People from almost all over the world are extremely delighted to journey to America, the land of promise, prosperity, and freedom. The phenomenon of immigration has been an important occurrence in America, the great nation. The prosperity of America, in a sense, depends on the immigrants’ inflow. Though the immigrants’ experience on the soil of America has a lot of benefits it also has its owes and aches. And Jhumpa Lahiri’s immigrants in her fiction experience the pain of displacement — physical, cultural, emotional, and religious — in the alien land.

The first-generation immigrants are always concerned with the retention of the socio-cultural baggage of their native country which consists of among other things their religion, language, music, art, dress, and cuisine. Conscious attempts are made by the diasporic communities to pass their tradition to the future generation. The experience of immigrants varies as to different diasporic situations. While standing at the crossroads the immigrants are forced to feel that they stand on the borderline, that is, they belong neither to their motherland nor to their host country. They make efforts to integrate with the new culture without losing their identity and this results in a dual identity. The feeling of dislocation, nostalgia, rootlessness, alienation, and the resultant sufferings stem from discrimination on the grounds of race, culture, religion, and language. And in the process of self-discovery the immigrants acquire a fractured identity. Lahiri herself has confessed as follows:

I think that, in part, it’s a reflection of what I observed my parents experiencing and their friends, their circle of fellow Indian immigrant friends. It’s also in part drawn from my own experiences and a sense of…. I always say that I feel that I’ve inherited a sense of that loss from my parents because it was so palpable all the time while I was growing up, the sense of what my
parents had sacrificed in moving to the United States, and in so many ways, and yet at the same time, remaining here and building a life here and all that entailed. (Lahiri 2000)

In her novels, Lahiri deals with the plight of immigrants who are physically as well as psychologically displaced. In most cases they feel like the citizens of two countries. Though they stay in the United States of America, they frequently dream of their native land, South Asia. As a result of dislocation or displacement Lahiri’s subjects of treatment encompass identity crisis and sense of belonging. Lahiri herself has faced identity crisis many a time in her host land, America, and Jha writes about it:

She has undergone the trauma of falling to find her identity in a world where she could never have a sense of belongingness and so tries to fall back upon the treasured memories of what Rushdie calls “Imaginary Homeland.” which, with its vibrant colours and versatility, gave life to her straying existence and stimulated her very being. (6)

In almost all the stories, the immigrants are longing to go back to their native land, as they are most of the time reminiscent of the life that they led in India before migrating to the hostland. Even the second-generation immigrants sometimes ruminate about their connection with the country of their origin.

Lahiri, the second-generation Indian American writer, speaks of the aesthetics of identity formation. In an interview she explains her own predicament:

When I was growing up I Rhode Island in the 1970s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back, I see that this was generally the case. But my
perception as a young girl was that I feel short at both ends, shutting between
two dimensions that had nothing to do with one another. (Lahiri 2006)

When the immigrants stay in the United States of America, owing to racial
discrimination they feel alienated. Alienation is part and parcel of human life. There are a lot
of occasions or circumstances or situations that force anyone to a state of feeling a sense of
alienation. A racially, religiously, sexually prejudiced socio-cultural environment, a biased
familial set up, and temperamental differences of individuals are a few factors that cause
people to feel alienated. The results of the alienation are a feeling of loneliness, depression,
worry, psychological pain, and mental agony.

Alienation has been one of the important subjects of treatment of many writers, and
Jhumpa Lahiri is no exception. And in her fiction she devotes considerable space to present
various causes and consequences of alienation. Many of the characters, or more specifically,
the immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction experience a sense of alienation and loneliness for
various reasons. In the novel, The Namesake, the important characters such as Ashima,
Ashoke, Gogle, and Moushumi feel intense loneliness as a result of alienation. The term
alienation is inextricably tied to loneliness. Gnanamony states: “Loneliness is one of the
burning problems of the expatriate community in the nation of their choice. In the novel in
reference, the Bengali Indian couple Ashoke Ganguli and Ashima Ganguli experience this
issue plenty on landing in Cambridege/ Massachusetts; of the two, it’s the wife who
undergoes this trauma more than the husband as the male goes out and meets his companions
in his work place or learning environment.” (55) As the host society does not fully
accommodate the wishes of the immigrants, they feel alienated. Ashima feels alienated for
being a foreigner and her state of feeling alienated is compared to the state of lifelong
pregnancy, because it is a perpetual wait and a constant burden. At first, while Ashoke is
pursuing his studies at MIT, most of the days Ashima is alone in her apartment feeling
terribly lonely. And the second occasion when she feels the pangs of loneliness is when she is admitted to the maternity ward with no known persons around her either to comfort or to console. The above-mentioned point is reiterated by Gnanamony: “Ashima Ganguli is pregnant and is expecting her baby in a couple of week’s time. She is hospitalised but there in no one to be with her. On the other hand, had it been in India, there would have been plenty of relatives to stand by her.” (55) She is exceedingly afraid of raising a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, and where life seems so burdensome and worrisome and so she fumes with indignation: “I’m saying I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not right. I want to go back” (33). On hearing the news of Ashoke’s death, she screams by herself and wanders the house for a long time, as there is no one with her in her home, and at last she makes a call to her son and daughter. It is so painful to note that she feels as an alien in the host land.

Lahiri, as experienced in her life, speaks of the predicaments of the first-generation (parents) and the second-generation (children) immigrants:

My parents were fearful and suspicious of America and American culture when I was growing up. Maintaining ties to India, and preserving Indian traditions in America, meant a lot to them. They are more at home now, but it is always an issue, and they will always feel like, and be treated as, foreigners here. Now that I am an adult I understand and sympathize more with my parents' predicament. But when I was a child it was harder for me to understand their views. At times I felt that their expectations were in direct opposition to the reality of the world we lived in. Things like dating, living on one's own, having close friendships with Americans, listening to American music and eating American food—all of it was a mystery to them. (Lahiri 1999)
Even in a few instances, the second-generation immigrants also feel as aliens. Gogol, a second-generation immigrant, also feels alienated, especially when he realizes that no one in Russia or India or America or anywhere in the world bears or shares his name. When Gogol is fourteen he starts hating his name and he responds rudely when he is asked for his name. At the college party, Gogol is reluctant to introduce himself to Kim as Gogol and so he asserts that his name is Nikhil. As Subbulakshmi observes, “Being born and bred in America, Gogol behaves himself as an American in language, in dressing but his looks reveal his origin. For that reason he does not like the name given to him as it does not identify him as an American.” (211) The agony of Gogol is the agony of Jhumpa Lahiri. Jhumpa Lahiri was born as Nilanjana Sudeshna, but she had a pet name, Jumpha, which was found easy to pronounce by her class teacher and so she became Jhumpa Lahiri. She injects her feeling into her character Gogol who never likes to be called by this name. Gogol considers himself an American, whereas American society considers him an Indian. He is alienated on the soil of America where he was born and bred.

Moushami rejects all Indian suitors whom her parents bring to her. In spite of her affair with an American she marries Gogol. As she is not near to Gogol’s heart she is discontented with her married life. She decides to become estranged from her husband, Gogol, and this decision and the repercussions lead her to feel the pain of separation. The feeling of alienation that she has is the result of her own making.

In the story “Mrs. Sen’s,” the thirty-three-year-old woman, Mrs. Sen is disturbed and affected by her displacement, that is, moving to America from India. Every day when her husband goes for work she is alone in her apartment. Little Eliot, an eleven-year-old boy who is babysat by Mrs. Sen, fills the void in Mrs. Sen’s life. In her apartment Sen “tries very hard to follow the ways and customs of the United States but she cannot escape the fact that everything is there in India” (113). What she misses a great deal in America is the friendly
chats that she had with her neighbours in India. This view is endorsed by Das N in the following lines:

Mrs. Sen is new to the foreign land and her sense of alienation becomes complete when she has to spend the day alone cooped up in the apartment with none of the neighbours coming over for a friendly chat. In India under such circumstances she would have been flooded by visits from the neighbours who would be there to get acquainted with her and also offer their assistance in her settling down. (63)

In India even after a long interval if anyone comes to Sen’s home there will be no restrictions or formalities to enter her home. Likewise, if any festivals or marriages take place in her village in India all the ladies gather together in the house of festivity and help the people in the household even in cooking. Sen explains this practice to Eliot:

whenever there is a wedding in the family, …or a large celebration of any kind my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night. (114-115)

As Mrs Sen lives in America she misses the closeness of the ties of friendship she had with all the neighbours in India, and yet she is happy for two things: one is she receives letters regularly from the relatives of her family in India, and the other is she is able to get fresh fish from the sea. An eleven-year-old Eliot to whom the happenings in India are narrated by Mrs. Sen is able to understand Indian culture though he is an American. In her apartment as Eliot is all the time exposed to the knowledge of Indian culture he feels like an alien. Eliot’s mother, Mrs. Linden, comes daily to Mrs. Sen’s house to fetch her son, and this
daily visit and the routine brief stay at Mrs. Sen’s house give her a foretaste of Indian culture. Still Eliot’s mother looks upon Mrs. Sen as an employee but Mrs. Sen expects from Eliot’s mother the kind of friendliness that she enjoys in India with the other neighbours. Mrs. Sen welcomes her, and provides food to her, but Eliot’s mother’s relationship with Mrs Sen is businesslike and this viewpoint is confirmed by Das N: “The pain of uprooting from one’s native land and shifting to an alien culture together with the mind your own business kind of attitude that native people show contribute to the sense of displacement that afflicts the likes of Mrs. Sen” (65). Both the host and the guest are similar on one count, that is, Mrs Sen feels alienated because of her displacement from her homeland whereas Eliot’s mother feels distanced and separated from Mrs. Sen in spite of her living in her homeland.

In the title story “Interpreter of Maladies,” Mr. Kapasi is seen driving an Indian American family to the sun temple at Konarak. The family looks like Indians but they have dressed like foreigners. Living as diaspora in the United States America, they view India as the exotic land of their forefathers. Knowing about their own land from someone else, and even seeing the people of India treating them as foreigners are really painful to them.

Lahiri’s treatment of alienation continues in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” and it can be viewed from different perspectives. This story presents a cultural unity between an Indian family and a Pakistani in a foreign soil. Mr. Pirzada is from Dacca which is now part of Pakistan. He leaves his wife and seven daughters in Pakistan to avail himself of a fellowship to study the foliage of New England. As his fellowship is adequate for the provision of a only dorm room, he comes to ten-year-old Lilia’s house to eat with her parents and watch the news of the Indo-Pakistan War on television. Food serves as a strong bond between characters. Choubey rightly points out that “food comes as a fistful soil from the motherland. Not only does food serve as a slice of native life for Mr. Pirzada but also it serves as a strong bond between the protagonist, Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s family.” (Choubey
2005) In the story, Pirzada suffers from the agony of separation from his wife and seven daughters who live in his hometown, Dacca. While dining with Lilia’s parents he keeps his pocket watch “set to the local time in Dacca, eleven hours ahead on his folded paper napkin on the coffee table” (30).

The immigrant children learn the history of America from the lessons through their schools, and they are taught to assimilate into the host culture owing to the influence of American history. Portes stresses that “communal insularity, while delaying full assimilation, may nevertheless create a vital breathing space for immigrant's children, the crucial second generation. This allows these children to learn the language and essential norms of mainstream society” (248) These children carry with them the past history of origin of their parents and grandparents. Lilia is able to recognize a similarity between Mr. Pirzada and her parents with respect to the feeling of alienation after Mr. Pirzada returns to her homeland and this is very well expressed by Lilia: “I knew what it meant to miss someone who was so many miles and hours away, just as he had missed his wife and daughter for so many months” (42).

In the novel, The Lowland, the immigrants Subhash, Gauri, and Bela feel alienated owing to their displacement. Subhash feels a sense of alienation and loneliness due to his displacement from his native country and he also feels cut off from his family members. The following lines attest to this fact: “Sailing even slightly east reminded Subhash of how far away he was from his family. He thought of the time it took to cross even a tiny portion of the earth’s surface. Isolated on the ship with the scientists and other students and crew, he felt doubly alone. Unable to fathom his future, severed from his past” (50). Subhash misses his family which is in India and this results in the loss of close ties with his family and so he feels lonely and the host society further intensifies his feeling of loneliness. He is deprived of the comfort of talking with the members of his family, and his immigrant status makes him get
acquainted with his family only through letters and telegrams. To get information about the welfare of the members of his family Subhash’s only hope is the arrival of letters and telegrams and this is expressed in the following lines: “For a year and a half, he had not seen his family. Not sat down with them, at the end of the day, to share a meal. In Tollygunge, his family did not have a phone line. He’d sent a telegram to let them know he’d arrived. He was learning to live without hearing their voices, to receive news of them only in writing.”(50)

Gauri is to be fetched by a driver for a lecture, but when the driver arrives, he mistakes Gauri for a servant and asks her to inform the owner of the house that he has reached the place to take her. This incident is described here vividly:

Her appearance and accent caused people to continue to ask her where she came from, and some to form certain assumptions. Once, invited to give a talk in San Diego, she’d been picked up by a driver the university had sent, so that she would be spared the effort of driving herself. She had greeted him at the door when he rang the bell. But the driver had not realized, when she told him good morning, that she was his passenger. He had mistaken her for the person paid to open another person’s door. Tell her, whenever she’s ready, he’d said.

(286)
And this terribly affects her and she sinks into the slough of alienation.

Gauri adapts certain American culture and practices in spirit as she is passionately determined to lead an independent life. And as a result she becomes self-absorbed and she neither cares for her husband nor for her daughter, Bela. She often leaves her daughter alone and takes a walk away from the house. When Subhash finds out that Gauri is leaving their daughter alone at home, he says to her, “My mother was right. You don’t deserve to be a parent. The privilege was wasted on you.”(175). In this context Subhash remembers what his mother warned him when he almost planned to marry Gauri: “She’s Udayan’s wife, she’ll
never love you” (160) and also “She’s too withdrawn, too aloof to be a mother” (114). Gauri
does not recognize the joy of sacrifice that motherhood demands. Instead she is willing to
accept her professor Otto Weiss’ offer, that is, her appointment as a requisite assistant which
might later help her pursue doctoral programme. Subhash finally realises that marrying Gauri
is a terrible blunder that he has made in his life. Subhash and Bela go to India to attend
Subhash’s father’s funeral, and when they return to America after six weeks they find the
house empty except a note written by Gauri. The note reads that she has left them for good
and also she is going to California, where she has been offered a job in one of the
universities.

The couple — Subhash and Gauri — never meet again. Bela is left shell-shocked by
these developments and she is awfully depressed in the wake of the separation of her parents.
She becomes a victim of alienation and withdraws herself from the family, and she also
decides to lead a nomadic life without getting married forever.

In the collection of short stories, *Unaccustomed Earth*, the second part is a collection
of three interlinked stories, that is, the stories of two eponymous characters Hema and
Kaushik. And the titles of the three interlinked stories are: “Once in a Lifetime,” “Year’s
End,” and “Going Ashore.” The characters, Hema and Kaushik, suffer from the trauma of
dislocation. Hema is able to have a negotiation with her past but Kaushik is unable to do so
because of his melancholic disposition. Hema suffers because of a conflict that arises due to
her aspiration to marry a white man but it ends up in an arranged marriage with an Indian.
She tries to convince herself that this relationship will endow her life with a sense of certainty
and direction. Kaushik’s sense of rootlessness is the result of his father’s remarriage, and this
ultimately robs him of his balance in life. He never mingles with his step-mother as well as
with his step-sisters, and he hates his father and even he has a doubt whether his father ever
loved his mother. Even though there are many people in his house, he feels lonely and also
feels as an alien in his own house. Kaushik’s grief over his mother’s death, and his rage at his father’s remarriage propel him into a career of photojournalist which provides him with the opportunity to travel more and also to spend less time with his family. He later dies in tsunami in Indonesia away from his home. The sufferings, as a result of the sense of alienation and loneliness, can be seen in all the three characters but at different levels.

Cultural confrontation plays a crucial role in the lives of the immigrants. In the story, “Hell-Heaven,” Pranab Kaku is a graduate who has come to America for his higher studies. As he feels lonely he is desirous to befriend some Bengalis. And this makes him follow Usha and her mother. Then because of the cordial fellowship with Pranab and Usha’s family he even dines with them daily. Later, against the wishes of his family he marries an American named Deborah. He then drifts away from the Indian-American community except maintaining the relationship with Usha and her family. Pranab’s wife gives birth to twin daughters and the girls grow up not knowing their ancestral culture, tradition, and language. The following lines describe how much Pranab’s children are influenced by the host country: “the little girls barely looked Bengali and spoke only English and being raised so differently…. They were not taken to Calcutta every summer, they did not have parents who were clinging to another way of life and exhorting their children to do the same” (75). They celebrate American festivals instead of Indian festivals. Thus Pranab gradually loses his identity and becomes completely a Westernized man. Later Pranab’s status as a minority in the white society makes him feel alienated and his inferiority complex causes double consciousness and as a result he is depressed and his life is tragic at the end.

Boori Ma, in the story “A Real Durwan,” feels like an alien in her own nation, that is, in India itself. She is a Bengali who hails from a lower caste, and she is sent to Calcutta after the Partition. She lives and works as an unofficial durwan in a building in Calcutta. As a self-appointed sweeper of the stairwell building her services “came to resemble those of a real
Boori Ma does not have a house of her own to live. Mrs. Sen, for instance, can talk and think about a geographical space called home to which they can return, whereas Boori Ma who has been separated from her family in East Calcutta owing to the Partition, has no homeland to which she can return. According to Kaur, “Though she herself is a Bengali like others living in that locality and city but she faces double displacement and discrimination because (i) of being a non-Indian (ii) and belonging to a lower caste.” (39)

Therefore, in the flat no one respects her; they do not even consider her as a human being. Mr and Mrs. Dalal give some place for her in their home. They do it not out of concern for her but as she does a lot of work for them. Mrs. Dalal does not give her proper bed to sleep and so she sleeps on the newspapers. Ultimately, she is suspected to be the informer to the robbers and is thrown out of the place when in the locality a few things are stolen in her absence. Jhumpa Lahiri underscores the impossibility of an exile communicating emotional pain and loneliness to others through the character Boori Ma: “Knowing not to sit on the furniture, she crouched; instead, in doorways and hallways, and observed gestures and manners in the same way a person tends to watch traffic in a foreign city” (176).

She plans to buy some vegetables for cooking and also to buy blanket for her but in the meantime someone has stolen the washbasin. But all blames her and sends her out. The conversation goes in this fashion: “Though none of them spoke directly to Boori Ma, she replied, Belive me, believe me. I did not inform the robbers.” (81) From the beginning till the end there is no one to support her. She is alienated from them all, and now she is lonely too, and finally she disappears.

The problems that man faces as a result of his or her or others’ faults have different dimensions such as social, political, psychological, emotional, and spiritual. And these spheres cannot be considered to be watertight compartments as some of them are interrelated,
and mostly the root of all problems is the thought that emanates from one’s mind. So almost every problem can be perceived from this angle, that is, psychological.

Many of the social and familial problems have been explicit, in the sense, the actions of an individual or individuals are manifested outwardly. But at the same time oftentimes an individual is tormented internally, that is, his/her mental or psychological suffering is unseen to the world outside. It is assumed, in general, that things that are invisible or abstract such as air, life, love, relationship, and death are more important than visible matters. And it is also true of hidden or invisible trauma that is psychological. The aches of the heart and mind need to be treated seriously than the social and political problems.

There are some British or American writers or others who belong to other literatures writers or others who give importance to the psychological study of the characters, that is, they delve deep into the psyche of the characters. And Jhumpa Lahiri also gives space to the experience of a few immigrants who pass through intense psychological trauma in some situations.

In the story “A Temporary Matter,” the psychological pain ensues after the death of the newly born child of the couple Shoba and Shukumar. Though both of them are not responsible for the death of their child, each blames the other for the tragedy. Shoba’s mental and psychological suffering takes away her happiness and peace. She suffers from the memory of the tragedy and to seek a temporary relief she tries to remove certain things from the apartment but they aggravate the sting of the pain. The details of the event are given below:

He knew that when they returned from the hospital the first thing she did when she walked into the house was pick out objects of theirs and toss them into a pile in the hallway: books from the shelves, plants from the windowsills,
paintings from wall, photos from table, pots and pans that hung from the hooks to stove. Shukumar had stepped out of her way, watching as she moved methodically from room to room. When she was satisfied, she stood there staring at the pile she’d made, her lips drawn back in such distaste that Shukumar had thought she would spit. Then she’d started to cry. (16)

“A Real Durwan” deals with an old woman, who is desperately making efforts to reconcile her past to the present. And in the course of time she suffers from the pain of rootlessness and for the old woman the only possible way to represent the loss is to exaggerate the stories of her past and thus reimagine them as larger than real life images. The pain of rootlessness that is inflicted on Boori Ma can also be noticed from how people feel about her. They sympathize with her for the loss of her family.

The rhetoric of pain that is observed in “A Real Durwan” and “Mrs. Sen’s” reflects the anxiety of individuals distanced in time and place. In other words, it conveys the alienation of the immigrants and the resulting inability of the two women to reconcile to the present. To both Boori Ma and Mrs. Sen the present is no longer a way of life but a painful reminder of the days that were better lived somewhere else. Mrs. Sen feels the sting of pain as she narrates the tale of her separation and the stories of the celebrations that formed an important part of the culture she has left behind, one that she cannot discover any more.

The way Mrs. Sen suffers and narrates her sufferings draws one’s attention to the gap between cultural practices and human perceptions of their tales. When she remembers the celebrations at home, her thoughts hover over the bliss that her communal life had once provided. These memories fill Mrs. Sen with grief. For her, home always stands for India and not America where she has been forced to live. This is something similar to what Boori Ma
experiences. Both feel the sting of being away from the native land and thus they suffer from the excruciating pain of separation.

These stories present the difficulties faced by Indian wives in an alien culture, without the warmth of friends and also how they struggle to cope with the new surroundings that they cannot consider their home. Mukerjee B has rightly pointed out in Massachusetts Review as follows: “When an Asian man comes to America for economic transformation, and brings a wife who winds up being psychologically changed” (47). Mrs. Sen’s mannerisms and cooked dishes which she serves to Eliot’s mother as a mark of Indian hospitality are despised by Eliot’s mother. Mrs. Sen feels bad and insulted many a time by her remarks and she always feels restless and uneasy, though she knows that her relatives in India “think I live the life of a queen...” (125).

The short story “Sexy” depicts the visible pain of a wife against the invisible pain of a mistress. The narrative is divided between the rhetoric of legal and the illegal right to express the pain that an individual experiences. Miranda’s pain is charted against that of Laxmi’s cousin when she questions the societal boundaries that assign people the legal right to express and thereby to share the pain of a failed relationship sanctioned by society through the ritual of marriage.

Rohin, Laxmi’s cousin’s son, a seven-year-old boy, watches the sufferings of her mother. Laxmi’s cousin’s husband is always with his mistress and he forgets his wife and son and so she weeps daily and applies a cream to her face to hide her suffering from others. Rohin sees the same cream in Miranda’s home and tells her that his mother uses this daily. Miranda, Dev’s mistress, realizes her mistake and cries for a long time. The psychological pain that Miranda and Laxmi’s cousin face is the same. In the case of Laxmi’s cousin it is acceptable by the society. At the same time in Miranda’s case, it is not acceptable by the
society, and so Miranda herself decides to sever the relationship with Dev for the sake of his wife.

The short story “The Treatment of Bibi Halder” also speaks of the pain of an alienated woman who lives a different life from the rest of the women in the society. Bibi Halder is a young woman living in a rundown building in Calcutta who is in the care of her cousin and his wife and Bibi has been suffering from epilepsy. Bibi’s suffering is explained in the following lines: “Bibi Halder suffered from an ailment that baffled family, friends, priests, palmists, spinsters, gem therapists, prophets, and fools” (159) The pain that she undergoes due to her childlessness and her search for a life partner make her rather an object of ridicule. If she sees any invitation or any news about marriage she thinks of her own marriage and she asks the members of her family to arrange for her marriage but they refuse. She suffers psychologically and this makes her act harshly to everyone. It is a painful story of a person’s search for completeness and satisfaction in life. The absence of a man in her life to protect her frustrates her. Bibi herself unknowingly admits that her illness is not physical, but something psychological. Her problem is solved when she becomes a mother before marriage. The following words of Bibi signify the desperate efforts of an exile to conceal her pangs of loneliness and keep a smiling face: “Now I am free to discover life as I please.”(170)

Lahiri frequently deals with identity crisis in almost all her works. In Lahiri’s stories identity crisis results from issues such as names, gender, significance of homeland tradition, cultural interaction, national identity, geographical boundaries, and occupation. These issues determine what can and cannot act as agents in the determination of identity, and many of her characters struggle to cope with the outside influences. Kakar explains this in one of his essays as follows:
An individual’s sense of identity is neither completely conscious nor unconscious, although, at times, it appears to be exclusively one or the other. At some place identity is referred to as conscious sense of individual uniqueness, at others, to an unconscious striving for continuity of experience, and yet other places as a sense of solidarity with a group’s ideal (Kakar 16).

One third of the Indian immigrants find it difficult to adopt the new culture and also at the same time to follow their own culture. Lahiri’s fiction focuses on the cross-cultural, multi-generational stories which examine the cultural conflicts, pangs, aspirations, and the dilemmas of the Indian immigrants who find themselves caught between the native and the host cultures. The first-generation immigrants find it very difficult to get accustomed to the host culture. And the second-generation immigrants are confused whether to follow their home culture which is being followed by their parents or to follow the host culture. According to Batra, “The first generation’s story was about adaptation and learning acculturing and also discovering new things about themselves. The second generation finds itself presented with two conflicting realities and cultures and sets of expectations—one of the host countries through the socio-cultures surroundings and the other of the home country through their parents.” (5)

Lahiri presents cross-cultural issues succinctly in *The Namesake*. Biswas says that Her (Lahiri’s) stories and her (Lahiri’s) novel are set in India and America and establish a certain Indo-American cultural link, in the post-colonial context....

*The Namesake* continues to develop further the themes of cultural alienation and loss of identity.... In her debut novel Lahiri tries to capture the experiences and cultural dilemmas of 30 year struggle of the Ganguly family, for their integration and assimilation into alien culture. (17)
This issue is analyzed from two perspectives in this novel: the first-generation immigrants’ difficulty in assimilating into the host culture and the second-generation immigrants’ ease in adapting to the cultural practices of the host society. Annie gives a detailed description of the second-generation immigrants’ easy adaptation to the way of life of the host society:

the second generation immigrants are twice removed and distanced from their culture and roots. They are born and brought up in the adopted land of their parents and are utterly unaware of their roots, only later to be learnt through picture books or personal narration. To them their roots have less meaning as far as their sense of belonging is concerned, and they have greater affinity to the place of their birth rather than to their roots which they learn through curiosity, as one would learn about a distant land. They perceive the land of birth as their “home” and so have a different kind of a problem in identity because they want to be accepted on their own terms. It is here they face a sense of alienation in the sense of “insider” “outsider”. In the land of their roots, they are considered “different” and they are not received with the same emotional longing a first generation would. Therefore, for a second generation to feel a sense of longing to the roots is a harder encounter than for the first. (49)

The immigrants attempt to fill the cultural gap, and in the process they move gradually towards assimilation into and adaptation to the host culture. And accordingly, “The immigrant experience is complicated as a sensitive immigrant finds himself or herself perpetually at a transit station fraught with memories of the original home which are struggling with the realities of the new world” (Dubey,22). In The Namesake Ashima and Ashoke, the first-generation immigrants, buy a house in Pemberton Road, in a locality where
all the houses belong to Americans. They get acquainted with other Bengali immigrants for the reason “they all come from Calcutta.” (38) They all gather together during occasions like rice and name ceremonies of their children, their birthdays, marriages, deaths, and other Bengali festivals. They celebrate these festivals and functions as per Bengali customs, wearing their best traditional garments, thus, trying to preserve their culture in the host-land. They “sit in circles on the floor, singing songs by Nazrul and Tagore argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit Ray. The CPIM versus the Congress Party. North Calcutta versus South.” (38)

The first-generation immigrants attempt to hold on to their past culture and history and at the same time they aspire to provide their children with the best facilities available in the host country. In order to preserve their culture in the foreign land they train their children to speak in Bengali and also they teach them Bengali literature and history, besides exposing them to their religious customs, traditions, beliefs, and food habits. In the novel The Namesake Ashima teaches Gogol to memorize a children’s poem by Tagore and also the names of deities adorning the ten-headed Durga. Every afternoon, before going to sleep, Ashima switches on the television and makes Gogol watch “Sesame Street” and “The Electric Company” in order to make him learn the American way of speaking in English.

Although immigrants try their best to preserve their heritage and culture, they cannot help but take in the social and cultural traditions of the host country. Filipczak states that “Even though assimilating, the representatives of the first generation immigrants are nevertheless cultural hybrids. They know their roots, but they also know that to achieve success they need to adapt to new cultural codes, which they inevitably do, because of the contact with another culture.” (4) Initially, Ashoke does not like the celebration of Christmas and Thanks Giving, but he accepts these Christian practices for the sake of his children, and Gogol, after his father’s demise, recalls his father’s change of attitude: “it was for him
Like Ashoke, Ruma’s father in the story “Unaccustomed Earth,” has gradually and unknowingly starts to adjust to the newly discovered independence of the host society. But he has not fully assimilated himself with the foreign culture yet. He still removes his shoes before entering the house, which is part of Indian culture. At the same time as he grows older, he feels happier with his life in America.

In the novel, *The Lowland*, the character Subhash feels nostalgic while thinking about his culture, that is, when he remembers his homeland culture. When he returns to India to visit his parents after a long time, he still remembers and follows the tradition as he did when he was in India. He remembers the rituals of honour at his father’s funeral. He even misses the Durga Pujo celebrations in India. He visits homes of Indians in America to show solidarity with Indian-Americans.

After her arrival in America with Subhash, Gauri finds America as an appropriate place to escape from her past and aching memories of Calcutta, and she has occasionally nostalgic memories about Calcutta and Udayan and it is said in the novel that “She put her face to the table’s surface, inhaling deeply, her cheek against the slats. It was the smell of the bedroom furniture she’d left behind in Tollygunge, the wardrobe and dressing table, the bed with slim posts on which she and Udayan had created Bela.” (169)

The first-generation immigrant mothers in America often teach the values of their culture and tradition to their children but the second-generation immigrant children, when they grow up they are not able to identify themselves either with their homeland, that is, India or with America. Thus they suffer from double consciousness, and ultimately they choose American way of life which gives lots of pain to the Indian immigrant mothers. Gnanamony in his article states that “Only a typical middle class Indian mother knows how much it would
affect her soul when she learns her children take to American ways, which are totally anathema to her social and religious beliefs and practices.” (57) Ashima, the main character, in the novel The Namesake, is terribly upset at seeing her children becoming cultural orphans in the United States of America. She has never imagined that this would happen to her children. Americanized children very often clash with their parents when their life style goes diametrically opposite to their Indian parents’ expectations. When Gogol goes steady with his girlfriend Ruth, his mother is a bit nervous, because she knows it is not their culture. Gnanamony in an article explains that “Sex between two adults is a way of life in the United States. Premarital sex is something which is so normal there. However it is not permitted in India; sex before marriage is a taboo in India.” (59) Gogol has an intimate relationship with Ruth one night. In the novel it is said that “They’d made love for the first time in a double bed” (119). Gogol terminates his affair with Ruth but he develops one with Maxine; he decides to spend his vacation with Maxine’s family and Ashima feels the chasm in her soul. The conversation that takes place between the son and the mother is given below:

“I’m going to spend a couple of weeks in New Hampshire.”

“Oh”, his mother says. She sounds at once unimpressed and relieved. “Why do you want to go there, of all places? What’s the difference between New Hampshire and here?”

“I’m going with a girl I’m seeing”, he tells her. “Her parents have a place there”.

Though she says nothing for a while, he knows what his mother is thinking, that he is willing to go on vacation with someone else’s parents but not see his own. (145)

Parents from the West seldom interfere in their children’s private lives and they respect their individuality. And this is contrary to the Eastern notion, that is, parents interfere
in almost all the affairs of their children. Gogol and Maxine often go out for shopping, and soon after his work, Gogol goes to their house and sleeps with Maxine and the whole night he makes love to her and their room is just above the one in which, Gerald and Lydia, Maxine’s parents stay. Gogol’s sister, Sonia, too has embraced American way of life and she has a clandestine relationship with an American boyfriend, Ben, whom she wants to marry later on.

Ashima is quite often doubtful about her future, that is, the direction in which her life will move on. Having been deprived of the company of her own parents under the pretext of moving to the United States of America, “her children’s independence, their need to keep their distance from her, is something she will never understand” (166). When her children do not return even on holidays she thinks, “she has given birth to vagabonds” (167)

Lahiri portrays the sufferings of the second-generation immigrants as a consequence of cross-cultural conflict in *The Namesake*. For instance, Gogol, sandwiched between the cultures of the country of his parents and the country of his birth, struggles to carry the burden of two cultures and two names. Gogol’s name Nikhil resembles an American name, and yet Gogol and his past life follow him everywhere like a shadow. He makes all efforts to erase his native identity and as a result he even hesitates to introduce his parents to his American girlfriends, Ruth and Maxine. The death of Gogol’s father brings about a great change in him. He is convinced that he cannot abandon or diminish the importance of both the cultures. Hall realizes “identity as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” (10). He learns to strike a balance between the two cultures. The realization that he is made up of two cultures strengthens his pride, instead of weakening his morale. He assimilates American culture and values without losing his Indian identity altogether. He feels no shame for his name, and also he feels proud to be called Nikhil Gogol Ganguli.
In the Story, “Only Goodness,” like Ashima, the main character Sudha’s mother, plays an important role in instilling Indian values into her children. She wears saris, cooks Indian food, and tries to prevent her children from falling a prey to the American way of life. Sudha’s mother does not like the drinking habit, a casual one in that new country. Her mother says, “That’s the problem with this country… Too many freedoms, too much having fun. When we were young, life wasn’t always about fun.” (143)

The habit of drinking alcohol destroys the familial harmony in many ways. Rahul’s dismissal from school which leads him to a bleak future, Rahul’s mischief in Sudha’s wedding party, and Rahul’s attitude that almost endangers Sudha’s baby are some of the unpleasant instances. It is the role of parents, especially mother who must prevent their children from anything that destroys their future.

In the story, “Unaccustomed Earth,” Ruma’s mother’s goal is to cultivate the homeland tradition in a foreign county, but the irony is even she is not able to teach her motherland tradition to her children. Ruma’s mother feels sad realising the fact that her daughter prefers pants and skirts to saris. Her mother fears that this is a sign of losing Indian values. Ruma’s mother feels that she cannot either make her daughter wear saris or cannot prevent Ruma from wearing pants and skirts in the new world she is in. The representatives of the second-generation immigrants are closer to the new culture of their host country. According to Bhabha they live the Third space, characterized by in-betweenness. No purist view of identity applies to them because they are “neither the One...not the Other...but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both” (41). Being born to the Indian parents in America, Ruma lives in the third space all her life. Ruma becomes a lawyer in New York; she marries an American and she has a child named Akash and also she leads a happy life. But Ruma’s mother tries her best to make her follow Indian culture which Ruma finds very difficult to follow. But after the death of her mother, the American Dream of
Ruma is destroyed and she withdraws from most of the things she has actively involved in her professional career. She decides to take care of her family, but this does not bring her happiness. Her mother’s death makes her identify strongly with Indian heritage. She does not reject American clothes, her taste for American food, nor does she speak Bengali, her parents’ native language. She rejects the fundamental thoughts like her independence, professional success, and sense of equality with her husband. She does according to Indian tradition like serving her husband which her mother always did, and being a mother and a housewife. And though her husband agrees to and accepts her new way of life nothing makes her happy. The irony is that Ruma’s mother is not there to see the change in her daughter’s attitude. At the same time Ruma is also not happy with her change. In these three stories their mothers are very much disappointed because of their children’s attitude.

Language becomes a barrier in communication and figures in the fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri which needs critical attention. It is discussed in the following paragraphs how the first-generation immigrants and the second-generation immigrants struggle because of the barrier, and how the language barrier influences the third-generation immigrants.

In the novel *The Namesake*, it is described that Ashima and Ashoke arrive at a hospital for confinement. In the labor ward the nurse named Patty helps Ashima to step out of her bed, tuck her feet one by one into slippers and after taking a few steps Ashima stops and a wave of pain surges through her body. To the question of Patty, “Hoping for a boy or a girl?” Ashima replies: “As long as there are ten finger and ten toe” (3) Patty smiles, a little too widely, and suddenly Ashima realizes her mistake, that is, she feels that she should have said “fingers” and “toes.” This error pains her almost as much as her last contraction. English had been her subject. In Calcutta, before she was married, she was working toward a college degree. She used to tutor neighborhood schoolchildren in their homes by “helping them to memorize Tennyson and Wordsworth, to pronounce words like sign and cough, to understand
the difference between Aristotelian and Shakespearean tragedy.” (3) But in Bengali, a finger can also mean “fingers,” a toe “toes.” This kind of problem is also faced by the immigrants in their host land. After she is allotted a bed in the maternity ward, Ashima looks for her husband, but he has stepped behind the curtain around her bed and utters in Bengali as follows: “I’ll be back” (3) — a language, neither the nurses nor the doctors speak. The curtain is a physical barrier and at the same time it also stands for language barrier, because of Asoke’s utterance in Bengali in the United States.

In the case of second-generation immigrants, Ashima and Ashoke send their children, Gogol and Sonia, to learn the Bengali language and also to attend culture classes every Saturday, but this initiative by their parents “fails to unsettle them that their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them in accents they are accustomed not to trust” (65).

In the title story “Unaccustomed Earth” Ruma’s mother teaches her Bengali language seriously. It can be observed in the following lines: “Her mother had been strict, so much so that Ruma had never spoken to her in English. But her father didn’t mind” (12). Even the Bengali language has been taught to the third-generation immigrant, that is, to Ruma’s son, Akash by Ruma’s mother. Her mother sings songs to Akash and teaches him Bengali nursery rhymes. And Ruma’s father, during his short visit, tries to acquaint Akash with at least the basic elements of Bengali culture and teaches him simple things like colours and numbers in Bengali and some aspects of Indian tradition such as eating with fingers or taking off shoes when entering the house and they are eagerly picked up by the boy himself. After Ruma’s mother’s death, she tries to teach Akash a few words in Bengali, but when her son becomes a bit older, she does not have enough courage to teach him. In fact, her world divides into two languages: Bengali in childhood and English in her adult life. At the end Akash has forgotten the little Bengali language his mother and grandmother taught him when he was young.
Food is a prominent cultural symbol in Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction. Food and culture have a strong co-relation with each other because food is not only merely a biological need required for sustenance but also is strongly associated with the ancestral roots, religion, region, and tradition of diasporians. According to Mehta, food can be used “to transcend feelings of immigrant powerlessness and to transform...the alienness of immigration into the hope of new beginning.” (111-112) Sociologists believe that for most new immigrants, the food habits of their countries are the last to go in the process of assimilation and women in particular hold on to them for a long time. In the novel The Namesake Lahiri pays great attention to the significance of food in the diasporic scenario. Nirmal in an article states that “In her novel The Namesake (2003) Lahiri emphatically utilizes ‘food’ as a metaphor for differentiating the experiences of first and second generation immigrants having divided identities and loyalties.” (111) In the very beginning of the novel, the pregnant and lonely Ashima prepares the spicy Indian snack, Jhalmuri, which is a popular street snack in India and rice, the staple food of Bengalis, is used to prepare this snack and she uses Indian as well as American ingredients to prepare this snack: “Rice crispies and planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chilli pepper, wishing there Mustard oil to pour into the mix.” (1) But in America she does not get mustard oil which is easily available in India. The hidden motive in this preparation is multiculturalism. Nirmal states this in his article as follows: “Besides, the mixing of various Indian and American ingredients covertly suggests the mixing of cultures, people and races which give birth to multiculturalism.” (111) Even in the Annaprasan ceremony, they plan what is to be served in the feast and this shows the importance attached to food and festivities.

Like Ashima, Mrs. Sen in the short story “Mrs Sens” holds her sense of identity in the new country by preparing Indian food. As a baby-sitter for Eliot when she narrates Indian
stories to Eliot, she shares her passion for Bengalis, Bengali food, fish and all other things from Bengal. Food is used as a metaphor but only in this story food assumes significance of a character. Fish is almost the staple food of Bengal Mrs. Sen is obsessed with eating fish as one does not always get good whole fish in America. The arrival of fish at the local store is greeted as a piece of news from home and she is always too eager to hold it, to cook it and to serve it to Mr. Sen. Mrs Sen loves feeding others. The first thing that she does daily to Eliot when he comes to her home is that she gives him a sandwich bag with peeled wedges of an orange or salted peanuts. One day the market puts a fish on hold and she forces her husband to take her to market. When Mr. Sen refuses to pick her she begins to weep and then she takes Eliot into her room. The weeping is not only for the fish but also for the separation from her homeland. Thus, for Mrs Sen, preparing and cooking food becomes a sensual experience and also an emotional activity. The next time when the fish arrives she takes a bold step taking Eliot with her and decides to drive to the store. The car meets with an accident and Mr. Sen has to be called to the lady's rescue. Fish becomes the leitmotif in the story. Mrs. Sen’s existence and her survival in an alien land revolves around and depends upon this food item. When she gets it she is happy, and when it is absent from her kitchen for a long time, she sulks like a child. For Mrs. Sen, fish becomes her home, her state, her neighbourhood, her friend, and her family. Fish gives her a sense of proximity to her people. The arrival of a tasty halibut gives her pleasure as nothing else does.

Brown assert that “food ways bind individuals together, define the limits of the group’s outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium of inter-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion and provide a context for performance of group rituals” (5). In the story “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” food comes as a fistful soil from the motherland. Not only does food serve as a slice of native life for Mr. Pirzada but also it serves as a strong bond between Mr. Pirzada and Lilia's family. Mr.
Pirzada comes from Dacca whereas Lilia’s parents are from India. But the food that they relish and also their eating habits establish a bond of affinity: “They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, and drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea.” (25)

Maini in his article states that “Food is clearly an important part of the culture that binds them despite barriers of nation, nationhood, and nationalism, in fact, Lilia’s parents, who are from east India, have more in common with Mr Pirzada, who is from east Pakistan (later Bangladesh), in terms of their food habits and language than a fellow Indian from north and south India.” (161) Mr. Pirzada is from Pakistan and he leaves his wife and seven daughters for a fellowship to study the foliage of New England. Since his fellowship provides for only a meagre dorm room, he comes to Lilia’s house to dine each night and also to watch the news of the Indo-Pakistan war. During the twelve days of the war, Lilia’s mother only cooks boiled eggs and rice. In January after the war Mr. Pirizada flies to his home. A month later Lila’s family receives a letter from Mr. Prizada and they come to know that he is reunited with his family. He thanks Lila’s family profusely for their hospitality. Lilia’s mother makes a special supper that evening to celebrate the union.

Likewise, in the story “Hell-Heaven” the trauma of displacement and cultural nostalgia make Pranab follow Usha and her mother to have some homeland touch. Pranab almost thinks of returning to his homeland owing to lack of availability of traditional Bengali food. Usha says, “he always seemed to be starving, walking through the door and announcing that he hadn’t had lunch and then we would eat ravenously, reaching behind my mother to steal cutlets as she was frying them.... I would find her in the kitchen, rolling out dough for
luchis, which she normally made only on Sundays for my father and me” (66). This incidence shows the importance of Indian food abroad.

At the same time in the case of the second and the third-generation immigrants they always like to have American food. In the story “Unaccustomed Earth” Akash is the representative of the third-generation immigrants and he has American eating habits and hates traditional Bengali food. He says, “I hate that food,” (23) and he utters this seeing his grandfather eating it. And Akash’s grandfather teaches him how to eat using fingers.

Lahiri explores the marital difficulties that take place abroad due to cultural differences. Most of the marriages of the second-generation immigrants are intercultural in nature. In these marriages two persons of distant historical, social and cultural backgrounds share their experiences with each other and out of these shared experiences emerge a third space. These marriages for instance, between Bengali man and an American woman or an American man and Bengali woman, result in hybrid culture. They never have problems with respect to food and dress code, because the second-generation immigrants like the American way of life. Language is also no barrier to them. But the relationship between their parents and siblings renews their cultural affiliations to the native country. The stories like “The Unaccustomed Earth” and “Hell-Heaven” come under this banner. In the stories such as “Interpreter of Maladies,” “A Temporary Matter,” “This Blessed House” and the novel The Namesake, the second-generation immigrants choose their life partners from the same cultural background but with regard to the choice between the native land and the host land it becomes an issue to them.

In the story “A Temporary Matter” Lahiri shows the importance of interaction between the couple Shoba and Shukumar who are second-generation American citizens of Indian origin. They live a happy life for quite some time. Shukumar is an academic who
reluctantly has to go out for a conference while Shoba is expecting a baby. But Shoba gives birth to a still born child, when her husband is away for a paper presentation and it becomes a traumatic moment for Shoba. He is stunned by the news of the birth of a stillborn baby, symbolically signifying the stillness that has crept into their relationship.

Though both of them are not responsible for the death of their child, each hates the other and looks with suspicion blaming each other for the tragedy. The death of the child completely changes the lives of both Shoba and Shukumar. Their relationship has reached a stage where “he didn’t want her to be pregnant again. Shoba’s confession leads to a further revelation by Shukumar. Both Shoba and her mother assume Shukumar to be a heartless, absent father” (22). There is a lack of understanding between them which creates crisis in their marital life. Though they live in a three bed-room house, there is no warmth in their relationship. However, “There was nothing to indicate that she would not be able to have children in the future.” (4) Aravind in his article affirms the above fact as follows: “Both of them deliberately avoid each other. Actually, they lived very happily before the tragedy happened in their life. Shukumar thought that this crisis in their relationship would pass soon. She was just thirty-three and was strong and on her feet again. The doctor also tried to console them by saying, ‘that these things happen.’ (4) But no one out of them was ready to bridge the barrier created between them after the death of their baby.” (72-73)

Shukumar wistfully thinks of those romantic days of the past: “He thought of how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions they still reached for each other’s bodies before sleeping.” (5) He also wonders how Shoba has been keeping the house in disarray whereas earlier she used to put her coat on a hanger, her sneakers tidily in the closet, and pay all the bills on time. But after the trauma, she is treating the house as if it were a hotel. At the end of the story, Shoba tells her husband that she is moving out of the house, and Shukumar admits to himself that he no longer loves
her. Lahiri’s delicate handling of the end of this marriage places no blame on the couple, who seemed to be completely compatible for a life-long commitment; rather, she focuses on their inability to communicate despite their shared years and the commonalities of their cultural heritage.

In the title story “Interpreter of Maladies” Lahiri explains the marital conflicts between Mr. and Mrs. Das. Like the couple, Shukumar and Shoba, the couple, Raj and Mina, suffer because of loss of interaction between them. They both are born and bred in America and soon after their marriage their parents move to India leaving Raj busy with his teaching assignments and so he has not enough time to interact with his wife and so life becomes dull and drab for Mina. Lahiri uses Mr. Kapasi as a mirror to reflect Mrs. Das’s own unfulfilled emotional life. Mina explains everything to Mr. Kapasi and the following lines explain this:

we met when we were very young…we went to the same college…as a result of spending all her time in college with Raj, she continued, she did not make many close friends… having a child so quickly, and nursing, and warming up bottles of milk and testing there temperature… she was left at home all day with the baby . . . Always cross and tired” (63-64)

Kapasi’s attitude towards his wife is similar to that of Raj towards Mina. Mr. Kapasi has lost his ability to communicate with his wife, forcing him to drink his tea in silence at nights which leads to a loveless marriage. Both ignore individual, emotional, and physical needs of their wives who are tied to the boring repetitive domestic backbreaking responsibilities. The problems for both the couples are caused by the nature of marital relationships dramatized in the story, which are unsatisfactory for the men as well as the women. Desai observe:

The family is not a homogenous group where all the members’ occupy equal
positions and derive equal benefits in terms of source, training opportunities and entitlements. The socialization of members and especially girls lead to women themselves accepting their secondary role in family . . . gender difference that are culturally produced are, almost invariably, interpreted as being rooted in biology, as part of the natural order of things. However, gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt within a complex of relationships (80).

Aravind in his article states that “Marriage is the union of two people, two families. Communication and confession are two pillars of marital bliss. Sense of guilt, non-communication and infidelity are elements that crush marriage. In “Interpreter of Maladies” Jhumpa Lahiri portrays the husband-wife relation which is full of deceit, deception, dark deeds, non-communication, lack of trust and understanding.” (80)

Mina’s problems are further complicated when she conceives her younger son Bobby owing to a sexual encounter with a friend of her husband who once happened to stay with them for a few days. She keeps the secret for eight years before revealing it to Kapasi. Mina hopes that it will make him feel better as he has revealed the secret. Kurian in his article confirms the above fact as follows: “Mrs. Das, the second generation immigrant thinks nothing of her sexual relationship with a casual visitor. But ten years later the truth about her son’s parentage worries her. This inbuilt sense of guilt makes her surfaces when she meets Mr. Kapasi, the interpreter of maladies. Unburdening her guilt to a stranger perhaps brings her some relief.” (110)

“This Blessed House” is another story that explores marriage and the effects of communication. Sanjeev and Twinkle have just started their married life in the United States of America. The parents of Twinkle and Sanjeev, like those of Raj and Mina, “were old friends, and across continents they had arranged the occasion at which Twinkle and Sanjeev
were introduced though his parents still lived in Calcutta and that of her in California” (142). They come from different cultural backgrounds with different experiences. This story deals with a relatively early period of the married life when the partners were quite emotionally attached to each other. Though their marriage is not an arranged one, in the traditional sense, they are matched by their parents and wed after only a brief courtship. Twinkle and Sanjeev do not know each other well and both fail to live up to the expectations of each other.

In the novel *The Namesake*, marriage is a complicated manipulation between the traditional expectations of immigrant parents and the desires of the second-generation children. As a young man, Gogol primarily dates white women, much to his parents’ dismay. Gnanamony in his article states that “It looks as though dating had been a way of life to the children in America until their marriage and for many it continues even after that. Americanized Indian children and their American counterparts are not at all in a hurry to marry and settle down.” (61)

In America premarital sex is a socially permitted evil, which is considered as sin in India. Deeply cherished Indian values like virginity and chastity have absolutely no significance not only to Americans but also to the Americanized Indians. The second-generation immigrants follow the American style even in this issue which is unbearable to the Indian parents and this often worries them and so they are worried about their future. Gnanamony states that “Sex between two willing adults is a way of life in the US. Premarital sex is something which is so normal there. However it is not permitted in India; sex before marriage is a taboo in India.”(59)

Gogol falls in love with an American girl named Ruth in his teenage; he takes her to a restaurant one night and there “They’d made love for the first time in a double bed.”(119) Later, he terminates his love affair with Ruth and develops another with an American woman
named Maxine and they date more than a year till the death of Gogol’s father. She comes to visit him in his home after his father’s death. Though their love proceeds well in the beginning, there is a change in the mind set of Gogol about Maxine after the death of his father. Soon Gogol wants to end the love as expected by his mother and loses the chance of entering into wedlock with a lovely and cultured Maxine. It is only after his father’s death that he comes to embrace his Bengali culture. He holds the ceremony for his late father, visits his mother and sister frequently.

On the advice of his mother, he marries a Bengali girl by name Moushumi who is also a second-generation immigrant. Moushumi dates an American Graham, and even gets engaged to him. And they come to India to get the blessings of Moushumi’s grandparents but Graham finds that in India they never have a chance for open kiss, hug, and drinks and also he sulks and the engagement breaks. Graham says, “people tended to stay at home most of the time. There was nothing to drink. Imagine dealing with fifty in-laws without alcohol. I couldn’t even hold her hand on the street without attracting stares.” (217) Thus the collision between Indian and American cultures does not let this marriage materialize. Moushumi also has a French boyfriend named Dimitri who is in Paris. Even though Gogol knows the past of Moushumi, he marries her.

Gogol and Moshimi live for a year as a husband and a wife and as they move into the second year they lose their interest in each other. In Paris Moushimi goes to a paper presentation and there he meets his teenage boyfriend Dimitri, and she shares her bed with him. When Gogol comes to know of it, he feels, “like a poison spreading quickly through his veins. He cannot blame her much, for they have both acted on the same impulse.” (284) Gogol does not scold her because before his wedding he too dates a married woman named Bridget and she regularly sleeps with Gogol in her husband’s rented house in Boston. So
without much argument they both agree to divorce. After the formal divorce, she moves to Paris.

In these four stories Lahiri delicately explores the complexities inherent in the formation of cultural identity of the second-generation couples of the same regional, cultural, social backgrounds in the United States.

In the story “Unaccustomed Earth,” Ruma, the second-generation immigrant, is well-educated; she is a lawyer in New York. She falls in love with an American and marries him. She has a three-year-old son Akash and now she is pregnant again. At first, life goes smooth that is, until till her mother’s death. Ruma’s husband gets another job. Suddenly, the pursuit of her American Dream comes to an end and she now wants to take care of the family and the household activities like her first-generation mother did. Even though she achieves her American Dream to some extent, Indian culture encourages her to take care of her family and so she sacrifices her dream. Her unwillingness to pursue the American Dream is indicative of her problem with identity. She leaves her home in Pennsylvania to work in New York and then moves with her family to Seattle. The position of in-betweenness, that is, living between two cultures, makes her uncomfortable and confuses her. After the death of her mother, her father journeys to many places and even Ruma does not know where his father is, but at the same time when he returns he stays with his daughter. At that time he spends much of his time in digging the earth and in the process he forges an intimate bond with his grandson. However, Ruma cannot cling to her father as her son has been able to. Her relationship with her father is marked by a lot of tensions. After her mother’s death, she thinks many times before asking her father to stay with her in her house. She is not sure whether her father, who is a product of a different set of values and relationships, can understand the equation she has with her husband. Lahiri brings out the tensions of the second-generation youngster who has successfully accustomed herself with the American way of life and of her father who finds it
difficult to adapt himself to the new culture in which he struggles to live. Even though the second-generation immigrants lead a happy life with their American husbands or wives they lose their identity as Indian immigrants.

Like Ruma, Pranab Kaku marries an American named Deborah in the story, “Hell-Heaven.” Pranab Kaku is a graduate who has come to America from India for his higher studies. He follows Usha and her mother all the way. As he feels lonely he wants to make some Bengali friends. Then, he joins Usha’s family dinner regularly. Later, he marries Deborah against the wishes of his family members. After the marriage Pranab Kaku disconnects all his ties with his parents, relatives, and all Bengali friends, and syncretises himself with American culture and life. He stops attending all Bengali festivals, functions, and gatherings. These kinds of activity help him lead a complete American life without any room for Indian food, dress, and culture. He then drifts away from the Indian-American community but maintains a slight relationship with Usha and her family. When Pranab’s wife gives birth to twin daughters, “the little girls barely looked Bengali and spoke only English and being raised so differently…. They were not taken to Calcutta every summer, they did not have parents who were clinging to another way of life and exhorting their children to do the same” (75). They celebrate American festivals instead of Indian festivals. Thus Pranab’s identity is lost and he becomes completely a Westernized person. Later, Pranab who belongs to the minority group moves to the white society; his inferiority complex causes double consciousness putting him under great pressure which finally pushes him to tragedy. So he divorces Deborah and marries a Bengali woman. Agarwal in her article speaks about this as follows: “His marrying a Bengali woman after the divorce shows his long suppressed desire to reconnect to his with the ethnic community.” (179)

In the novel The Lowland, Udayan marries Gauri who is working for her degree in philosophy at presidency. But Udayan joins the Naxalites movement and encounters the
police. On reaching home Subhash gets to know, what actually happens to his brother Udayan. A week before Durga Puja while Gauri and Udayan’s mother are returning from a day of shopping with packets containing gifts for the extended family they find their house surrounded by police and soldiers, and her father-in-law descending the stairs, his hands raised and a policeman pointing a rifle at his back. Udayan hides behind the water hyacinth, in the flooded water of the lowland, and at last they catch and kill him. Later, Subhash marries Gauri and they go to Rhode Island. She marries him not out of love for him but it offers an alternative and academic prospects which she longs for a long time. Subhash has the hope that after she finishes her course she will come back one day to love him. But while she gets to know that she is not the first woman in Subhash’s life, she no more feels obliged to love him. She changes herself by cutting off her hair and purchasing new American dress to have a new identity for her. Subhash’s fear that Bela the daughter of Udayan and Gauri, will cease to love him if his real identity is revealed, and this expresses his weakness and this revelation empowers Gauri who “realized the weapon was in her hands now” and everything “that matters to him, she could take away” (170). She develops a peculiar mind set when she leaves her baby daughter Subhash and joins as a teacher in California. She does not hesitate to leave her daughter as she feels that she is doing a favour to Subhash by not claiming for Bela. She has failed to treat Bela as an individual who must have her own choice, and she has never thought how as an adolescent Bela would grow up without her mother. Towards the end of the novel, she receives a note from Bela, who is still remorseless for her outburst, and it informs her that when Meghna might keep up relationship with Gauri then it is understood that she is not faithful to her husband, and she never minds the future of her daughter Bela.

Every society has different customs and traditions with respect to wearing dress, eating food, and drinking different kinds of drinks. The foods that people in a society eat have a specific mark in any society. The food that they eat also depends on the weather and climate
of that particular region to which they belong to and this shows that there is a correlation between the food habits and the climate. And usually it is assumed that people living in cold countries have the habit of drinking beverages because of the cold climate. At the same time, whatever food one eats and the drink that one drinks should be healthy and in no way the food and drink should be harmful and, moreover, on any account it should not lead to health hazards because one eats food in order to be healthy and to have longevity. So any food or drink that is detrimental to good health should be avoided.

In the East, especially in India, liquor or any alcoholic drink is not supplied during the course of any meal served at homes. Or even serving liquor at important events like birthdays, weddings, and wedding anniversaries is prohibited. In most of the states in India, alcohol consumption by the citizens is prohibited. Even in Lahiri’s short stories there are references to Bengali homes where they abstain themselves from taking liquor as that is their custom. This step taken to prevent people from taking liquor is for the welfare of the people, that is, to keep the people in good health.

If anyone is addicted to this habit then the whole family suffers. The addicted person beats and injures the members of the family when he is in an intoxicated state and the family suffers financially and also mentally. The psychological and the emotional suffering inflicted on the family members are irreparable and the whole family is ruined.

In the West consuming alcohol even at homes is part of American culture. And in the East, and specifically in India, it is men who take to drinking liquor and consumption of liquor by women is something unheard of. But in the West there is no gender discrimination with regard to consuming liquor. So in almost all homes in the West they serve liquor during any meal. It is not a taboo in America.
Most of the Indian immigrants in America assimilate the American culture of consuming wine at meals. The distinction between an American and an Indian immigrant in America erodes with regard to taking wine at homes. This can be seen in stories such as “A Temporary Matter,” “Hell-Heaven,” “Only Goodness,” and the novel *The Lowland*.

In “A Temporary Matter,” there are references to Shoba, an Indian immigrant in America, drinking wine: “She took a sip of wine” (13) And in another place it is said “When she went upstairs to change, Shukumar poured him-self some wine and put on a record” (20) So women taking wine in the West is a familiar sight unlike in India.

In “Hell-Heaven” also one can find the presence of wine at parties. Pranab Kaku and Deborah invite a few people for Thanksgiving. There “Bottles of wine were lined up on the table. Two turkeys were brought out, one stuffed with sausage and one without.” (78)

The opening line of the short story “Only Goodness” points to the beginning of a tragic story of Rahul. This is how the short story commences: “It was Sudha who’d introduced Rahul to alcohol, one week end he came to visit her at Penn — to his first drink from a Keg” (128) They are Indian immigrants in England. And their interest in liquor is explained as follows:

She went to a liquor store, helping Rahul divvy up the cans between his room and hers so that their parents wouldn’t discover them.

After her parents were aseep she brought some cans into Rahul’s room. He snuck downstairs, bringing back a cup of ice cubes to chill down the warm Budweised. They shared one cupful, then another, listening to the stones and the Doors on Rahul’s record player, smoking cigarettes next to the open window and exhaling through the screen. (128)
And further it is said as follows:

She began drinking, something her parents did not do. They were prudish about alcohol to the point of seeming puritanical frowning upon the members of their Bengali circle — the men, that was to say — who liked to sip whiskey at gatherings. In her freshman year there had been nights when she got so drunk that she was sick on the streets of campus, splattering the side walk and stumbling back to her dorm with friends. But she learned what her limits were. The idea of excess, of being out of control, did not appeal to Sudha.

(129)

In the beginning the parents of Sudha and Rahul are in a celebrative mood as they have felt that they have successfully raised their children in America. Sudha leaves for Philadelphia and Rahul goes to Wayland for higher studies. And he returns home for Christmas when Sudha also has been there for Christmas. Rahul does not discuss anything like his classes, professors or the new friends he has made at his college. When his mother and Sudha show interest in decorating the Christmas tree, he keeps himself aloof and seems to be bored.

It is found by Sudha that Rahul has come home with a liquor bottle. And he has hidden it so that others in his home do not take notice of. Moreover, Sudha and Rahul plan to consume liquor as soon as their parents go to sleep. And this is what takes place after some time:

Their parents were in bed by the time thry returned, but Sudha insisted they hide things as they had before. Thinks that their mother might have reason to enter Rahul’s room for the weeks that he was home, to clean up or put away his laundry, she kept the liquor in her room, a few cans at the back of her
closet, some in a gap behind a bookcase, the bottle of Smirnoff wrapped in an old pilly sweater in her chest of drawers. She told Rahul it was safer that way, and he didn’t seem to care. He took a couple of cans for the night, pecking her on the cheek before he left her, not insisting when she said she was too tired to join him. (133)

Sudha shows a lot of interest in Rahul so that he leaves his mark as a successful boy in America. Sudha now joins the London School of Economics and she comes home for a weekend during which Rahul also has been at home. Rahul’s uninterestedness and disoriented nature worry Sudha and she keenly watches his behavior and she is very much upset. The indifferent attitude of Rahul is explained below:

His aloofness troubled Sudha, but her parents said nothing. He seemed always to be in a slightly bad mood and in urgent need to get somewhere — to his job, to a gym where he went to lift weights, to the video store to return one of the foreign films he would watch when everyone else was asleep. She and Rahul never argued, but there were moments, when she crossed paths with him in the hallway or asked him to pass her the remote control, when she was briefly convinced he despised her. It was nothing he said or did — even in his avoidance he was always coolly polite — but she sensed that he had revised his opinion of her, that the Rahul who had once looked up to her and confided in her was replaced by a person she could only offend. She wondered when he would approach her for another run to the liquor store, but he never mentioned it. She gathered he had his own supply, stashed away somewhere; one night, when she was up late reading a magazine, she heard the sound of the ice machine grinding in the refrigerator, cubes dropping into a glass. (139)
After seeing his second-semester poor grades, Rahul’s mother shares this with Sudha and asks her to speak to him. Sudha steps into his room and finds that

He was lying in bed, listening to music on his headphones, leafing through a tattered copy of Beckett’s plays. He put the book on his chest when he saw her but didn’t remove the headphones. She saw a mug on the floor by the bed, filled with ice cubes and a clear liquid. He didn’t offer any, was playing their old game without her.

“So, what’s going on at school?” she asked.

He looked up at her. His eyes were reddish. “I’m on vacation.”

“Your grades weren’t good, Rahul. You need to work a little harder.”

“I did work hard,” he said.

“I know the first year can be tough.”

“I did work hard,” he repeated. “My professors hate me. Is that my fault?”

“I’m sure they don’t hate you,” she said. She considered crossing the room and sitting on the edge of the bed but remained where she was.

“What the fuck do you know?” he said, giving her a start.

“Look, I’m just trying to help.”

“I’m not asking you to help. You don’t need to fix anything. Has it ever occurred to you that my life might be fine the way it is?”

His words silenced her, cut to the bone. She’d always had a heavy hand in his life, it was true, striving not to control it but to improve it somehow. She had always considered this her responsibility to him. She had not known how to be a sister any other way.

“You don’t even live here,” he continued. “You think you can stroll in and make everything perfect before you disappear to London? Is that what you
want to do?”

She looked at him, and then at the mug at the side of his bed, wondering how much he’d consumed in the course of the evening, where the bottle was hidden. She thought of her parents sleeping down the hall, unaware of what he was doing, and she felt indignant on their behalf. “You’re smart, Rahul. You’re a lot smarter than me. I don’t get it.”

He leaned over and picked up the cup from the floor. He took a sip and swallowed, then slid the cup under the bed, out of sight. (140-141)

A day before Sudha was about to leave for Philadelphia,

It was Rahul calling from the local police station. He’d been pulled over on a quiet road near Mill Pond for wavering in his lane. His blood alcohol content was not extreme, but because he was under twenty-one it was enough to get him arrested. He asked Sudha to come to the station alone, to bring three hundred dollars in cash. But it was past midnight, and besides, the keys to her parents’ car were in the pocket of her father’s pants, in their bedroom. She woke up her father, told him to get dressed. Together they went to post bail and release Rahul from the cell. (142)

It is a great humiliation to his parents and Sudha to go to a place where handcuffed criminals are brought. Sudha discloses to her parents that Rahul has a drinking problem. Rahul’s mother retorts: “That’s the problem with this country,” her mother said. “Too many freedoms, too much having fun. When we were young, life wasn’t always about fun.” (143)

Sudha is surprised to find her mother blaming the American system. “Sudha pitied her mother, pitied her refusal to accommodate such an unpleasant and alien fact, her need to blame America and its laws instead of her son.” (143)
In the meantime, Sudha falls in love with an Englishman named Roger who has been previously married and they want to have their registry wedding in London and their reception in Massachusetts. Before their wedding reception Rahul surprises everyone in the family by saying that he has been dating a woman named Elena who is eight years older than Rahul. And quite after some time he is also engaged to Elena. And the response he receives from his family members for this act is that he has no career, no goal, no path in life and, moreover, he is in no position to be getting married. Rahul gets angry and goes out with Elena.

As Rahul has been addicted to liquor, his parents are looking to have Sudha’s wedding reception at a restaurant where there is no bar. But all the restaurants in London have bars. So they are helpless. And during the reception Rahul makes a toast.

The toast went on, the words becoming slurred. Before the reception, her father had spoken with the bartender, paying him extra to monitor Rahul’s drinks; Sudha did not have the heart to tell her father that Rahul was beyond such measures, that alcohol dwelled in his pockets where most men’s wallets were, that the two glasses of champagne he’d had openly were just for show. Rahul began telling a story about Sudha’s childhood, dredging up an anecdote about going on a vacation long ago in Bar Harbor, Sudha needing to use the bathroom and there not being a gas station for miles. Then their father got up, stood next to Rahul, and whispered something in his ear, motioning for him to sit down. (156-157)

And what has followed his father’s whispering something in his ear is given below:

“Excuse me, I’m not finished.” People laughed, not realizing Rahul had not meant to be
funny, that it wasn’t some sort of comic routine. The microphone made a screeching sound. Their father took him by the elbow then, and Rahul flinched, giving a shove. “You — don’t — touch me, Rahul hissed, the words amplified by the microphone.” (157) And soon he disappears from the gathering. Sudha feels terribly sad and bad about this incident:

Life went on. Sudha and Roger returned to London, settling into their new house, writing cards to thank their guests for helping to make it such a special day. But Sudha could not forgive Rahul for what had happened, those dreadful minutes he stood at the microphone the only thing she remembered when she looked at the photographs of her reception (158)

After this without others’ knowledge he goes to Ohio and it is found that he has stolen all the gold jewels his mother has acquired over her lifetime. Since her wedding Sudha has not seen Rahul but Sudha receives a letter from him after a long time and the content of it is given below:

I hope this is you. First, I want to say that I’m sorry. For everything. I know I screwed up, but things are better now. I have a job at a restaurant, as a line cook. I discovered that I really like cooking. Nothing fancy, but I’ve gotten really good at omelettes. Also, I’m writing another play. I showed it to someone I met here, a guy who’s directed some things at Syracuse, and he said it still needs work but that I should stick with it! I’m living with Elena — remember her? We got back together and I convinced her to come up here. Crystal’s in fifth grade and Elena got a job doing human resources at the university. Think what you will about Elena, but she got me to start rehab. So like I said, things are better. Anyway, I’m sorry for everything and I hope you (and Roger) can forgive me for being a jerk at your wedding. I really am
happy for you guys. And I’d like to come to London and see you, if that’s okay. I’ve saved up some money and I’ll have a little time off from the restaurant this summer. I’m assuming you won’t mention any of this to our parents. (160-161)

To this letter she writes a reply as given below: “Yes, it’s me. I’ve had a baby, a boy named Neel. He’s ten months old, and I want you to meet him.” (16)

One fine morning Rahul pays a visit to Sudha’s house and sees her son Neel. And during this stay at her home he spends most of the time playing with Rahul. Sudha finds a change in him and he does not seem to have the addiction to liquor. But unfortunately one day he again consumes liquor and falls flat at her house which has infuriated Sudha and Roger. Roger cannot forgive the act of Rahul and he asks Sudha to send his brother out of the house. And with a heavy heart he sends him out of the house. And he leaves them and enters an unknown and a bleak future. Sudha feels guilty most of the time because it is she who has introduced Rahul to the habit of drinking which has ruined his life altogether. She is remorseful for her act of spoiling his brother’s life and future. From the beginning to the end the story revolves around drunk Rahul’s life. His grades have suffered and as a result he cannot get qualified. This results in his unemployment. He is arrested for drunk driving. His wayward life leads to his unhappy marriage with Elena. All these point to the fact that how an alcoholic’s life is doomed and the dreadful consequences of the drinking habit. The evil addiction not only ruins his life but also makes his sister Sudha suffer and cry besides his parents.

Indian immigrants who settle in America suffer in the host land as aliens and the sense of alienation makes them think of their lost identity. Cultural identity plays a major role in Indian immigrant’s loss of identity. The sufferings of the first-generation immigrants and
also the second-generation immigrant’s confusion about their identity due to difference in language, food, and marital relationships have been discussed in detail.

As a coin has two sides, chapter four titled Euphoria of immigrants attempt to prove that the experience of the immigrants on the American soil has a lot of benefits too, besides certain disadvantages.