economic betterment. In a call for total revolution immigrants reassert ethnicity in all its autonomy” (Radhakrishnan 121). It is a curious phenomenon because it is not a reaction to an overtly hostile host society that discriminates and excludes at will. This reassertion by ethnic groups grows on itself since, unlike races, it “involves the groups themselves
attempting to stake out boundaries that are designed to promote a sense of distinctiveness” (Kivisto 15). It comes out as a reaction to the migrants’ own earlier phase of living, despite being willingly adhered to. It is a kind of displeasure against oneself meted out against the host society.

Both Gogol and Sonia go through the second phase. After Ashoke’s death Gogol becomes reserved and distances himself from Maxine as well as from his American lifestyle. The shock that Gogol receives at the sudden death of his father tilts him towards his family, leaving his American friends. Sonia in one of her growing-up year “had refused her gifts after taking a Hinduism class, in college, coming home and protesting that they weren’t Christian” (Lahiri, Namesake 285). But it is just a temporary phase for one cannot go on living by walking a tightrope and tilting from side to side. Moreover, it is the closed diasporic communities, especially populated by first generation diasporic Indians, that pander to this phase of immigrant existence. It is a phase of insecure life in exile as has been pointed out by Edward Said:

“Because nothing is secure. Exile is a jealous state. What you achieve is precisely what you have no wish to share, and it is in the drawing of lines around you and your compatriots that the least attractive aspects of being in exile emerge: an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you.” (Said, Reflections 178)

Often in a militant form this phase gives birth to terrorists like Sukkhi of Jasmine or Abbas Sattar Hai of Desirable Daughters. It is this militant phase that causes greater alienation and distancing even among diasporic populations themselves. Post 9/11, some Hindus living in Britain do not want to be described as Asians and “want to be known as
British Indian, Hindu— or even desi— because of "a ‘general assumption’ that any brown-skinned Asian person was Muslim". But despite its drawbacks, this phase is crucial because it produces the realization of the third phase. "The third phase seeks the hyphenated integration of ethnic identity with national identity under conditions that do not privilege the ‘national’ at the expense of the ‘ethnic’" (Radhakrishnan 121).

It is in the third phase that self-fashioning assumes its most dynamic form. It becomes an ongoing process of creation of identity for the migrants now understand that to avoid the clash of cultures one has to acculturate with the host society:

The diaspora has created rich possibilities of understanding different histories. And these histories have taught us that identities, selves, traditions, and natures do change with travel (and there is nothing decadent or deplorable about mutability) and that we can achieve such changes in identity intentionally. In other words, we need to make substantive distinctions between “change as default or path of least resistance” and “change as conscious and directed self-fashioning.”

(Radhakrishnan 126)

In the third phase one realizes the real definition of hybrid existence. One realizes that cultures enrich through intermingling and not through isolation. Cultural plurality becomes allied with globalization and multiculturalism flourishes. Lisa Lowe points out in reference to the US that—

Once arriving in the United States, very few Asian immigrant cultures remain discrete, impenetrable communities; the more recent groups mix in varying degrees, with segments of the existing groups. The boundaries and definitions of
Asian-American culture are continually shifting and being contested from pressures both “inside” and “outside” the Asian-origin community. (Lowe 138)

In the globalized world, the accepting West does not see Gogol in *The Namesake* as an intruder. Gogol does not have to assert himself to be an American; he is acknowledged as an American by virtue of his birth and by virtue of his upbringing despite his ethnic roots. He finds himself more at ease with his American identity than with his Indianness.

Gogol, Moushumi, and Sonia belong to a multicultural society and therefore their circle of friends is wide and diverse. They have integrated within Western society more productively, but their inherited ethnicity often clashes with their Western lifestyle and brings out their sense of rootlessness. To prevent conflict Gogol lies to his parents about his American girlfriends, Ruth and later Maxine. Sonia also keeps secrets from her parents. Their hybrid existence prevents them from defining themselves in exclusive terms. Gogol finds it desirable to add his Indian roots to his self-definition but in doing so he does not eschew his American nationality. Gogol in defining his self through his nationality cannot feel anything but American in America and even American in India.

Gogol has been accepted by a multicultural American society in such a way that he cannot assert any other nationality. Yet at different times in his life he feels that his self-respect lies in being Gogol or being Nikhil or being Nick. This indeterminacy arises because he has inherited one identity from his parents and has grown up acknowledging another identity. To overcome this indeterminacy Gogol has to fashion himself continuously through acculturation and redefining human realtionships.

Human relationships – father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, and others – are primary definitions of selves because they are both acultural and anational. When Gogol
is born, Ashoke and Ashima define themselves newly as parents in America. Gogol’s indulgence in a number of relationships (with Kim, Ruth, Maxine, etc.) is his attempt to define himself suitably outside familial ties. But diasporic life is so demanding that even basic human relationships are not adequate to define oneself sufficiently. It often takes a shock to remove the pluralities in diasporic living and define oneself singularly. When Moushumi betrays Gogol, Gogol discretely isolates himself and is seen, towards the end of the novel *The Namesake*, preparing to reassess his priorities and come to a solid ground of reconciliation.

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “A Temporary Matter”, the diasporic Indian couple, Shoba and Shukumar, go through the shock of their child being born dead. They isolate themselves from all acquaintances and eventually from each other too. Whether isolation can provide one with a reconciliatory definition is contingent because it depends on the individual. But at least the detachment involved with isolation does provide a method for an individual to review any situation with a new perspective. Shoba’s and Shukumar’s confessions to each other cause pain, arouse hatred, and still act as therapeutic. Shoba does not want to know the gender of her unborn child after the ultrasound test to keep it as a surprise (it is contrasting to note that in India, where gender testing of the foetus is unlawful, many people, very unlike Shoba, are rather eager to know the gender of their unborn child). After Shoba gives birth to a dead child, she finds the fact that she does not know whether the child was a boy or a girl as consoling. But when she reveals to Shukumar that she wants to live away separately from him, Shukumar tells her the gender of their stillborn child as an act of revenge. The tragedy of their stillborn child causes them pain and they find it difficult to come out of this pain because they think that
somehow the root of the tragedy lay in the lives they have been living. Through confessions they enforce their alter-identities: the misfortune and guilt of their former selves getting obliterated in the painful birth of new selves. Defining new selves is no doubt painful because the birth pangs are always there but the pain is curiously made bearable since it is self-inflicted. It is a triumph of will over adversity – the joy of triumph lessening the pain.

Sometimes, as in the case of Mrs. Das from Lahiri’s short story “Interpreter of Maladies”, the limits of conventional human relationships are crossed. Mrs. Das is a totally Americanized Indian. The secret sin of adultery that Mrs. Das committed in America is revealed by her to Mr. Kapasi, the Indian guide, while she is on tour of India with her family. The burden of her guilt has weighed on Mrs. Das’s self-respect and by revealing the secret she has unburdened her self-respect, that too without any adverse consequence. Mrs. Das by secretly having an extra-marital affair defines herself as an adulterer. It wracks her with a guilty conscience but saves her from a nondescript self. In Mrs. Das’s case a fusion of identities had taken place and yet it left scope for differentiation of the two selves that made Mrs. Das confess and relieve her pain.

Mrs. Das fashions herself for self-respect by the differentiation of identities. Mrs. Sen, from Lahiri’s short story “Mrs. Sen’s”, faces, on the other hand, the problem of self-fashioning by integration of identities. Mrs. Sen is an Indian in America who juxtaposes her loneliness with Eliot’s, the American boy whom she baby-sits, and discovers the inherent nature of human loneliness. Her physical displacement has only added matters of geography and culture to define her as an exile. Mrs. Sen lives by that definition because her attachments are too strong to be ignored. But to belong totally to her country of
adoption she has to be an American, otherwise she will forever be wracked by a sense of exile. The greatest handicap she faces in acknowledging herself as an American is her fear of driving. It is this fear that gnaws at her self-respect. Her attempt to drive a car to go and buy a whole fish to cook is symbolic of her attempt to integrate her Indian identity with her American identity. It is not self-fashioning in totality but a necessary part of an ongoing process.

The crisis of hyphenated existence – being Indian and American at the same time – needs to be reconciled with so as to define oneself, though not conclusively, but at least with self-respect. Even when the reconciliation has taken place, self-fashioning does not stop because it entails not only constructing new identities but also searching for old ones. Tara, from Bharati Mukherjee’s novel Desirable Daughters, has built her self-respect on the twin pillars of her Indian heritage and her American life. Her Indian heritage is of being born in the respectable Chatterjee family of Calcutta. In San Francisco a stranger confronts her with a scandalous secret of her family, heretofore unknown to her. The stranger claims to be Tara’s elder sister Padma’s illegitimate son. Her search for this stranger’s identity is her attempt to test her conviction about her family’s respect. She discovers that nothing is what it seems, that behind self-fashioned identities people hide numerous secret identities. The stranger Abbas and Tara’s elder sister Padma keep their secrets by taking up new identities and the only difference is that Padma does not have any sinister motive like Abbas’s. It is interesting to note that Padma Mehta, as the famous host of the TV show “Namaskar, Probasi”, and Abbas Sattar Hai, as the terrorist with a penchant for taking up the identity of the latest victim, have self-fashioned themselves like Marlovian protagonists (Ref. Greenblatt) by living out their
lives as projects. Both of them are chasing fame, albeit for different reasons, and both of
them have missions to accomplish that will enhance their self-esteem. By becoming
citizens of a developed nation they want to make a difference in their own ways so as to
be recognized – Padma in a positive light and Abbas in the negative.

In the globalized world acceptance is taken for granted and self-fashioning becomes
more a matter of recognition. Recognition generally comes from an issuing authority, in
this case the host society. But whatever be the economic or religious or political disparity
between two societies, since societies are formed by families, which are basically same
all over the world, and it dilutes the sense of repressive notion of authority. Hence, self-
fashioning becomes a question of self-recognition and it is realized on being reconciled
with the idea of displacement. R. Radhakrishnan asserts the fruits of distancing thus:

It is quite customary for citizens who have emigrated to experience distance as a
form of critical enlightenment or a healthy “estrangement” from their birthland,
and to experience another culture or location as a reprieve from the orthodoxies of
their own “given” cultures. It is also quite normal for the same people, who now
have lived a number of years in their adopted country, to return through critical
negotiation to aspects of their culture that they had not really studied before and to
develop criticisms of their chosen world. (Radhakrishnan 128)

In this sense displacement does not exactly distances but bridges cultures, societies,
nations, and even families and individuals. By going through this process a migrant is
able to understand the significance of hyphenated existence.

Arun, from Anita Desai’s novel *Fasting, Feasting*, is a student in Massachusetts,
USA, and spends his summer with the Patton family in the American suburb. Arun is
quite a loner because he is disillusioned with his smothering and overbearing family in India; but he is equally dissatisfied on seeing the American family system with its unwarranted license and freedom. Arun's disillusionment and dissatisfaction help him to detach himself from both the situations and he discovers the inherent dysfunction in families across cultures and continents when he sees in the "feasting" bulimic Melanie a resemblance of his "fasting" sister in India, Uma. Arun observes in Melanie the signs of frustration and helplessness just like that of his sister, though they are situated in radically different cultures. This is not a reconciliation of the differences between the East and the West but rather an acknowledgement of the superficiality of all such differences. Arun has opened a door to define himself without any attachment and hopefully to live by it. He does not take any affront from the demeaning attitude of his host's daughter Melanie. Melanie makes "offensive remarks" (Desai, Fasting 194) about Arun's food ("lentil soup"). She monopolizes the common television set and when Arun trespasses on her space, he can read the expression on her face that says, "Get out" (Desai, Fasting 188). Melanie sits on the landing of the staircase "as if to intercept" (Desai, Fasting 195) Arun and he has to maneuver to step past her legs as well as her "accusing glare" (Desai, Fasting 195). But Melanie is a person whose condition Arun pities and she cannot harm his self-respect. Melanie is a victim of "the sugar-sticky web of family conflict" (Desai, Fasting 195). Although Mrs. Patton welcomes Arun and indulges in all sort of activities to make him feel at home, Arun remains detached from the Patton family and it is this self-fashioning of detachment that makes him immune to any assault on his self-respect. This gives him opportunity to understand his hybrid existence and create his identity not as a nondescript self, an alien or a rootless person, but one with "many roots and many
pasts" (Radhakrishnan 129). Thus identity becomes “a matter of rich and complex negotiation and not a result of some blind and official decree” (Radhakrishnan 129).

Anita Desai’s surreal short story “The Man Who Saw Himself Drown” is symbolic of all nondescript selves. A businessman, away from home, sees his own death and flees from the situation happy in the knowledge that now he has the freedom to define himself anew. But he feels a compulsion to go back to his mourning family, though only as a secret observer. This prevents him from creating a new identity for himself and therein lies the crisis. Defining selves in dislocated existence is an ever-changing process. The process leads from one’s initial definition of self to an adopted definition that ultimately gives way to a hybrid definition. Only by going through the pain of living by a hybrid definition one can hope to reconcile with one’s hybridity and arrive at a new definition of self. It becomes more a philosophic leap of mind than anything else.

Exile, in its literal sense, is a physical condition but the sense of exile is not necessarily a manifestation of a dislocated existence. Even if there is a geographical displacement, the exilic condition in many cases is only superficially physical and fundamentally psychological and spiritual. The external exile either compounds or, occasionally, suppresses these internal conditions. The Indian diaspora in the West has experienced a physical displacement but in a globalized world migrants are not treated as aliens, moreover the newer migrants have migrated of their own will, and hence there is little cause for them to feel the sense of being in exile. The world as a global village facilitates the feeling of being at home in the cosmopolitan urban quarters of the world. It is in these situations that the external circumstances of displacement become of less importance and the internal circumstances, that is the psychological and spiritual
condition of the mind, gain prominence. Despite being in a diaspora there is little
consolation of any hope of escape into any pre-exilic state. It is, as Rushdie says in
reference to diasporic writers, a haunting of the mind:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are
haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the
risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do
so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our
physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable
of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create
fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands,
Indias of the mind. (Rushdie, Imaginary 10)

This mental condition can only be tackled by catering to the psychological and spiritual
aspects of life – a self-fashioning of the mind and the spirit.

India is not merely a geographical space on the world map. It occupies a well-defined
space both in history as well as in culture. Thus, the Indian migrants in the West look
back not only at the spatial contour of the subcontinent but at its history, society, and
culture too. This looking back is paradoxically aided by technological innovations that
help keep intact one’s link with the past – a past that reminds of one’s roots. Films,
music, magazines, the cyber communities, and all other media of communications
continually keep refreshing the link. Hamid Naficy notes in the essay “Framing Exile:
From Homeland to Homepage” that due to “the globalization of travel, media, and
capital, exile appears to have become a postmodern condition” (Naficy 4). It is basically
this postmodern condition that produces a gnawing feeling of being in exile for the Indian
diasporic community despite having the advantages of easy telecommunication and speedy travel.

The trope of exile is a perennial presence in all religions. Its prototypical model can be found in the Jewish “exodus”, the Muslim “hegira”, and so on. Exile plays a pivotal role in both the two great Hindu epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. In fact the Hindu pantheon of Gods and Goddesses is replete with the concept of mobility symbolized by the deities’ “vahans” or the animals on which they ride – the lion for Durga, the ox for Shiva, the peacock for Kartick, the mouse for Ganesh, the owl for Lakshmi, the swan for Saraswati, and others. The psyche of the Indian immigrant fed on the mythologies of movement and exile is preconditioned to succumb to the sense of estrangement, alienation, non-belonging, and dislocation at the slightest pretext. Hence, physical displacement is only a catalyst that generally aggravates a pre-existing psychological and spiritual sense of loneliness. But this generalization is not sweeping because sometimes it so happens that physical displacement allays the cosmic sense of loneliness. It is because of this complex and apparently paradoxical nature of the exilic condition that it is equated with the postmodern condition.

Bharati Mukherjee’s novel *Jasmine* traces the story of the eponymous heroine in her American odyssey. Jasmine, the Hindu widow, who leaves India for the US after her husband’s death in a terrorist attack, is found to undergo a cross-cultural metamorphosis in her fractured life as an immigrant. The opening chapter of the novel starts with the words:

Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, an astrologer cupped his ears – his satellite dish to the stars – and foretold my widowhood and
exile. I was only seven then, fast and venturesome, scabrous-armed from leaves and thorns. (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 3)

The astrologer goes on to allude to the story of Behula from Hindu mythology. Here Bharati Mukherjee is not just exoticizing the content of the novel through these allusions. She is defining the mental space of her seven-year-old protagonist. Jasmine’s psyche is formed by the stories that her mother recited to her of “the holiest sages”, the “third eye” they develop in the middle of their foreheads to peer “out into invisible worlds” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 5), and their likes. No doubt Jasmine’s mind is spiritually inclined even though she challenges and revolts against customs and traditions.

Jasmine’s decision to fulfill her husband’s aspiration of going to America is guided by her spiritual beliefs as she acknowledges:

> I had not given even a day’s survival in America a single thought. This was the place I had chosen to die, on the first day if possible. I would land, find Tampah, walking there if necessary, find the college grounds and check it against the brochure photo. Under the very tree where two Indian boys and two Chinese girls were pictured, smiling, I had dreamed of arranging the suit and twigs. The vision of lying serenely on a bed of fire under palm trees in my white sari had motivated all the weeks of sleepless half-starved passage [. . .]

(Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 120-21)

The village girl from Hasnapur survives in America. She does not immolate herself because after landing on the Gulf Coast of Florida she is raped, and in turn she murders her rapist. This defiles her mission and death is denied her: “Lord Yama, who had wanted me, and whom I’d flirted with on the long trip over, had now deserted me” (Mukherjee,
Jasmine 120). The transformation of Jasmine from the archetype of Sati to that of Goddess Kali as she towers over the man who violated her chastity, with blood oozing out from her sliced tongue, is a dramatic and violent imagery of self-assertion. The critic Nagendra Kumar notes that Jasmine’s “decision to kill herself first, is a decision of a woman who lives for her deceased husband but the woman who kills Half-Face is prompted by her will to live to continue her life” (N. Kumar 110). Jasmine’s journey from Punjab, through Florida, New York, and Iowa, to California depicts the various stages of her exilic condition. But these exilic locations are also representation of the spiritual states of her mind. Jasmine assumes different mythological avatars in her various exilic states: “I have been reborn several times” (Mukherjee, Jasmine 126). She shuttles between identities: “Jyoti [was] the Sati-Goddess, Jasmine lives for the future” (Mukherjee, Jasmine 176). Jasmine emancipates herself from being an illegal immigrant into a self-assured American woman but her spiritual call comes from India: “I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness” (Mukherjee, Jasmine 240).

The “old-world dutifulness” forms the spiritual make-up of Indian migrants to the West. In Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel The Namesake the Bengali diasporic community in Boston religiously celebrate Durga puja and Saraswati puja. But for characters like Ashima such celebrations are less about religion and more about rejuvenation of the link with the old world – the home they have left behind. Ashima’s life in exile is eased by the spiritual frenzy brought about by religious festivities. On the other hand, Gogol and Sonia, who are born and brought up totally in the West, find their parents’ spiritual leanings intensifying their exilic condition. Their self-fashioning as Westerners receive a jolt each time they encounter certain aspect of their ancestry either corporal or spiritual.
Sometimes the second-generation migrants revolt against their ambivalent position. The Gangulis celebrate “with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 64). But once Sonia, in one of her growing-up years, refused her Christmas gifts after taking a Hinduism class in college, “protesting that they weren’t Christians” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 285).

In Lahiri’s short story “This Blessed House”, Twinkle fervently collects the Christian paraphernalia left behind by the previous occupier of the house that is newly procured by her husband Sanjeev. For Sanjeev, his wife’s idea is outlandish. When Twinkle finds a “plaster Virgin Mary as tall as their waists, with a blue painted hood draped over her head in the manner of an Indian bride” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 146) she decides to put it on the lawn to the shock of her husband:

“Oh God, no. Twinkle, no.”

“But we must. It would be bad luck not to.”

“All neighbors will see. They’ll think we’re insane.”

“Why, for having a statue of the Virgin Mary on our lawn? Every other person in this neighborhood has a statue of Mary on the lawn. We’ll fit right in.”

“We’re not Christians.”

“So you keep reminding me.” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 146)

For Twinkle, her external exilic state suppresses her internal spiritual exile by giving her an alternative mode of belonging – to “fit right in.” Twinkle’s relic hunt in her newly possessed house provides her a mental connection with the past of the house to secure her sense of belonging. Salman Rushdie says that “the broken pots of antiquity, from which
the past can sometimes, but always provisionally, be reconstructed, are exciting to
discover, even if they are pieces of the most quotidian objects” (Rushdie, Imaginary 12).
Though in Twinkle’s case the objects discovered are not exactly common and have no
relation to her past, they still bring peace to her mind. Whereas, Sanjeev’s psyche closes
options for him, taking him to a spiritual isolation compounded by his external
displacement. The psychological build up of each migrant is different and hence the
varied responses to a similar situation.

It is often seen that the physical shift from one’s place of origin to a new place of
residence does little in itself to arouse the sense of being in exile. In Sunetra Gupta’s
novel Memories of Rain the protagonist Moni is the quintessential romantic who “had
loved Heathcliff before she loved any man” (Gupta, Memories 177). She finds in
Anthony a hero figure straight out of the novels of Jane Austen or Thomas Hardy.
Anthony is to rescue her from India – “a bizarre and wonderful land” – to England – “this
island, this demi-paradise” (Gupta, Memories 6). Incidentally, John of Gaunt, the Duke of
Lancaster, in Act 2 Scene 1 of William Shakerpeare’s play, King Richard the Second,
composed in the 1590s and dealing with the subject matter of the early 13th century,
speaks in very similar words (“This other Eden, demi-paradise”). This echo of lines
spoken more than 750 years before Moni, and before Sunetra Gupta, show that for many
middle class Indians, England is a cultural and spiritual state rather than a mere physical
space. England is a space in Moni’s subconscious mind. Moni has, as Amit Chaudhuri
alludes, “the vague, intense longings of the feminized, adolescent imagination”
(Chaudhuri 583). So, when Moni arrives with her English husband to an England that is
vastly different from the England of her English literature class, she is in for a rude
shock. Moni’s psyche is fashioned by a life of sensation and when encountered with the bleak reality of a fast-paced modern-day England, her sensibilities are brutalized. It is the irreconcilability of the life of action with the life of sensation that compounds Moni’s exilic condition. Even the romantic consolation in sorrowful memories is denied her by the indifference shown to her by her husband, who is having an affair with another woman. Anthony is no Heathcliff and her dream of “wandering as a spirit with her beloved upon English moors” (Gupta, *Memories* 177) remains unfulfilled.

It was in the rains of 1978 Calcutta that Moni’s brother had brought home his English friend Anthony. Anthony had been enamoured by Moni, the second-year college student of English. Later he had recited from John Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy” — “No, no! go not to Lethe, neither twist wolf’s bane, tight rooted . . .” (Gupta, *Memories* 17) — and then to Moni’s utter embarrassment he had asked her to translate for him the Bengali song that she had been singing in the morning.

Many years later, huddled in the deserted tin mine on the Cornish coast, she translated the same song for him, staring into the sheets of rain that ran by like frozen phantoms across the crumbling entrance, and he sat back against the moldy walls, paying only half heed to her eager, nervous translations, mesmerised instead by the duet of the storm and the sea, until, like the sudden spray it hit her that he was not listening, he was not listening at all [. . .] (Gupta, *Memories* 10)

Anthony is lost in his amorous musings of adulterous lovemaking with Anna and is blatantly indifferent towards Moni. It is the denial of even the “Beauty that must die”, the “Joy [. . .] bidding adieu”, and the “aching Pleasure” that bars Moni from entering Melancholy’s “sovran shrine”. The psychological constraint of being deprived of the
aesthetic response that one craves for in pain makes Moni's exile acute. So, when Moni decides to return to Calcutta a week before Durga puja, she reminisces how "every autumn she had watched the city burst into joy to welcome the Goddess Durga to her father's home" (Gupta, *Memories* 173) and realizes that "this year she will return with the Gods, a daughter come home" (Gupta, *Memories* 174). Moni reverts to her native spirituality as a consolation for her condition.

Anita Desai's novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* has the Indian migrant Dev disillusioned by an England represented by the London of the 1960s because his mind has the image of an England as depicted in English literature studied in schools and colleges. Dev's psychology aggravates his exilic condition because his aesthetic sense cannot identify with reality. But when he visits the countryside he finds:

this was the England her poets had celebrated so well that he, a foreigner, found every little wildflower, every mood and aspect of it eerily familiar. It was something he was visiting for the first time in his life, yet he had known it all along – in his reading, in his daydreams – and now he found his dreams had been an exact, a detailed, a brilliant and mirrorlike reflection of reality.

(Desai, *Blackbird* 170)

Dev decides to stay in England after making this mental identification that eases his exilic condition. In St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, Dev finds "little religious aura" (Desai, *Blackbird* 68) and "has an uneasy feeling that these are no temples of Christ, but temples dedicated to the British Empire" (Desai, *Blackbird* 68). It is in the countryside that he visits an "old, small and silent village church" (Desai, *Blackbird* 172) and on touching "the rounded pillars felt soft to his hand as do the stones in Hindu temples that have been
touched by so many devout foreheads. The stone tiles were curved beneath his feet as are those of temples on which Hindu worshippers kneel and walk incessantly” (Desai, Blackbird 171). Dev wishes that “he had a stick of incense to burn, a handful of jasmine or marigold to offer, Hindu fashion, to the grace of Christianity” (Desai, Blackbird 172).

It is the aesthetic and spiritual familiarity that suppresses the psychological sense of exile.

In Sunetra Gupta’s novel A Sin of Colour, physical relocation from India to England becomes too easy a form of exile to produce any sort of detachment. Debendranath wants to exile himself from his thoughts of forbidden love for his elder brother’s wife Reba. Years later Debendranath’s niece Niharika finds herself in a similar predicament when she commits the sin of loving a married man Daniel Faraday. Niharika also exiles herself though, unlike Debendranath, not away from the person of her love but rather with the person she loves. In both the cases their exiles are not mere physical dislocation but exile from society, exile from relationships, exile from a familiar world, exile from a former self, and an exile into anonymity. After twenty years when Debendranath comes back to Mandalay, the almost deserted house, Niharika summarizes his absence thus: “You were able to reinvent yourself entirely” (Gupta, Sin 134). This self-exile from one’s identity, echoing the “agyatavasa” that the Pandavas suffered in The Mahabharata, transcends the concept of material displacement and takes exile to a metaphysical level. Exile becomes a panacea for the soul ailing from existential alienation. It is not only the contingency of the world but also, the contingency of one’s very will that baffles. Debendranath and Niharika need to isolate themselves from the world of action because to act is to assert one’s will. Hence, by faking death they somehow extricate themselves from the sin of their desires. The psychology behind their displacement becomes all the more important.
Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “A Temporary Matter” has Shoba and Shukumar in their diasporic life grieving for their stillborn child. They find solace by isolating themselves from friends and relations and starting to live life a little differently, fashioning themselves anew, and creating new identities for themselves. For them their exilic condition is superficially due to their diasporic status and is rather fundamentally psychological. At different levels this is precisely the case with most of the diasporic characters. Since by birth human beings are exiled from the womb; one’s home, one’s family, one’s country, one’s culture, and so on stand as metaphorical imagery of that natal refuge. This inherent mental condition either acts in conjunction with physical displacement or in opposition with it – either compounding the exilic state or suppressing it. That is why exile is taken as a human condition – some are exiles from happiness, some are exiles from peace, some are exiles from love, and some from their Maker.

William Wordsworth powerfully expresses in his “Ode on Intimations of Immortality” the idea that “our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting”, and as the child grows up there is a continuous alienation “from God, who is our home.”

But Wordsworth’s concern is not strictly in the religious sense of alienation of human beings from God and the ways ordained by God as underlined in books like Aligheri Dante’s Divine Comedy or John Milton’s Paradise Lost. Wordsworth’s concept is in the cosmic sense of alienation of the human consciousness from nature – human beings thinking of themselves as formally part of nature and yet distinct from it. Terry Eagleton in reference to Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale and The Tempest writes that “nature produces culture which changes nature: it is a familiar motif of the so-called Last Comedies, which see culture as the medium of nature’s constant self-fashioning” (Eagleton 3). In much the
same vein, culture is the medium of self-fashioning for individuals as well, especially in the context of the diaspora.

Left to its own devices, our reprobate nature will not spontaneously rise to the grace of culture; but neither can such grace be rudely forced upon it. It must rather cooperate with the innate tendencies of nature itself, in order to induce it to transcend itself. (Eagleton 6)

Diasporic life heightens the awareness of the act of constant self-fashioning, especially because of the cultural sub-context. Dev, in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, realizes how emotions become linked with culture in displaced existence, when he listens to Indian classical music at Emma Moffit's house in London.

Dev himself was engaged in fighting the powerful tide of emotional music with every nerve, and wondering why a second-rate musician giving the most syrupy rendering possible of a *raga* he had heard played better in India, should arouse reactions on this alien soil so utterly different from what they would have been had it been a concert and an audience in India. (Desai, *Blackbird* 96)

In his displaced existence, Dev instinctively self-fashions himself as a fastidious protector of his culture. Culture and self-fashioning are concepts that often sound antagonistic to each other because culture is usually identified with rigidity and self-fashioning with fluidity. Yet, culture and self-fashioning are intricately allied. Stephen Greenblatt has viewed the self as a "cultural artifact" (Ref. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*). According to Karl Marx, it was human labour that created culture (Ref. *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"*). And T. S. Eliot in his treatise *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* sees culture as "the way of life" (N. Kumar 2).
Nagendra Kumar explains T. S. Eliot’s three ways of regarding culture: “as the culture of the individual, as the culture of the group or class, or as the culture of a whole society” (6) and notes that writers like Matthew Arnold (Culture and Anarchy) have dealt with the first aspect of culture without relation to the third. He then goes on to describe after Eliot the attainments to be had in different cultural contexts.

First, by culture we may mean “refinement of manners – or urbanity and civility.”

Second, we may be thinking of “learning and a close acquaintance with the accumulated wisdom of the past.” Third, culture may imply “philosophy in the widest sense – an interest in, and some ability to manipulate abstract ideas.”

Fourth, “the art” also may well be implied. (N. Kumar 6-7)

Kumar further endorses Eliot’s views and says, “though religion forms a sound basis of a culture, in actual life, culture and religion are not so completely unified” (4). In relation to civilization, Kumar goes as far as to assert that “civilization may sometimes act against culture” (2) because culture is concerned with the enlightened section of the society and not the entire population. That is why Meghnad Desai writes: “while cultures have existed since time immemorial, the idea of culture as a category of study is a product of the Enlightenment” (M. Desai 20). Even though Desai, to “sharpen the difficulties” (M. Desai 30) faced on the issue of culture, does not adopt a “secular definition of culture, separating it from religion, he negates the notion of culture as “some timeless constant with deep roots and ancient histories transmitted across generations in an unchanging fashion (M. Desai 20). Moreover, he adds:

Those who champion this view seek ways of rooting culture in beliefs and objects, which can claim to be changeless. Hence the emphasis on texts which are
said to be divinely inspired or even divinely pronounced. But a culture is as much
a product of social and economic forces as most other human practices. [...] it is
as much an endogenous product of human social practice as is the use of economy
or technology, or even knowledge. (M. Desai 20-21)

When Arun, in *Fasting, Feasting*, ate with “an expression of woe and a sense of
mistreatment” (Desai, *Fasting* 184) sliced tomatoes and lettuce on bread, he wants to tell
Mrs. Patton that these “were not the foods that figured in his culture [...] his digestive
system did not know how to turn them into nourishment” (Desai, *Fasting* 184-5).
Although culture is not the food, here, for Arun, food becomes the culture, because it is a
part of his social practice -- a way of life.

Moreover, just as one can grow a taste for a particular kind of food, one can show
similar adaptability in case of culture. Adit, in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, cannot palate the
watercress sandwiches offered by Mrs. Roscommon-James. When Sarah lays before Adit
aubergine fried in mustard oil, he longs for the Bengali feast prepared by his mother --
“that *hilsa* fish baked inside green banana leaves [*paturi*], that hill of rice flavoured with
saffron and sprinkled with nuts and raisins, that clay-pot full of *paish* made with date
palm jaggery cooked in the creamiest milk till it was thick and soft and bubbling . . .”
(Desai, *Blackbird* 182). But, despite religious considerations, he had grown a liking for
the veal cutlets of Mrs. Miller, his former landlady in Harrow. The power of adaptability
is such that it not only makes one used to a way of life but at the same time diminishes
the remembrance of any former way of life if not frequently revisited. Hence the need for
constant recreation of nostalgia through food. In Desai’s short story “Winterscape”, for
Rakesh’s mother and aunt “the only way they know to do this was to cook him the foods
of his childhood — as best they could reproduce these in this strange land” (Desai, *Diamond* 44) without realizing that in Canada Rakesh’s favorite food has become pasta.

Rakesh has acquired newer tastes, in place of his native favorites, because he had no choice on being deprived of the cooking of his mother and aunt in his migrant life. His effort has been to consciously discard the taste of the past. That is why the narrator of Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “The Third and Final Continent” brings his son home at Boston from Cambridge for the weekend “so that he can eat rice with us with his hands” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 197), something he might never do away from home. In Lahiri’s short story “Mrs. Sen’s”, the thing that makes Mrs. Sen very happy was “fish from the seaside. It was always a whole fish she desired” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 123). It was so because “she had grown up eating fish twice a day [. . .] first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, as a snack after school, if they were lucky. They ate the tail, the eggs, even the head” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 123-24). In Boston she keeps herself busy cooking tinned sardines, fresh mackerel, butterfish, tuna, sea bass, and halibut. For Mrs. Sen, fish is not just a food, but it represents her food, her culture, her past, her nostalgia — cooking fish transports her back to India.

One of the commonest forms of diasporic communal bonding is to cook and eat native food together. Ashima Ganguli, in *The Namesake*, very much like Mrs. Sen, keeps herself busy cooking Indian food. Since her pregnancy, Ashima continues, at times, to consume a mix of Rice Krispies, peanuts, and onion. But the Gangulis also purchase, like other Americans, “barbecue [meat] for tandoori on the porch in summer” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 64). They allow their children, growing up in America, to choose their kind of food at the supermarket. “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. At his insistence, she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat” (Lahiri, Namesake 65). Such is the intermingling of cultures through food.

Once culture, as a concept, loses its rigidity, it becomes easier to see in the diasporic context that “cultures are not closed and complete in themselves” (Smith 249). The position of the migrant becomes crucial because it is in the “in-between” space where lies the meaning of culture – the hyphen in hyphenated existence becomes more meaningful than the words it joins. Homi Bhabha explains the increasing recognition of hybrid cultures:

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (Bhaba 2)

Characters like Gogol and Sonia from The Namesake, or Rabi from Desirable Daughters, and even Jasmine from Jasmine and Niharika from A Sin of Colour belong to this hybrid culture. Maxine accepts Gogol’s hybridity and she does not see it as a hindrance to their relationship. Gogol and Sonia, unlike Ben, are not born hybrid but they have grown up in two different cultures simultaneously and hence their hybridity. Once people start to accept them as belonging to two cultures, they also have to go through a process of accepting themselves as hybrid. The recognition has to come both from the self as well as the society. It is this juncture that defines the “historical transformation” brought about by the self-fashioning way of life.
The differences between Gogol’s hybridity and a first generation migrant Jasmine’s hybridity are in matters of ease of acceptance and in matters of nature of revolt. Firstly, the degree of acceptance that Jasmine receives in the West is not as much compared to Gogol because the latter being born in a globalized world has a distinctive historical advantage. Gogol has an ease of acceptance that Jasmine does not have. Secondly, self-fashioning is to some extent a breaking of the mould repeatedly and hence there is some sort of revolt in the matter. Hybridity is a result of appropriation because by living in two cultures one has to allot space for both the cultures through the processes of acceptance and rejection. Gogol’s experiences of the two cultures, one from the family and the other from the society, have been simultaneous. But Jasmine’s experiences have been adjunctive. Her experiences in America add to her experiences of India, but since the cultures are different she has to make room for both the cultures in her self. She does so by shedding that part of her Indianness that dims her vision and impedes enhancing the quality of her life.

She revolts against conservative Indian attitude towards poor widows who are treated like non-entities. She resents against the ‘Sati’ system which compels Indian women to sacrifice their life although they want to live. She rebukes the male dominating Indian society which discourages self-reliance in women.

(N. Kumar 121)

Here is Jasmine’s revolt that makes her different from Gogol. Gogol’s revolt is in the family and private but Jasmine’s revolt is societal and general, in addition to being private. The nature of the revolt is different and the revolt is not against culture, but against its rigours, “its particular way of partially comprehending the world” (N. Kumar
Jasmine does not struggle against a family as such, but against demeaning social traditions and customs that do not profess any value.

Acceptance of hybrid culture tolls the end of purity of culture and any totalization of category when seen through the concepts of displacement and migration. Any exclusive or singular identification becomes a contentious point of debate and thereby is found to be inadequate. Andrew Smith writes:

If human beings have tended to understand themselves as citizens of nations or as blood members of ethnic groupings, migration increasingly exposes the insufficiency of these ways of identifying ourselves. It reveals these identities as stories which are acted out in life but which are not unchangeable. It also shows how they often smother and silence other competing stories. (Smith 249)

Thus identity is not a fixity but a contingent reality. Moreover, identification is not with one identity but many identities. Amartya Sen, who has criticized in his book *Identity and Violence* the assumption that cultures have clearly delineated boundaries, has said that it is a basic mistake to see individuals in terms of only one identity, namely civilizational identity. He writes:

The noble and elevating search for amity among people seen as amity between civilizations speedily reduces many-sided human beings into one dimension each and muzzles the variety of involvements that have provided rich and diverse grounds for cross-border interactions over many centuries, including the arts, literature, science, mathematics, games, trade, politics, and other arenas of shared human interest. (Sen 12)
It is the acknowledgement of multiple identities that gives an individual a choice and hence the case for self-fashioning. Tara, from *Desirable Daughters*, identifies herself variously: “by father’s religion (Hindu), caste (Brahmin), subcaste (Kulin), mother-tongue (Bengali), place of birth (Calcutta), formative region of ancestral origin (Mishtigunj, East Bengal), education (postgraduate and professional), and social attitudes (conservative)” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 78). But the crux of the matter lies in the fact that Tara among Asian, Latino, and African-American students, in an American school with European-American teachers, finds: “when the little kids climb on my lap to be read to, or just listened to, I don’t think they see me as anything different from their parents, the school nurse, or their teachers” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 78). Despite diversity, multiple identities do not dilute the self. This is because, as Adit, from *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, says that he is “a man of parts. Many parts” (Desai, *Blackbird* 153) and each single part represents the man but no single part constitutes the man wholly. What self-fashioning does is to highlight each part appropriately and timely, and it is matter of choice. Amartya Sen explains this act of volition thus:

> We do belong to many different groups, in one way or another, and each of these collectivities can give a person a potentially important identity. We may have to decide whether a particular group to which we belong is – or is not – important for us. Two different, though interrelated, exercises are involved here: (1) deciding on what our relevant identities are, and (2) weighing the relative importance of these different identities. Both tasks demand reasoning and choice.

(Sen 24)
What this shows is that identity is, as in the words of Stuart Hall, “not an essence but a *positioning*” (237). “Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall 244). But if culture is a determinant of various factors and identity is equally a contingent determinant, then cultural identity seems to be quite an elusive concept.

Yet, cultural identity is meaningful because cultural hybridity is meaningful. Since childhood, Gogol and Sonia have been encouraged into a hybrid lifestyle. As children in Cambridge they go to see the Apu Trilogy at Orson Welles and Kathakali dance performance or sitar recital at Memorial Hall. When Gogol is in third grade, every other Saturday, he is sent to Bengali language and culture lessons.

In Bengali class, Gogol is taught to read and write his ancestral alphabet, which begins at the back of his throat with an unaspirated $K$ and marches steadily across the roof of his mouth, ending with elusive vowels that hover outside his lips. He is taught to write letters that hang from a bar, and eventually to cobble these intricate shapes into his name. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 65-66)

He also learns about the Bengali Renaissance and about the revolutionary exploits of Subhas Chandra Bose. Ashoke and Ashima want their children to live in two cultures simultaneously because they are “unsettled” when their children sound just like Americans, they are “confounded” on hearing the language in which Gogol and Sonia expertly converse, they are “accustomed not to trust” the accent in which their children speak. Hence hybridity becomes a necessity, rather than mere circumstantial positioning by chance. The more the diaspora is looked into the more meaning it gives to various elusive concepts. As Andrew Smith points out that “because diaspora formations cross
national borders, they reveal precisely the fact that cultural practices are not tied to place. They show culture, in other words, as *deterritorialized* (Smith 256).

It is then that Stuart Hall’s two ways of thinking about cultural identity becomes clear. Stuart Hall’s first position on cultural identity is “in terms of one shared culture” (234) that gives a sense of unity and commonality. His second, but related, view on cultural identity is the process of identification itself and is a matter of “becoming” (236) that exposes the discontinuities in identity formation. “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation” (Hall 236). The gist of Hall’s two positionings is that they are related and crucial to identity formation as a continuous process. This inter-relatedness makes the concept of identity enriching because, as Amartya Sen says, identity is not “obtained only through discovering where we find ourselves” (Sen 36) but it “can also be acquired and earned” (Sen 36). Sen further explicates:

> We have different ways of identifying ourselves even in our given locations. The sense of belonging to a community, while strong enough in many cases, need not obliterate – or overwhelm – other associations and affiliations. These choices are constantly faced (even though we may not spend all our time articulating the choices we are actually making). (Sen 37)

Meghnad Desai is of a similar view when he writes that the “very notion of community is inclusive of the like but as a consequence, excludes the unlike” (M. Desai 23). So, for a truly enriching cultural identity exclusion of the unlike has to be relinquished with. The richness of a culture is in its diversity and paradoxically “the deeper the community feeling, the less cosmopolitan a culture will be” (M. Desai 23). Hence, cultural self-
fashioning is as akin to cosmopolitanism as are globalization, postmodernism, multiculturalism, and their ilk. The world is "calling for theories of rootlessness alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups, on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other" (Appadurai 27). And hence, communities, despite growing on displacement and distancing, give a feeling of nearness especially through the variety and speed of media that aid recreation of that that has been left behind. But these communities are best as facilitators, as means and never ends in themselves.

Cultural self-fashioning purports openness and not closure and, hence, whenever there is a confinement, especially in defining oneself in exclusive terms, there is a cultural stagnation. Diaspora communities are more seen as thoroughfares than as blind alleys. Ethnic ghettos that Jasmine experiences, or the Indian association for ABCDs ["American-born confused deshi"] that Gogol does not want to join, or Emma Moffit's Indian club are all confining spaces that make people see and think in one direction exclusively. Communitarian thinking, in this sense, fails to achieve the aspirations of cultural self-fashioning. Jasmine has to go through the process of appropriating diasporic life in America because in America "her grudge is against the artificially maintained ghetto which bars the non-resident Indians from identifying themselves with the progressive ideals of the West" (N. Kumar 121). Adit and Dev are not exactly in tune with the thinking of many members of Miss Moffit's Indian club. In fact, paradoxically, it shows the diversity within the communities themselves and is a cause for celebration.

In fact "communitarian thinking began, at least partly, as constructive approach to identity" (Sen 177) and it "began as an entirely estimable theoretical attempt at seeing
human beings more ‘fully’—and more ‘socially’” (Sen 177). But it has “largely ended up with a highly restricted understanding of a person mainly as a member of exactly one group” (Sen 177). This not only negates the diversity of identity, but also gives rise to the concept of plural monoculturalism instead of multiculturalism. Sen contrasts the two concepts.

In contrast, having two styles or traditions coexisting side by side, without the twain meeting, must really be seen as ‘plural monoculturalism.’ The vocal defense of multiculturalism that we frequently hear these days is very often nothing more than a plea for plural monoculturalism. (Sen 157)

Indeed, to plead for cultural diversity on the ground that this is what the different groups of people have inherited is clearly not an argument based on cultural liberty (even though the case is sometimes presented as if it were a ‘profreedom’ argument). (Sen 116)

The twain has to meet because cultures benefit from interactions among themselves. Writers like Bhikhu Parekh and Salman Rushdie are of the view that no culture is perfect. And cultures need to be enhanced through “critical dialogue”. It is then only the society, instead of becoming culturally multifaceted, will become truly multicultural. It is often said that cultural liberty is hampered if the traditional lifestyle of the members of a community is restricted, but it must also be acknowledged that traditional lifestyle should not hamper the choice of way of life afforded by cultural diversity. “Whatever a community may be, ultimately it comprises of autonomous individuals, each of whom is his or her own moral agent. No community has the right to deny this autonomy to any of its members” (M. Desai 27). Amartya Sen is even of the view that “the relation between
cultural liberty and cultural diversity need not be uniformly positive” (Sen 116). Tara, Padma, Harish Mehta, Danny Jagtiani, and Bishwapriya Chatterjee all belong to the same diasporic Indian community, but in their lifestyle they encompass a diversity of cultures. It is this richness that is truly a matter of celebration, especially, in relation to the passage of culture from one generation to another generation.

Nagendra Kumar, referring to Eliot, mentions several channels for the transmission of culture, the primary of them being the family. “The family is the primary channel of cultural transmission. No man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from his early environment” (N. Kumar 9). The family forms a vertical channel for transmission of culture – from one generation to another. But there are a number of horizontal channels that run parallel to family: language, education, environment, and so on. This shows that identity is both inherited and acquired. Cultural self-fashioning becomes the various crossroads where various identities, inherited or acquired, meet into hybridity while getting transmitted. Nagendra Kumar writes:

If we consider national culture as a ‘language’ and the culture of different groups or societies of that nation which ultimately forms that national culture, as ‘dialect’, than we find that different dialects of that particular language have to some extent certain qualities common to that language which bind and unite them with that language. (N. Kumar 9)

So, this is what a multicultural nation aspires to be – that its culture will have a commonality with all cultures that reside in the nation with their distinctive traits. When Moni, in Memories of Rain, passes through Bristol, “her heart rose in a great leap to her
throat, here, somewhere, under sullen British soil, lay a man who had transformed the destiny of their race, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, [. . . ] had died here, under incurious skies, more than a hundred years ago” (Gupta, Memories 175). If Raja Ram Mohan Roy is a part of Moni’s inherited Indian identity, Bristol is a part of her acquired migrant identity.

Generally, identity in the realm of philosophy and even otherwise, is governed by the principle of exclusion — to be one thing rather than another. Even though self-definition is the defining of a single individual entity, namely “the self”, it has many facets to it. It is as if the self constantly escapes definition and hence the perpetuity of the process. In this sense self-fashioning becomes relative to particular moments in time. Every definition of the self adds to its characteristics and growth. Self-definition becomes a summation of the chronological history of the self till the moment immediately prior to the moment of the act of defining the self. Thereby identity is created because summing up the past fashions the future. Eagleton writes comparing human beings and nature:

We resemble nature in that we, like it, are to be cuffed into shape, but we differ from it in that we can do this ourselves, thus introducing into the world a degree of self-reflexivity to which the rest of nature cannot aspire. As self-cultivators, we are clay in our own hands, at once redeemer and unregenerate, priest and sinner in the same body. (Eagleton 6)

Creation of identity becomes more than a mere answer to the question of degree of integration into the host society. It becomes a matter of self-reflexivity — a matter of perceptions, either communal or individual. It is not what name is proper for the protagonist of Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake — Gogol or Nikhil — but rather with what name is the bearer comfortable, and how the community at various points of time
perceives the name. In Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird* it is not that whether Adit is right in returning back to India or Dev is right in staying in England, it is how they perceive their individual situations. It is not how much Bharati Mukherjee’s eponymous heroine Jasmine has integrated into American society but how far she feels at home in Bud or Taylor’s company. In Sunetra Gupta’s *Memories of Rain*, Moni’s choice of escaping from England and a bad marriage is primarily a matter of self-reflexive consciousness, and secondarily a matter of adjustments and adaptations as a migrant.

This does not mean that Gogol, Adit, Dev, Jasmine, and Moni lose their objectivity in self-fashioning. Even though grappling with one’s identities is a matter of the consciousness it is displacement that begets the notion of self-fashioning to create one’s identity. In fact objectivity is crucial in creation of identity because as John Durham Peters says, “if we believe Hegel or Lacan, the self always confronts itself first as a fantastic other; thereafter, all identity passes through otherness. Constructing others will always be part of constructing the self” (Peters 37). It is this other that is objective, governed by physical distances, cultural incompatibility, social alienation, racial discrimination, communal profiling, and such likes. And even though the postmodern world has erased from reckoning the instruments of othering, the idea of displacement is ever so present. Peters further writes: “Deleuze [Gilles Deleuze] and his many disciples see the nomad as a figure equipped for postmodernity” (Peters 18) thus stressing on the inevitability of movement. It is movement that makes the reality contingent, uncertain, subject to circumstances, and hence open to interpretations. There may be no contextual objective reality but reality needs to be created in the form of the other. The migrant provides such an opportunity because it is the prefabricated other. Even where there is no
physical transport there is the "special rhetoric of transport" employed by broadcast voice-overs: "We now take you to [. . .]" (Peters 18-19). Thus, and in many other ways, without movement also individuals are transported. This is very true of the cosmopolitan nature of the world: "Whereas the migrant travels the world, the world travels to the cosmopolitan. The migrant cannot go home, whereas the cosmopolitan has no home to go to" (Eagleton 63). That is why it is not surprising when Ashima Ganguli after twenty years in America "cannot bring herself to refer to Pemberton Road as home" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 108).

Terry Eagleton further considers that cosmopolitanism is but an "elitist version" of multiculturalism, just as migration is its "popular form" (Eagleton 63). The growth of cosmopolitanism is both as a result of migration and as a counter current of migration. Due to migration societies become cosmopolitan and at the same time the challenge of encountering the influx of migrants in a society is met by taking a cosmopolitan outlook. That is why, in keeping with the times,

Every developed country has become multicultural and multiethnic. Western countries are no longer primarily Christian or even Judaeo-Christian. Their cities are polyglot, their cuisine is a rich rainbow of many ethnic cuisines, their schools educate children who speak strange languages and have parents whose practices and beliefs about child rearing are often at odds with norms of acceptable behaviour. (M. Desai 22)

This change in the colonial mindset of the West was not an overnight phenomenon. In the aftermath of colonialism there can be found in England the likes of Adit's wife, Sarah, as well as the likes of Sarah's mother, Mrs. Roscommon-James. When Sarah says about her
to-be-born child that she hopes “it will look like Adit, brown as brown, with black hair and black, black eyes”, her mother advises her: “I suppose it will be better to have the child in India” (Desai, *Blackbird* 224). Sarah is no better than a migrant in an England still under the hangover of a colonial past.

[At her school job] when she briskly dealt with letters and bills in her room under the stairs, she felt like an impostor, but, equally, she was playing a part when she tapped her fingers to the sitar music on Adit’s records or ground spices for a curry she did not care to eat. She had so little command over these two charades [. . .]

(Desai, *Blackbird* 34)

Compared to Sarah’s experiences Dev’s experiences do not seem very appalling when he finds that every thing in England points towards him as an outsider. At a Portobello Road shop Dev asks the price of an expensive item only to get this reply from the shop attendant: “Oh, very much. I wouldn’t even name the price to you” (Desai, *Blackbird* 71). When Adit enters the same shop after fluffing the silk handkerchief in his pocket, polishing his ring on his sleeve, and setting his hat at a tilt, he is told the price. This proves that it is not exactly racial discrimination but “imperialist insolence” that shows in the “bland manners of the British” (Desai, *Blackbird* 73).

Both Adit and Dev at various points in time have urges to live a cosmopolitan life in the England of the late 1960s.

There are days in which the life of an alien appears enthrallingly rich and beautiful to him [Dev], and that of a homebody too dull, too stale to return to ever.

(Desai, *Blackbird* 86)
Sometimes it stifles me [Adit] – this business of always hanging together with people like ourselves, all wearing the label *Indian Immigrant*, never daring to try and make contact outside this circle. (Desai, *Blackbird* 188)

And their thoughts are not way off the mark in anticipating a changed society because:

Sooner or later, in the course of development every capitalist country adopts this Enlightenment package. Their development makes them multiethnic and multicultural communities, since globalisation encourages movement. All communities lose their old cohesion and exclusivity and become mixed and cosmopolitan. (M. Desai 27)

But those who populate the diasporas, equally have a responsibility to accept a cosmopolitan culture. Arun, in Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting*, after his arrival in America, cannot fit himself within the cosmopolitan American culture because “every cell of his body” was filled with “resistance to being included” (Desai, *Fasting* 171). His situation is not exclusive to his feeling as a foreigner in America because “he resisted even the overtures made by his own countrymen who had formed a small ghetto on the thirteenth floor of the dorm” (Desai, *Fasting* 171). To integrate in the host society he has to leave the baggage of his past in whatever way he wishes to do so.

First, from the point of view of the assimilated generation, it is all too easy to want to forget the past and forfeit community in the name of the “free individual,” a path open to first-generation citizens. [. . .] The second path is the way of the film *Mississippi Masala*, reveling uncritically in the commodification of hybridity. The two young lovers walk away into the rain in a Hollywood resolution of the agonies of history. (Radhakrishnan 124)
But is it necessary to “forget the past” or commodify “hybridity”? Gogol does not forget the past neither does he shrink from the present. It is here that “the young adults of these diasporas are caught in a double bind of adapting to the local culture while assuring their elders that they remain faithful to old practices from distant lands” (M. Desai 22). In this situation even the words of Mrs. Roscommon-James to Sarah about her to-be-born child seems justifiable: “I suppose it might be awful for the child not to know which country it belongs to and be torn between the two” (Desai, \textit{Blackbird} 216). Gogol’s condition vouches for this fact. But Gogol’s circumstances provide him enough objectivity to create his other, Nikhil. It is an artifice – self-fashioning is as much so – but it is the reality of circumstances. Gogol remains Indian but as Nikhil he becomes American. The difference with the traditional view is that this is not the colonial other but the postcolonial other – a self-created other. In fact Gogol and Nikhil are interchangeable as one’s other. Gogol is equally the other of Nikhil. This other bears the burden of cultural rigidity that overlooks the fact that “as people move, the cultural center also moves, not in any specific direction, but in a diffusing, outward spread” (Smith 245). But since the other is just a mental construct it is at best a phantom, a perceptual entity without any physical existence. And it is only the hybrid of Gogol and Nikhil that has existence.

Similarly, Ashoke Ganguli, who is as much an Indian in his Pemberton Road house as he is in India, has his other – as professor in the university. Ashoke’s dream job is of teaching in a university rather than working in a corporation: “What a thrill, he thinks, to stand lecturing before a roomful of American students. What a sense of accomplishment it gives him to see his name printed under “Faculty” in the university directory” (Lahiri, \textit{Namesake} 49). The self-reflexive creation of identity is not a case confined only to the
second-generation migrants. "Specific practices, ways of constructing meaning, allocating value, determining status, and so forth — in short all of the buttresses of identity — seem perfectly capable of being reformed and reproduced in conditions of exile and movement" (Smith 256). Hence it is relatively easy for the migrants of both first and second generation to create their others through the process of self-reflexivity in such circumstances. In the diaspora the migrants see themselves as the "others" in society even when they are not made aware of it explicitly through discriminatory attitudes. Gogol, Moni, Adit all trespass into some territory that alters the perception of their own identities.

This conjuring of the "other" that alters identity is an inescapable phenomenon because as Said says in his essay "Identity, Authority, and Freedom: The Potentate and the Traveler":

Historically, every society has its Other: the Greeks had the barbarians, the Arabs the Persians, the Hindus the Muslims, and on and on. But since the nineteenth century consolidated the world systems, all cultures and societies today are intermixed. No country on earth is made up of homogenous natives; each has its immigrants, its internal "Others", and each society, very much like the world we live in, is a hybrid. (Said, Reflections 396)

The "other" is not rigid but yields fluidly to numerous manifestations — the historical other, the post-colonial other, the diasporic other, the ethnic other, the cultural other, the religious other, the racial other, the subaltern other, the primitive other, the existential other, and so on. But as is the case with Tara, when she comes out of a bookstore into the crowd of Haight Street in San Francisco, California, and finds her kinship with the world
lost because nobody pays attention to her, she still sees herself as the “other” – “I stand out” (Mukherjee, Daughters 79). This is because the “other” is not external to her self. Here it becomes a manifestation of the self – “a psychic image” as Homi K. Bhabha explains in his essay “Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative”:

“For the image – as point of identification – marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split – it makes present something that is absent – and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition.” (Bhabha, Culture 51)

The existence of one’s duality makes present what is absent – it makes real what is virtual. It is the “binary, two-part identities [that] function in a kind of narcissistic reflection of the One in the Other” (Bhabha, Culture 51). Gogol / Nick or Jasmine / Jane are such reflections of each other simultaneously – both can be identified as object as well as image at the same time. They grow out of each other.

As a principle of identification, the Other bestows a degree of objectivity, but its representation – be it the social process of the law or the psychic process of the Oedipus – is always ambivalent, disclosing a lack. For instance, the common, conversational distinction between the letter and spirit of the Law displays the otherness of Law itself; the ambiguous grey area between Justice and judicial procedure is, quite literally, a conflict of judgement. (Bhabha, Culture 52)

Just as the spirit of Law displays the inscribed Law’s otherness, self-fashioning itself, and quite paradoxically since self-fashioning is often a reaction to the “other”, displays the diasporic individual’s otherness. The otherness is between the formerly fashioned self
and the subsequently fashioned self. Identity is always in a limbo between two successive selves – lacking conclusiveness. As long as the individual sees the gamut of identities (social, political, personal, and so on) externally there is a crisis of identity due to confusion of plentitude. But once the condition is internalized, the whole edifice of tangible identities collapses and one has to rely exclusively on one’s self for creation of identity. According to James Gindin: “The collapse of public labels, public ties that would help the individual define himself, leads to man’s necessary reliance on himself as the only means available” (Gindin 230). Under this consideration there comes a point in time when Gogol finds himself alone upstairs while Ashima and Sonia prepare for a party downstairs. Jasmine finds herself alone when Du has left and Bud is not yet home. Debendranath finds himself alone when he disappears leaving behind Jennifer in Oxford and Reba in Calcutta. Arun finds himself alone when he cannot look at Mrs. Patton sunbathing and is asked to go away by a sick and vomiting Melanie. It is then that the characters in their solitude confront their selves. It is a moment of epiphany even though one’s whole life cannot be taken as a frame of reference since a part is still left to be lived. When one confronts a self-fashioning diasporic individual, one cannot see the multiplicity of identities at once, but this does not hinder the comprehension of the wholeness of all identities in a single self. This is also applicable when the confrontation is with one’s own self and hence the epiphany. Each diasporic individual is characterized to be unique and this is a common condition.

Psychologically, the creation by the self-reflexive consciousness dilutes in the human psyche the desire of return to a home. It is so because home is the place of origin of the other and hence just a space in the mind where the other itself has its existence.
According to Hamid Naficy the concepts of house and home are related but have distinctly different connotations at some level. He says:

*House* is the literal object, the material place in which one lives, and it involves legal categories of rights, property, and possession and then opposites. *Home* is anyplace; it is temporary and it is moveable; it can be built and rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination. Exiles locate themselves vis-à-vis their houses and homes synesthetically and synecdochically. Sometimes a small gesture or body posture, a particular gleam in the eye, or a smell, a sound, or a taste suddenly and directly sutures one to a former house or home and to cherished memories of childhood. (Naficy 6)

This reiterates the fact that home is not tied to any place but is flexible. The Greek term “oikos”, which often combines the senses of both house and home, shows synecdochically how a part of a house evokes the perception of the left-behind home and synesthetically how even a sound in the new house associates it with the feelings of the left-behind home. Sometimes one can feel at home in a mere gesture instead of being in a house. It is so because perceptions differ as “all displaced people do not experience exile equally or uniformly” (Naficy 4).

Perception is a subjective matter and does not vouch for rightness or wrong-ness of anything either native or alien. “As Arjun Appadurai, among others, has argued, neither distance nor proximity guarantees truth or alienation. One could live within India and not care to discover India, or live abroad and acquire a nuanced historical appreciation of the home country and vice-versa” (Radhakrishnan 126). Tara, in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Desirable Daughters*, finds after years of staying in America:
There was a time I could identify faces from any north Indian state (the south being an enduring mystery), let alone related religions and nationalities. Now, my radar was down. I couldn’t distinguish Muslims from Hindus anymore. I wasn’t even hundred percent sure of Bengalis. I felt as though I were lost inside a Salman Rushdie novel, a once-firm identity smashed by hammer blows, melted down and reemerging as something wondrous, or grotesque. (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 195-6)

Tara suffers an automatic change during her stay in America and this change is not a physical change in identity. It is a realization of her hybridity brought about by self-fashioning. It is not that due to self-fashioning the alien becomes the native but rather it is the thought that changes. That which was perceived as alien is now perceived as native. Moreover it is equally a change in self-perception. When Niharika asks Daniel, in Sunetra Gupta’s novel *A Sin of Colour*, how Daniel could be comfortable if he is caged with an orangutan for the people to stare at, Daniel replies: “I think I could try and pretend they did not exist” (Gupta, *Colour* 72). Self-fashioning is, in a sense, a pretence – it is how an individual perceives oneself to be. The alien into the native means the creation of a new identity, a new self-definition, and not literally a creation of any tangible alter ego in the binary form of alien / native which hybridizes through self-fashioning. The alien and the native are only perceptively different and not inherently so because it is only the relative position of the observer that distinguishes alien from native: “When a clay pitcher breaks, you see that the air inside it is the same as outside. [...] We are just shells of the same Absolute” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 15). Jasmine too realizes that self-fashioning is a self-reflexive process than anything else.
But the constantly changing postmodern world and the accordingly self-fashioning individuals create minimal friction with each other and often lead to an uncanny feeling. It is such a feeling that replaces social alienation with metaphysical alienation. D. H. Lawrence once said, the body is more exacting than the mind and nothing can make bitter into sweet. It is the demand of the body that is often sufficed when deciding on topics like what one eats or what one wears or what lifestyle one leads. As Martin Seymour-Smith remarks in his perceptive introduction to the Penguin edition of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, that the tragedy of being human is contrary to the teachings of most religions, for selfhood to be dependent not merely on mind but on body as well. When Arun phones Mrs. Patton and she welcomes him to spend the summer with her family, stressing on the fact that her children are about his age, Arun needs "to quell his nausea" (Desai, *Fasting* 175) at the very idea. Again, when Mr. Patton brings "steak, hamburger, ribs and chops [.] to broil and grill, fry and roast" (Desai, *Fasting* 185) at the patio, Arun cannot have that food because his body will possibly revolt against it as he is a vegetarian.

Increasingly psychological and the physical are intermixed. Jasmine feels like the recipient of an organ transplant on getting a fake visa for America. Ashima feels that being a foreigner is like a lifelong pregnancy. In fact the very modes of displacement by air or sea are accompanied by physiological symptoms of jetlag and seasickness respectively. In addition to these ailments, there is the inherent sickness for home. Aritha van Herk describes homesickness as an illness that "goes far beyond a vague feeling of nostalgia" (van Herk 217). The nausea of the existential is very much present in the malaise of the diaspora.
There is sickness due to movement and disorientation due to the knowledge of prior displacement. The initial reaction of the migrants is to hide or negate or overcome this condition. Perhaps taken unconsciously, this is precisely the first step in self-fashioning. Quite unawares, diasporic individuals start to comprehend and acknowledge the apparent paradoxes of migrant existence. The mechanical and the automatic aspects of life fuel the absurd. Adit is awed at seeing the Battersea power station in London and compares it to a massive vault / temple for “sacrificial fires” (Desai, *Blackbird* 54), thereby intermixing archaic imagery with a modern invention. Jasmine, in America, on first seeing a revolving door wonders “how could something be always open and at the same time always closed” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 133); on first seeing an escalator wonders “how could something be always moving and always still” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 133) thus raising deep philosophical problems related to “paradox”. (Compare T. S. Eliot’s “still point of the turning world” in “Burnt Norton”, II, from *Four Quartets* where Eliot establishes time as a state of permanent change and contrasts it with the still point – the paradox of the center of the wheel). The latter generations of migrants grown up to see the absurd as the matter of fact of life. For Rabi, there is no rhetoric of contradiction when he calls from Australia, where he is with his father, to his mother in the US to tell her that “we’ll be back sometime before we leave” (Mukherjee, *Daughters* 256). Gogol, who has traveled between India and the US a number of times since his childhood, has grown used to seeing the airport as the place of both arrival and departure.

Above all, the self is seen both as native and alien under specific circumstances. These apparently contradictory positions do cause a feeling of uneasiness in diasporic life but the condition can be endured through self-fashioning. A study of a spectrum of works
of Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta, and Jhumpa Lahiri shows not only how the migrant Indians are increasingly being accepted by the West but also how these diasporic Indians cope with such a shifting plane of acceptance through the perpetual process of creation of identities.