Euphoria of Immigrants

America which is said to be a land of opportunities helps the immigrants quench their intellectual thirst and broaden their intellectual horizon. Indian immigrants are able to get the best education in the universities and institutions of world renown in America. In Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction one can find a lot of Indian immigrants moving to America and the cultural clash they encounter in the host land can be termed as “the exuberant clash of immigrant culture” (240) as Boehmer calls it. According to Tandon,

The exuberance of immigrants which comes with the acquisition of Americanness and the immigrant Indianness as a sort of fluid identities to be celebrated does not come easily, for it is difficult to divorce oneself completely from one’s own past nor it is easy to overcome the ‘aloofness of expatriation’ or sever oneself from the roots and the tradition of the culture one comes from. In this flurry of change and action is the conflict and confusion of the whole cross-cultural business. (141)

Varma statistical report about the Indian migrants working in various American companies and sectors is given below:

Foreign-born from India make up less than 1% of the total U.S. population (Schmidley 2001), but they are highly clustered in the U.S. S&E workforce. In 2003, out of 3.3 million foreign-born scientists and engineers, 15.4% (515,000) were from India,… Indian immigrant scientists and engineers have become one of the most successful immigrant communities in the creation of knowledge-intensive companies based around engineering, information technology, and finance (Biradavolu 2008). A case study of immigrant entrepreneurs found that Indian immigrants were, in 2005,
responsible for 15.5% of all Silicon Valley start-ups, an increase from 7% in 1998. Nationwide, Indian immigrants founded 26% of the engineering and technology companies that were founded by foreign-born. Indian immigrants have founded more engineering and technology companies than immigrants from the United Kingdom, China, Taiwan, and Japan combined (Wadhwa et al. 2007). Another study found that India ranked first as the country of origin for immigrant-founded venture-backed public companies, which accounted for 32 companies (22%) in 2005 (Anderson and Platzer 2007). These studies also show that Indian immigrants are more likely to start businesses in the technology sectors than their U.S. native-born counterparts.

Despite their presence, there are remarkably few studies on the nature of entrepreneurship among Indian immigrants in the U.S. technology sector. (271)

America provides the immigrants with the best education and employment opportunities. The immigrants’ journey from India to America has helped them to have an international outlook, and so they are able to look at things from different and new perspectives.

In most of the stories of Lahiri, it is observed that most of the important characters are Bengalis who move from Bengal to the West, and particularly to the United States of America, to pursue their higher studies and subsequently to find employments in the United States of America and to settle down. They lead a sophisticated life in the United States of America. Borjas points out the fact that “Many immigrants are probably dismayed to find that the roads in Los Angeles and New York are not paved with gold and that the types of jobs available and the income that their skills can command are far below than what they expected.” (79). Annie concludes that “not all immigrants’ stories have happy endings; indeed, many do not.” (47)
Most of the Bengalis migrate to the United States of America in pursuit of higher education. In the short story “Hell-Heaven,” Pranab Chakraborty, called Pranab Kaku by the members of Shyamal Da, has an opportunity to move to the United States of America in the early sixties to study engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Even though Shyamal Da’s family has moved to the United States of America, it has had the advantage of the retention of Bengali way of dressing, preparing and eating Bengali food, celebrating Bengali festivals and speaking the Bengali language in the United States of America and these things have given the members of his family a feeling of being at home, that is, in Bengal. Monica is also of the same view and she says as follows:

The post-independence migration has provided successful professionals, traders and entrepreneurs to the world. These Indian people are not only packed with the baggage of education, and professional skill but also their memories and attachment to their land. They retain their family name, speak their mother tongue in family and close social circles, celebrate their festivals, and observe religious and socio-cultural rituals in their host land. (92)

And specifically, Aparna has not lost her Bengali identity in the United States of America. The following lines uttered by her daughter illustrate this fact:

my mother was wearing the red and white bangles unique to Bengali married women, and a common Tangail sari, and had a thick stem of vermillion powder in the center parting of her hair, and the full round face and large dark eyes that are so typical of Bengali women. He noticed the two or three safety pins she wore fastened to the thin gold bangles that were behind the red and white ones, which she would use to replace a
missing hook on a blouse or to draw a string through a petticoat at a moment’s notice, a practice he associated strictly with his mother and sisters and aunts in Calcutta. Moreover, Pranab Kaku had overheard my mother speaking to me in Bengali, telling me that I couldn’t buy an issue of *Archie* at the Coop. (61)

With regard to preparing and serving Bengali food she further adds that

my mother invited him to accompany us back to our apartment that very afternoon, and prepared tea for the two of them; then, after learning that he had not had a proper Bengali meal in more than three months, she served him the leftover curried mackerel and rice that we had eaten for dinner the night before. (61)

Initially, Pranab Kaku’s visit almost every night to Shyamal Da’s family has given Pranab a sense of belonging to his native culture. He has also got the satisfaction of eating Bengali food daily at Shyamal Da’s house. Aparna is personally benefited by the acquaintance of Pranab Kaku. Aparna is unable to identify herself with the American way of life as she is very much rooted in Indian culture, and specifically in Bengali culture. And she regrets for not frequenting Bengal. Even once Shyamal Das tells her in irritation to go back to Bengal.

All the discussions that Aparna and Pranab Kaku have had centre around the Bengali way of life. Aparna’s daughter explains in detail the common interests between them:

They were from the same neighborhood in North Calcutta, their family homes within walking distance, the façades familiar to them once the exact locations were described. They knew the same shops, the same bus and
tram routes, the same holes-in-the-wall for the best jelabis and moghlai parathas. My father, on the other hand, came from a suburb twenty miles outside Calcutta, an area that my mother considered the wilderness, and even in her bleakest hours of homesickness she was grateful that my father had at least spared her a life in the stern house of her in-laws, where she would have had to keep her head covered with the end of her sari at all times and use an outhouse that was nothing but a raised platform with a hole, and where, in the rooms, there was not a single painting hanging on the walls. Within a few weeks, Pranab Kaku had brought his reel-to-reel over to our apartment, and he played for my mother medley after medley of songs from the Hindi films of their youth. They were cheerful songs of courtship, which transformed the quiet life in our apartment and transported my mother back to the world she’d left behind in order to marry my father. She and Pranab Kaku would try to recall which scene in which movie the songs were from, who the actors were and what they were wearing. My mother would describe Raj Kapoor and Nargis singing under umbrellas in the rain, or Dev Anand strumming a guitar on the beach in Goa. She and Pranab Kaku would argue passionately about these matters (64-65)

Annie also holds the same view as mentioned in the last part of the above passage:

“To them (immigrants) homeland becomes a series of objects, which bring before them a life of nostalgia of things which belonged to their country. It could be anything between an old dress or the latest hit song, cherished and sung. In being nostalgic, the immigrants transport themselves to areas of experience that lie beyond the immediate referential context.” (35)

Pirzada, a Pakistani professor, has a thirst for great discovery. And to achieve this, he
must have the right kind of intellectual atmosphere and facilities. But he lacks these facilities in his country. So the great impetus in him, that is, making a great contribution to the field of Botany, drives him to go to Boston by availing himself of a grant. And this grant and the resultant trip to Boston where he has all the research faculties — infrastructural, laboratory, and library — help him quench his intellectual thirst for a discovery. The grant is a great honour to his intellectual pursuit. Though Pirzada happens to be thousands of miles away from his family, in the foreign land, he gets acquainted with an Indian family in Boston. The advantages of this fellowship are that they

spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. 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, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea. (25)

Pizada has the experience of feeling at home though far home. As far as the story “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” is concerned, an interesting point is made by Shukla with respect to culture acting as a unifying force rather than be a cause of conflict. He points out that

she (Lahiri) has realised how history is the story of integration and disintegration of human aggression but culture as the greatest integrating force in men. In her story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," she has presented how culture does not continue in social systems or in institutions but rather in the norms of human conduct. It is like a flowing stream in the life of the people. The story is a turning point in her literary career. It is set on the American soil with an Anglo-American protagonist. She portrays Mr. Pirzada, a Bangladeshi scholar in America and shows how he is more close with her father and
family. Lahiri conveys how this intimate alien Bengali focuses his support to India during Pakistani Civil War of 1971. Although the story reminds of the caricaturing style of Dickens, it conveys the message that culture is the greatest integrating force that unites men with others. In the story Mr. Pirzada and Lahiri’s father are the persons of separate national identifies but they have been preoccupied with their respective countries and cultures living in America's neo-cultural matrix. (147-148)

The joyful experience of the Lilia’s family, an Indian family in America, is narrated by Lilia herself and she says that her mother seemed genuinely proud of the fact, as if it were a reflection of my character. In her estimation, I knew, I was assured a safe life, an easy life, a fine education, every opportunity. I would never have to eat rationed food, or obey curfews, or watch riots from my rooftop, or hide neighbors in water tanks to prevent them from being shot, as she and my father had. “Imagine having to place her in a decent school. Imagine her having to read during power failures by the light of kerosene lamps. Imagine the pressures, the tutors, the constant exams.” (26-27)

Lilia’s education at the USA school has a lot of merits and Lilia has enumerated the very many benefits of the system:

We learned American history, of course, and American geography. That year, and every year, it seemed, we began by studying the Revolutionary War. We were taken in school buses on field trips to visit Plymouth Rock, and to walk the Freedom Trail, and to climb to the top of the Bunker Hill Monument. We made dioramas out of coloured construction paper depicting George Washington crossing the choppy waters of the Delaware River, and we made
puppets of King George wearing white tights and a black bow in his hair.

During tests we were given blank maps of the thirteen colonies, and asked to fill in names, dates, capitals. I could do it with my eyes closed. (27)

In the short story “The Third and Final Continent” in 1964, an unnamed Indian, a Bengali, leaves for England with a certificate in commerce. When he is 36-year old he is offered a full-time job in the processing department of a library at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in America. He says that “The salary was generous enough to support a wife, and I was honoured to be hired by a world-famous university, and so I obtained a sixth-preference green card, and prepared to travel farther still. By now I had enough money to go by plane. I flew first to Calcutta, to attend my wedding, and a week later I flew to Boston, to begin my new job.” (174)

The comfortable and prosperous life that Mala and her husband lead has been described in detail:

Mala and I live in a town about twenty miles from Boston, on a tree-lined street much like Mrs. Croft’s, in a house we own, with a garden that saves us from buying tomatoes in summer, and room for guests. We are American citizens now, so that we can collect social security when it is time. Though we visit Calcutta every few years, and bring back more drawstring pyjama and Darjeeling tea, we have decided to grow old here. I work in a small college library. We have a son who attends Harvard University. Mala no longer drapes the end of her sari over her head, or weeps at night for her parents, but occasionally she weeps for our son. So we drive to Cambridge to visit him, or bring him home for a weekend, so that he can eat rice with us with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die. (197)
In the story, “Unaccustomed Earth,” Ruma’s father comes to America in search of better educational opportunities. He receives a Ph.D. degree in biochemistry; he finds a rewarding job in a pharmaceutical company, which helps his family to live a comfortable life. As an immigrant in America, he enjoys enormous freedom that the country offers. In India, every father is entrusted with a lot of family responsibilities. He cannot be a free bird. Ruma’s father is fond of travelling to so many countries to enjoy seeing the important sights in these places. He has travelled to Europe, France, Holland, and Italy. He has now settled in Pennsylvania. He lives alone making his own meals as he has lost his wife. His wife, all through her life, served her husband first, as a typical Indian wife, not influenced by the independence that United States of America gives to any woman. So Ruma’s father, even when his wife is alive, does not take or share the family responsibilities. According to Muthyala,

Assimilation into the host culture does not fully restore a sense of equilibrium that balances or rather harmonises the experience of alienation and loss engendered in the experience of travel and relocation and neither is sustaining a pure unadulterated native culture and identity in foreign location a fully realizable possibility. (98)

Usually, in India, after the demise of one’s wife, one moves into the family of either a son’s or a daughter’s. Indian society does not allow a man to live alone after the death of his wife or a woman after the death of her husband. Ruma admits this fact: “in India, there would have been no question of his not moving in with her.” (6) But Ruma’s father, because of his long stay in the United States of America, has been influenced by the American way of life, and the freedom he enjoys has made him not to go and live with Ruma. He says, “He didn’t want to live again in an enormous house that would only fill up with things over the years, as the children grew, all the things he’d recently gotten rid of, all the books and papers and
clothes and objects one felt compelled to possess, to save. Life grew and grew until a certain point. The point he had reached now.”(53) And moreover, she is also not willing to take her father into her house and the reasons are given in the following lines:

Ruma feared that her father would become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in a way she was no longer used to. It would mean an end to the family she’d created on her own: herself and Adam and Akash, and the second child that would come in January, conceived just before the move. She couldn’t imagine tending to her father as her mother had, serving the meals her mother used to prepare. Still, not offering him a place in her home made her feel worse. It was a dilemma Adam didn’t understand. Whenever she brought up the issue, he pointed out the obvious, that she already had a small child to care for, another on the way. He reminded her that her father was in good health for his age, content where he was. But he didn’t object to the idea of her father living with them. His willingness was meant kindly, generously, an example of why she loved Adam, and yet it worried her. Did it not make a difference to him? She knew he was trying to help, but at the same time she sensed that his patience was wearing thin. By allowing her to leave her job, splurging on a beautiful house, agreeing to having a second baby, Adam was doing everything in his power to make Ruma happy. But nothing was making her happy; recently, in the course of conversation, he’d pointed that out, too. (7)

Ruma’s father lives so independently without much responsibility. And this fact is endorsed by Ruma herself when her father intends to stay with her for a week before going to Prague:
It was her mother who would have been the helpful one, taking over the kitchen, singing songs to Akash and teaching him Bengali nursery rhymes, throwing loads of laundry into the machine. Ruma had never spent a week alone with her father. When her parents visited her in Brooklyn, after Akash was born, her father claimed an armchair in the living room, quietly combing through the *Times*, occasionally tucking a finger under the baby’s chin but behaving as if he were waiting for the time to pass. (6)

A few Indian immigrants who migrate to the United States of America in pursuit of higher studies and also to get employments prefer to choose Americans as their life partners. And this is because they are enamoured of the American way of life owing to their stay in the United States of America. This is not uncommon. The immigrants’ prolonged stay makes them push their native culture and customs to the background. They foreground the host-culture as it is beneficial to them in many ways. In India, marriages are arranged by the parents and relatives and this custom is deeply rooted in Indian social life. But in the West almost all the marriages are love-based. The selection of life partner is made by the partner himself or herself. First, they love each other and then they get married in America and this shows the importance the American society attests to individuals which is absent in Indian social system.

The Indian immigrants who have been exposed to this kind of arrangement of marriage is attracted to this kind of selection because they feel that it is he or she who is going to live with her or him. Pranab Kaku, in the story “Hell-Heaven,” attracted to the Western way of living, decides to choose his wife by herself. So when he frequents the house of Mr. Shyamal Da, he has also acquainted with Deborah, an American. He brings Deborah to Shyamal Da’s house many times. Lila recollects Deborah’s visit to her house:
I called Deborah by her first name, as my parents did, but Pranab Kaku taught her to call my father Shyamal Da and my mother Boudi, something with which Deborah gladly complied. Before they came to dinner for the first time, I asked my mother, as she was straightening up the living room, if I ought to address her as Deborah Kakima, turning her into an aunt as I had turned Pranab into an uncle. “What’s the point?” my mother said, looking back at me sharply. “In a few weeks, the fun will be over and she’ll leave him.” And yet Deborah remained by his side, attending the weekend parties that Pranab Kaku and my parents were becoming more involved with, gatherings that were exclusively Bengali with the exception of her. Deborah was very tall, taller than both my parents and nearly as tall as Pranab Kaku. She wore her long brass-colored hair center-parted, as my mother did, but it was gathered into a low ponytail instead of a braid, or it spilled messily over her shoulders and down her back in a way that my mother considered indecent. She wore small silver spectacles and not a trace of makeup, and she studied philosophy. I found her utterly beautiful, but according to my mother she had spots on her face, and her hips were too small. (67-68)

Before Pranab Kaku and Deborah get married, they have some intimate moments even in the presence of others, and they are described in the following lines: “Sometimes they ended up feeding each other, allowing their fingers to linger in each other’s mouth, causing my parents to look down at their plates and wait for the moment to pass. At larger gatherings, they kissed and held hands in front of everyone.” (68) They get engaged in the presence of a small gathering in a church with the members of Shyamal Da’s family. And this is followed by their marriage in a church, and Da’s family also participates in the ceremony. Pranab
Kaku asks Mr. Shyamal Da to convey the good tidings of their marriage to their parents in Calcutta so that they will not protest to his choice. Pranab Kaku is much delighted to get married to Deborah whose parents are professors. When their marriage is brought to the notice of Pranab Kaku’s parents, they are flabbergasted. The reaction and response of their parents is so shocking and it is explained in detail below:

Pranab Kaku’s parents were horrified by the thought of their only son marrying an American woman, and a few weeks later our telephone rang in the middle of the night: it was Mr. Chakraborty telling my father that they could not possibly bless such a marriage, that it was out of the question, that if Pranab Kaku dared to marry Deborah he would no longer acknowledge him as a son. Then his wife got on the phone, asking to speak to my mother, and attacked her as if they were intimate, blaming my mother for allowing the affair to develop. She said that they had already chosen a wife for him in Calcutta, that he’d left for America with the understanding that he’d go back after he had finished his studies, and marry this girl. They had bought the neighboring flat in their building for Pranab and his betrothed, and it was sitting empty, waiting for his return. “We thought we could trust you, and yet you have betrayed us so deeply,” his mother said, taking out her anger on a stranger in a way she could not with her son. “Is this what happens to people in America?” For Pranab Kaku’s sake, my mother defended the engagement, telling his mother that Deborah was a polite girl from a decent family. Pranab Kaku’s parents pleaded with mine to talk him out of the engagement, but my father refused, deciding that it was not their place to get embroiled in a situation that had nothing to do with them. “We are not his parents,” he told my
mother. “We can tell him they don’t approve but nothing more.” And so my parents told Pranab Kaku nothing about how his parents had berated them, and blamed them, and threatened to disown Pranab Kaku, only that they had refused to give him their blessing. In the face of this refusal, Pranab Kaku shrugged. “I don’t care. Not everyone can be as open-minded as you,” he told my parents. “Your blessing is blessing enough.” (71-72)

The joyful experience of Pranab Kaku’s getting united in matrimony with Deborah is a very sad and sorrowful event to his parents. Initially, Aparna dislikes everything that is American as her Bengali cultural roots are strong. But in due course of time she has a change of heart towards American customs and tradition and this is evident from the following passage:

She had accepted the fact that I was not only her daughter but a child of America as well. Slowly, she accepted that I dated one American man, and then another, and then yet another, that I slept with them, and even that I lived with one though we were not married. She welcomed my boyfriends into our home and when things didn’t work out she told me I would find someone better. (81-82)

Probably as the Bengali parents of Kaku have not exposed to the American culture as Aparna is exposed to, they are reluctant to accept their son’s marriage to an American and it is their rootedness in Indian culture that has resulted in their hatred for the American way of life.

Successful married life is a great achievement in the life of any married couple. And to lead a successful married life the partners need to be very sincere, committed, and
dedicated. The very many identical tastes that they have help them lead a harmonious life without having frictions or strained relationships between them. So naturally, the choice of partner one makes is also an important component to lead a happy married life.

In “Only Goodness,” Sudha, a second generation Indian immigrant, has been a successful student. She has achieved a lot of academic excellence and she is considered one of the outstanding students among all Bengali children. And their parents are very proud of her many an accomplishment. She has been driven by the spirit of competence all through her life. While she has been wandering through the National Gallery in London, she happens to meet Roger and this result in their marriage and their marriage is solemnized with the approval of their parents.

Usually, it is believed that when a man and a woman hailing from different races and religions marry, there would be a lot of cultural and religious differences between them which are not easily reconcilable. But it is not true in the case of Sudha’s marriage with Roger. It is usually more difficult for the first-generation immigrants to get reconciled to their socio-cultural and religio-philosophical differences rather than the second-generation immigrants who are part of American society. Sudha and Roger have disproved Kipling’s dictum “East is East and West is West/ And the twain shall never meet” and in their case the East and the West not only meet but also merge and become one.

Roger is a responsible person. His natural indisposition is a great asset to him. He possesses a lot of good qualities and they have been listed below:

He took responsibility for things, booking theater tickets, making reservations at restaurants, packing picnics and dragging Sudha off to Hampstead Heath.

He was the first man she’d dated who was never late, never forgot to call when he said he would, and Sudha quickly recognized in him the same strain of
competence she possessed. He enjoyed food and cooking, inspired to get up early and walk to a favorite bakery for pastries, surprising Sudha, the first morning she woke up in his flat in Shepherd’s Bush, with breakfast on a tray. He had lived alone for many years but quickly opened his life to her, giving her a key, lined drawers in his bureau, a glass shelf in his medicine cabinet. (147)

And further it is said about Roger that Sudha’s parents approved of his academic qualifications, his ability, thanks to his wisely invested inheritance, to buy a house for himself and Sudha in Kilburn. It helped that he’d been born in India, that he was English and not American, drinking tea, not coffee, and saying “zed” not “zee,” superficial things that allowed her parents to relate to him. Sudha felt that they were not so much making room for Roger in the family as allowing him to take her away. But Rahul had not loosened his grip; he asked Roger questions, combing through the current issue of Roger’s art magazine that her parents had admired and set aside, doing his part to inspect his sister’s future husband for flaws.

“Roger’s a good guy,” Rahul told her when the two of them were alone in the kitchen clearing plates. “Congratulations.” (152)

Sudha leads a happy married life with Roger who is an understanding, committed, and responsible husband. He takes care of Sudha well and fulfils the household responsibilities. He is fond of his son Neel, and Roger performs his fatherly duties to his son, besides loving his father-in-law and mother-in-law. He also loves Rahul, Sudha’s brother, and he lives as a responsible brother-in-law. And these good traits of Roger contribute to their happy married life.
Usually, sociologists and marriage counselors are of the view that a marriage between a husband and a wife belonging to the same race, religion, country, caste, and community has better chances of survival. In interreligious and interracial marriages the couple have to encounter a lot of cultural and religious differences which would be a stumbling block to marital harmony. But Ruma’s marriage with Adam, an American, proves the other way. At first, Ruma’s mother objects to her daughter’s willingness to marry an American whoever for that matter it might be. Ruma recollects what happened when she proposed to marry Adam:

Ten years ago her mother had done everything in her power to talk Ruma out of marrying Adam, saying that he would divorce her, that in the end he would want an American girl. Neither of these things had happened, but she sometimes thought back to that time, remembering how bold she’d had to be in order to withstand her mother’s outrage, and her father’s refusal to express even that, which had felt more cruel. “You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian, that is the bottom line,” her mother had told Ruma again and again.

Adam behaves so well and with much responsibility towards his wife, son, mother-in-law, and father-in-law. He stands apart from other Americans and even it can be said that he is more dutiful, committed, and dedicated than many an Indian husband and in many ways he is far better than others and he cannot be compared to Ruma’s elder brother who has neglected his parents.

Ruma’s mother who once hated and objected to their proposal vehemently now feels contented and happy about their married life. Ruma’s mother’s positive responses have been listed here:
Over the years her mother not only retracted her objections but vehemently denied them; she grew to love Adam as a son, a replacement for Romi, who had crushed them by moving abroad and maintaining only distant ties. Her mother would chat with Adam on the phone, even when Ruma was not at home, e-mailing him from time to time, carrying on a game of Scrabble with him over the Internet. When her parents visited, her mother would always bring a picnic cooler filled with homemade mishti, elaborate, syrupy, cream-filled concoctions which Ruma had never learned to make, and Adam loved. (26)

There are other reasons for Ruma to feel happy about her husband Adam. When Ruma’s father visits her family for a week before going to Prague, Adam has been away from home on a business trip for two weeks. When Ruma announces her father’s visit, Adam feels happy as her father’s presence will be of great help. And Adam is very affectionate to all the family members. When he is away he enquires about his father-in-law. The following conversation between Ruma and Adam over the phone reveals his genuine love for all:

“My dad’s here.”…
“What did he say?”
“The usual questions: ‘How are you? How are your parents?’”….
“Have you eaten?”…
How’s Akash?”
“Right here.” She put the receiver to his ear. “Say hi to Daddy.”
“Hi,” Akash said, without enthusiasm. Then silence. She could hear Adam saying, “What’s going on, buddy? Having fun with Dadu?” But Akash refused to engage any further…
“I can’t imagine my father living here,” she said.
“Then don’t ask him to.”
“I think the visit is his way of suggesting it.”
“Then ask.”
“And if he says yes?”
“Then he moves in with us.”
“Should I ask?”

She heard Adam breathing patiently through his nose. “We’ve been over this a million times, Rum. It’s your call. He’s your dad.”

She turned a page of Akash’s book, saying nothing.
“I need to get going,” Adam said. “I miss you guys.”
“We miss you, too,” she said. (24-25)

Adam, unlike other Americans, and like many Indian husbands, wants his father-in-law to move into his family after the death of his wife. Though Americans respect individuality and want to enjoy their freedom, Adam seems to digress from their path and he comes closer to Indian husbands with regard to taking their in-laws into his family, and especially after the death of either the father-in-law or the mother-in-law. And the irony is that even Ruma is reluctant to take her father into her house, but Adam insists many times on taking her father into her household after her mother’s death. These are all some of the commendable great traits of Adam and even many Indian husbands lack these admirable qualities. In this sense, Ruma is extremely fortunate to marry Adam. It is Adam’s true love for his wife, son, and in-laws that has transcended all the barriers — race and religion — to lead a harmonious family life.

One can draw a parallel between this Adam and the Adam God created and kept in the Garden of Eden. Adam loved his wife Eve so much that he ate the forbidden fruit along with her, sacrificed his life for her by preferring mortality to immortality, and even he was ready to
relinquish the comforts of the Garden of Eden. Likewise, this Adam also loves Ruma exceedingly and sacrifices his freedom for the sake of Ruma, and even by distancing himself from the American way of life.

The image of women in literature assumes importance owing to many factors. Since time immemorial, portrayal of women in literature has acquired multifaceted dimensions. Inequality in any sphere of life has led to many problems in society. Even after the world has witnessed a number of civilizations, this social evil still persists. Even after great strides have been made in the fields of education, science and technology, and higher standard of living, the problem of inequality is found to be deep-rooted in society.

In God’s creation, differences in colour, size, beauty, and growth found in plants, trees, animals, and even in human beings have to be welcomed and they give man a great delight and they are marvelous to think of. Man and woman, the tower of God’s creation, also have differences physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. They are natural. In one sense, differences, that is, inequalities exist in God’s creation. But with respect to a man treating another, there should not be any inequality. Inequality perpetrated in the name of caste, creed, wealth, popularity, and gender is something subhuman and inhuman. In The Second Sex Beauvoir says, “women have always been man’s dependant, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality.” (20)

Barry in Beginning Theory points out that “in feminist criticism in the 1970s the major effort went into exposing what might be called the mechanism of patriarchy, that is, the cultural mind-set in men and women perpetuated sexual inequality. Critical attention was given to books by male writers in which influential or typical images of women were constructed” (122)
In the article titled “Subversion of Myth and Fairy Story in Lakshmi Kannan’s Short Story ‘Because’: A Feminist Perspective” it is clearly stated “women are capable of positive thinking, and consequently they need not confine to stereotyped societal conventions as they too have a great zest for life as men have, and also the freedom of choice was bestowed on both man and woman in the garden of Eden by God without any discrimination.” (Jebastine 121) From this it is observed that gender discrimination is not God-made; it is man-made.

Feminism strives to bring about equality between genders. It voices against the inferior status of women in society. Usually, all the societies are patriarchal and it is believed that even all religions support or even promote patriarchy. So male dominance in any sphere is objected by women and they feel as they are capable of doing anything that men do they equal to men. Enjoying equal rights with men is women’s right and once they get it they will feel emancipated and empowered. According to Pelt “Feminism aims to establish, define and defend equal political, economic, and social rights for women around the world. In addition, feminism seeks to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment.” (1)

Devi describes the power that women are badly in need of as follows:

What is needed is power....the power of sacrifice and detachment, the power to liberate from the narrow confines of self-interest, the strength to tear apart the veil of false consciousness and to stand out in the splendour of one’s own dignity. Women need the ability to distinguish between pride and self-respect, freedom and self-will. (22)

Western society values independence more than interdependence. Even sometimes it is said that American society is matriarchal. Women in Western society enjoy enormous freedom unlike their counterparts in other societies. American constitution stresses the
importance of equality and liberty. In the early 20th century enormous social changes took place in America and women were given equal rights as a result of Women’s Liberation Movement. Tyson explains in her book *Critical theory Today: A User Friendly Guide* the many benefits women now enjoy in the United States of America as follows:

Before World War I, American women did not enjoy universal suffrage. In 1920, two years after the end of the war (and after seventy-two years of organized political agitation), they were finally given the vote. Before the war, standard dress for women included long skirts, tightly laced corsets, high-buttoned shoes, and long hair demurely swept up onto the head. A few years after the war, skirts became shorter (in some cases, much shorter), laced corsets began to disappear (indeed, the most bold and unconventional young women wore few, if any, restraining undergarments), modern footwear frequently replaced high-buttoned shoes, and “bobbed” hair (cut short and worn loosely) became the fashion for young women. Perhaps most alarming for proponents of the old ways, women’s behavior began to change. Women could now be seen smoking and drinking (despite Prohibi- tion), often in the company of men and without chaperones. They could also be seen enjoying the sometimes raucous nightlife offered at nightclubs and private parties. (121)

Any society can be considered civilized only women in that society are treated equally with men in their homes, workplaces, and everywhere. In the East, inclusive of India, women are given a secondary position in almost all walks of life, because Indian society is highly patriarchal. The gender roles assigned to women in Indian society are unjust, hard, inflexible and unchangeable. They are overburdened with their assigned roles and women alone are expected to be highly sacrificial, dedicated, responsible, and unselfish. Divakaruni points out the societal expectation of women as unselfish in the following lines: “Selflessness
is a great quality and it is the quality of the healer who gives love. Yet, within a social context where women are only expected to be selfless, it can become a big problem in a way of keeping women in control.” (7) Expecting only women to be unselfish is unjust. What is expected of a woman is unreasonable and sometimes even condemnable. As far as sharing of the tasks and responsibilities are concerned they should be shared equally and also according to the convenience of both of them. As physically women are weak owing to their psychological nature, that is, the physical burden they have to bear plus the burden of experiencing the pangs of giving birth to children, it is men who should labour physically more than women.

America, said to be a land of freedom, gives enormous freedom to women. Gender discrimination plays a very minor role in America. Independence of an individual is the lifeblood of every American. Individuality is respected and honored in American society and it is an individual’s freedom and happiness that is the prime concern of the nation.

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s novels and short stories one can notice absolute freedom that the American women as well as the first-generation and the second-generation Indian women immigrants enjoy in the foreign soil.

The first-generation immigrants are caught between the much practiced conventions of Indian patriarchal society and the new-found freedom in America. The first-generation Indian women immigrants find it very difficult to adjust to the new social conventions of free America. “Indian women must be either traditional or progressive, whereas the reality may be a healthy mixture of the two.” (Gupta 11-12) But the second-generation Indian women immigrants do not have any problem or face any problem with respect to the unlimited freedom that they enjoy in America, because they are born and bred in America, and since their birth they have been exposed to only this kind of life and freedom. This
unbridled freedom gives Indian women immigrants a sense of emancipation and empowerment. This fact is reiterated by Kulkarni in his article as follows:

Most of the women characters in Jhumpa Lahiri’s fictional works belong to the second generation immigrants…. The second generation younger women do not have identity crisis in a severe way because they are in a more accommodative world of America which has made immigration of the other country people, especially South Asian people like Indians, more liberal and less racial…. Though their parents support them financially to a greater length as in India, they are free to make the choices of their career and education. Most of them end up with high class degrees in literature, history, law schools and love to do the teaching in Universities. (148)

Most of the women characters in Jhumpa Lahiri’s fictional works are the first and the second-generation immigrants. In the case of the first-generation immigrants the women or their husbands migrate as employees or students of higher education and later they are employed there itself and thus they settle down with green cards. The characters such as Ashima in the novel The Namesake, Gauri in the novel The Lowland belong to the first-generation. Mrs. Parul Choudhari in “Once in a Lifetime,” and Mrs. Meenakshi Bagchi in the story “Unaccustomed Earth” belong to the second-generation.

In the novel, The Lowland, Gauri is doing a degree in Philosophy at presidency. As her parents are no more she is with her brother Manash. Manash has befriended Udayan at Calcutta University. Udayan and Gauri fall in love with each other and they get married against the wishes of Udayan’s parents. Udayan involves in politics and later joins the Naxalbari movement. Udayan is killed by the police before his wife Gauri and his parents.
Gauri describes the incident briefly to Udayan’s brother Subhash who is doing his Ph.D in the United States of America.

On the eleventh day at the end of the mourning period, Gauri’s in-laws give a white sari to her to wear in place of colour saris. Subhash’s parents do not like to be with Gauri and they need only Udayan’s child. Subhash decides to marry Gauri. Subhash has convinced her by telling the obvious facts like, no one in America knows about the movement, no one will bother her and she can go on with her studies as she wishes, and it will be an opportunity to begin her life again. Gauri decides to marry him not because of love she feels for him but this chance offers an alternative for her and also it will help her pursue her academic interests. She pursues Ph. D in psychology. And at one point she has enough money to lead a separate life in California. She works in a college in California and her job is not only to teach students but also to mentor them. She is expected to be approachable. This obligation to be open to others and to forge alliances with others has in the beginning brought an unexpected strain. But she is quite successful with her colleagues and students. Though her husband’s death gives her a lot of pain, the American society gives her hope and makes her lead an independent and bold life.

Likewise, in the title story “Unaccustomed Earth,” Meenakshi has been driven by different dreams when she enters America. She wishes to escape from the tyrannical world of blind customs and superstitions of her homeland, and so she goes to America to enjoy freedom and independence. She escapes from India for the fear of being forced by her parents to remarry, after her beloved husband’s death. She receives a doctorate in statistics; she becomes a lecturer at a university, and she leads an independent life as she wishes. The following lines in “Unaccustomed Earth” make this point clear:

She had married a boy she’d loved since girlhood, but after two years of marriage he was killed in a scooter accident. At twenty-six she moved to
America, knowing that otherwise her parents would try to marry her off again. She lived on long Island, an anomaly, an Indian woman living along. She had completed her doctorate in statistics and taught since the seventies at Stony brook University, and in over thirty years she had gone back to Calcutta only to attend her parents’ funerals. (89)

In the novel *The Namesake*, the character Ashima leaves the tradition-bound life in Kolkata, and settles in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Ashoke, Ashima’s husband, does his engineering then Ph.D. and then finds a job in a University. Ashima tries to adapt herself to the new spatial and cultural setting. Since her landing in America, Ashima endures both Boston’s harsh winter and cultural isolation. Ashima feels out of place ever since she arrives in Cambridge. She does not have any professional skills. She comes along with her husband to the United States of America only to perform her role as a good housewife.

In the early days of the couple’s stay in the new land, Ashima has to live in an apartment alone for the whole day. As Ashoke remains busy in the university, she has to bear the pangs of solitude more than that of her husband. By that time she realises that Americans “In spite of their public declarations of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other on the Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy.” (3)

Gradually, Ashima learns to cope but, nonetheless, her diasporic translocation makes her difficult to adapt to a totally new set of circumstances and surroundings. Ashima’s grandmother believes that Ashima will never show any sign of betrayal, that is, she will not change herself even after living in a different culture. Her grandmother’s thinking is right. Ashima’s life in America, of course, brings certain changes in her, but not with regard to her ethical and cultural mores. She learns to adapt to the culture, food habits, and festivals of the
United States of America for the sake of her children, but she herself sticks to Indian cultural heritage.

At the age of forty she takes a job at a public library and makes American friends. When Ashoke leaves for a university near Cleveland, she decides to stay back so that she can continue her work, asserting her independence for the first time. Later, she gets adapted to the foreign culture slowly. Ashima prepares her favorite Indian food in the beginning of the novel and prepares a Christmas cake at the end of the novel.

A few characters who belong to the second-generation are Shoba in the story “A Temporary Matter,” Mrs. Mina Das in “Interpreter of Maladies,” Twinkle in “This Blessed House,” Ruma in “Unaccustomed Earth,” Megan in “A Choice of Accommodations,” Sangeeta in “Nobody’s Business” Hema “Going Ashore” and Sonia and Moshami in the novel The Namesake. The second-generation young women do not have identity crisis in the new world; their identity merges with American identity because they are born there and they also study there and also they have many American friends, and they will be also there in the future.

Though their parents support them financially to a greater extent as in India, they have enormous freedom to choose their career and education. Most of them obtain high class degrees in literature, history, and law, and they love to work in the new world. Shoba, in the short story “A Temporary Matter,” works as a typographer in a publishing house, Ruma in the short story “Unaccustomed Earth,” works as an assistant in a law firm as paralegal, and Moushami in the novel The Namesake, Twinkle in the short story “This Blessed House,” and Hema in “Only Goodness,” work as lecturers in the Universities.

In the novel The Namesake, Moushami has majored in Chemistry by her parents’ insistence and without their knowledge she pursues double major in French. Moushami
reinvents herself, without misgivings, and without guilt. While teaching French at NYU she feels flattered when her students assume her to be a French lady: “She enjoys their looks of disbelief when she tells them that she grew up in New Jersey, born to Bengali Parents” (253)

As a research scholar Moushumi has travelled through Asia, Latin America, American continent, and Europe, and has acquired a wide cultural perspective.

In “A Temporary Matter,” the opening lines speak of the impending power cut. Shoba and Shukumar, the Indian immigrants, come to know in advance about the power failure through a notice. And this helps them plan things beforehand. This is one of the advantages of the American system. Usually, the interests of the people are put first and so there exists a good system of governance.

After the rift between Shoba and Shukumar in consequence of the death of their child, there in a reversal of role with respect to cooking, that is, Shukumar starts cooking. Shoba who was interested in cooking and doing the cooking once avoids going into kitchen and cooking. As she has lost interest in life for a brief period, this change has happened in her. This has resulted in Shukumar taking the responsibility of his wife, that is, of a cook and it is said in the story that “Shukumar enjoyed cooking now.” (7) In India, in houses it is women who cook whereas in the West both, the husband and the wife, take to cooking and it is not gender-specific.

The pursuit of higher education in the United States of America, good employment opportunities it provides, the harmonious married life with the partners from the West, and the empowerment of women offer are some of the exhilaration experience of the immigrants.