A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Novels

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most eminent Indo-American writers. She is one among the diasporic writers, carries with her the strikingly fresh Indian sensibility abroad and lets it out through her fiction in an impressive form. Since she herself is the child of immigration and multiculturalism, she could portray the characters both in the light of native and alien culture. Deeply felt by the importance of family relationship and attachment with the relatives in the home country, Jhumpa Lahiri has experienced the trauma of failing to find her identity in the new land where she could never have a sense of belonging. Though these displaced realities and self-imposed exile are in many ways a calamity, this existence acts as a stimulus and enables Jhumpa Lahiri to excel in fiction writing. As a popular young writer of Indian background, she is a sort of representative figure for the female predicament in Diaspora. She explores the ideas of cultural and personal isolations and identities.

She was born on 11 July 1967 to a Bengali immigrant family in London. When she was only three years old, her parents moved to the United States from England. In addition, she grew up in South Kingstown, Rhode Island where her father had been working as a university librarian. Her mother has worked as a schoolteacher. She has a younger sister who has gone on to acquire a Ph. D. in History. She learned about her Bengali heritage at an early age, travelling regularly to Kolkata, spending considerable time with her extended family. When she began kindergarten in Kingston, her father enrolled her name as
Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri. But Lahiri’s teacher decided to call her by her pet name, “Jhumpa” because it was easier to pronounce than her name. Lahiri excelled in school. She is a graduate of Barnard College, (affiliated to Columbia University) in 1989 where she received a B.A. in English literature and at Boston University, she received an M.A. in English, M.F.A. in creative writing, M.A. in comparative literature and the arts, and Ph.D. in Renaissance studies. She received a two-year fellowship at Provincetown’s Fine Arts Work Centre. In 2001, Lahiri married Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush, a journalist, who was then a Deputy Editor of *Time*, an American weekly news magazine. Lahiri, after a contented life in Brooklyn, New York, has shifted her residence to Italy where she wants to explore more about the human characteristics in a new atmosphere. She has been living in Rome for a year with her husband and their two children, Octavio born in 2002 and Noor born in 2005.

Lahiri also taught Creative Writing at Boston University and the Rhode Island School of Design for a short period. She was a keen writer already at the age of seven. While working on her doctoral thesis, Lahiri was associated with Boston Magazine as an intern in 1997 and was reportedly given little trust ‘as a real writer’. After the release of her first book, she began to receive awards.

During her prolonged stay at Boston University, Lahiri worked seriously on short stories. Her stories already began to appear in places like *The New Yorker, The Harvard Review, The Louisville Review, AGNI, Salamander*, and *Story Quarterly*. As many as nine stories, three of which already appeared in *The New Yorker*, the year before,
comprising her first book *Interpreter of Maladies* published in 1999, which immediately received plenty of accolades: the **PEN/Hemingway Award** for the Best Fiction Debut of the Year, the **Transatlantic Review Award** from Henfield Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, the **0’ Henry Award** for Best American Short Stories etc.

In 2000, Lahiri was awarded the prestigious **Pulitzer Prize** for Fiction *Interpreter of Maladies*. It has already been translated into at least twenty nine languages all over the globe including Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Italian, Dutch, Danish and Japanese.

*The Namesake* (2003): It is Lahiri’s much anticipated first novel. Like her short stories the novel too received huge critical attention, and was selected as one of the best books of the year by USA Today and Entertainment Weekly. Besides, it was a New York Times notable book, a Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist. Eventually the novel was also adapted into a film by Mira Nair bearing the same name. The film, starring both Bollywood and Hollywood artists, was released in March 2007. This novel describes the cultural dilemmas and displacement of Indian people. In their attempt to settle in a foreign land, the immigrant face many challenges, the main difficulties for them to reconcile the native cultural practices with the foreign cultural practices, upbringing of their children and make oneself compatible according to global requirements.

The Lowland, published in 2013, was shortlisted novel for the Man Booker Prize and was in the final list of the National Book Award for Fiction. It is slightly different from the previous publications. It talks much about immigrant issues, withstands the whirlwind of political chaos and family ties.

Lahiri writes in American English with Indian flavour. The American literary world celebrates her as an American author. She has been appointed by the US President, Barack Obama, as a member of the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

Jhumpa Lahiri in her works, Interpreter of Maladies, The Namesake, Unaccustomed Earth and The Lowland, travels through her antagonized experiences of an Indian woman across the world. She finds out the complex cultural encounter and shifts along with emotional imbalance and relationship between parents and children, lovers, siblings, husband and wife and determination of identity in general. As a Diaspora writer, she deals with a multicultural society both from ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, seeking to find her native identity as well as the new identity in the adopted country. She also dwells on ‘acculturation’ and ‘contra-acculturation, which is experienced by the second generation Indian-Americans. Jhumpa Lahiri shows how this second generation is able to get acculturate in the new country, embracing its socio-cultural values, at the same time experience a sense of nostalgia for the Indian culture and sensibilities, experiencing alienation and up rootedness. “...displacement, adhere to their native culture, attempt to integrate themselves into their adopted homeland, and suffer tensions over moral and emotional issues.”
Globalisation is leading for world to a new social and cultural pattern. It has largely influenced every new work that is being produced by the diasporic writers. Jhumpa Lahiri intends to foreground this newness of women’s identity caught in the dichotomies of acculturation and dissociation. She reveals the different aspects of diasporic experiences and how these experiences further diverge into preservation and appropriation under the sway of globalization, which is a challenge to cultures, to marginalized communities and their identities. She reveals the main thrust that globalization has contradictory influences on the migrants – preservative for the expatriates and appropriative for the immigrants.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s feminist approach is somewhat different from the other diasporic writers. She represents the different image of Indian woman and her marginalization in cultural context. Her female characters are not subjected to any economic exploitation by the patriarchy. Most of the women characters in her works belong to diasporic communities facing cultural dilemma. She presents the ramifications of patriarchy on the lives of Indian women. The psychological trauma of a woman is attributed to Indian patriarchal notion of marriage. Their individuality is snatched by neglecting their emotions. she says;

When I first started writing, I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life.²
Lahiri debunks the notion that western culture is universally acceptable and applicable. She shows the incompatibility of western culture. In her novels the immigrant women of the first generation of diaspora are in constant search of their identity and behave as if they are thrown into an incongruous universe. Their lives are not governed by any divine agency. In her works feminine identity is affected more than masculine identity by culture because of women’s strong cultural ties to the land of their ancestors. The second generation creates a different identity which has to be understood on the basis of their psychological assessment. Second generation female immigrants do not deem India as their home. Their vision of America is contrary to the first generation. The first generation immigrants become isolated in the alien land and culture. Lahiri presents the divided psyche of women torn between two cultures. She suggests that expatriates have created a third space.

Her works portray male and female characters and the impact the diaspora space has on these subjects and their relationships. It shows how the gender barriers in Lahiri’s fiction are more fluid as it represents both men and women as having different, but still significant, concerns about their roles in the new space, in which cultural diversity is an element that triggers the identity reconfiguration of the subjects. She presents the different aspects of feminine identity. She exemplifies women’s conformist attitude to the patriarchy. She exposes the patriarchal niche of woman as a preserver of indigenous culture. The first generation immigrant women in Jhumpa Lahiri’s works are often subjected to patriarchal marginalization.
Throughout the novels Jhumpa Lahiri tries to depict the predicament of women. She tries to focus on the parental and marital relations. She seeks to expose the traditions by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novels reveal uneasiness and the adverse condition of the diasporic modern Indian women in the manmade patriarchal traditions.

Lahiri has deep instinctive insight into women’s problems and dilemmas which helps her drawing a realistic portrait of a contemporary woman. She explores and interprets the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with sympathetic understanding. The female protagonists in her novels are in constant search for meaning and value of their life. Jhumpa Lahiri traces a woman’s journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization, from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation.

The feminine consciousness is felt in all her novels. She offers us a glimpse into the lives of ostensibly content housewives who are nevertheless suppressed under the weight of male dominance. Her protagonists are stronger than her contemporary writers. They refuse to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of upholding the traditional role. Models laid down by society for women but they attempt to resolve their problems indication of new women and liberated emancipated new women. They, through their rebellion achieve liberation and emancipation.

She not only presents a feminist insight into patriarchal values, but also prescribes a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. She portrays the psyche of the
middle-class Indian women who feel oppressed and hemmed in by their patriarchal socialization. To her, traditions are the values of harmony and coexistence that symbolize the Indian way of life, and modernity is the assertion of the independent, individual identity. After having passively played out their socially ordained roles, her protagonists move out of their cloistered shelves to assert their individuality as human beings.

Jhumpa Lahiri feels that a woman must be true to her own self if she wants to realize herself. The straitjacketed role imposed on woman only bogs her down in mire of negation and suppression. She must venture out of the familial framework to give full expression of her individuality and identity. Her novels reveal her artistic vision of femininity. She delineates her women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations. They are aware of their strengths and limitations, but find themselves thwarted by the opposition and pressure from a society conditioned overwhelmingly by the patriarchal mind-set. They are concerned with quest for an authentic selfhood and an understanding of the existential problems of life. She reveals a remarkable insight into a woman’s psyche by representing woman in different roles: daughter, wife, mother and an individual who seeks her gender identity. She contributes by depicting the problems and plights, trials and tribulations of the middle class women of Indian society. She does not give her female protagonists a readymade solution for their problems, but develops a faith in hope so that they can change their circumstances from despair to hope through a route of self-searching and self-examination, through valour and resilience.
Lahiri explores the cross-cultural experiences of dislocated women and the possible condition of belonging simultaneously-psychologically and experientially - in the maze of cultural plurality. The issues of identity and cultural clashes have already been vastly explored in her novels. She analyses the issue of cultural encounter specifically from the perspective of women’s identity and her approach to this issue is via feminist literary theory but it is natural.

When I first started writing, I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life.\(^3\)

In this connection, Himadri Lahiri also points out:

“Expatriate on the other hand, is a sort of static state; it is a refusal to become amalgamated into the new society. An expatriate considers his or her stay in the new country as a temporary matter and looks back to the “home” country for emotional sustenance. Both Ashoke and Ashima at the moment are therefore not in a position of ‘exuberance’.”\(^4\)

The image of woman in Indo-American novel is based on the traditional ancient literature of India, which shows woman as a devoted wife or a devoted mother. Traditionally Indian women have been treated as marginalized figures. They are represented as a spineless, wooden creature, subjected to male domination. The laws of Manu dictated the position of women in the family and society. Women were never allowed to be independent and had to spend life under the authority of a
man. The sublimation and suppression of natural desires and aspirations creates a deep struggle in women. The society which praises and adores the classic legends or epic like Kannagi, Savitri, Sita, Draupadi, and so on, does not give a necessary respect to womanhood. In reality, a woman is always adopted as a daughter, sister, mother, and wife. She is not viewed as an individual or human being.

One is not born; but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.\(^5\)

The postcolonial writers of Indo-American novels equipped with a new education and sociability have different perspective of the image of woman. In the era of globalization liberal thought was brought all over the world and it was propagated by western education and culture. The woman novelists were responsible for the new image of woman struggling against the oppressive social norms of the western society. In this respect There occurred changes in theme, emphasis and design in the literature of women novelists like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherji, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri. They made straight journey into the psyche of a woman who was torn on account of the tensions generated by the discord between an individual and the surroundings. They have started trying to understand Indian women and portray the female characters in their novels. The image of the woman in the fiction is a crystallized form of the two different cultures. They portrayed the image of woman as a custodian of extraordinary moral
virtues incorporated with devotion and sacrifice. In the works of feminist writers, women protagonists demonstrate the changing facets of womanhood. They face a conflict between personal desires and social expectations. They question and challenge traditional male oriented norms and codes. They are conscious of the great social inequalities and injustice towards them. They seek to assert their independent identities by bringing forth their suppressed talents. They revolt against their marginalization and question the sexual politics and gender imbalance in the society.

Between patriarchy and imperialism subject constitution and object formation the figure of a woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘Third World Woman’ caught between tradition and modernization.  

Sexual difference has traditionally been represented by binary opposition; it is assigned to men and women because of biological differences. Gender, however, is a social and cultural constructed thought in terms of what a certain society determines as being masculine or feminine. Judith Gardiner explains:

Varied theories developed to explain the causes of male dominance, to correct a erroneous assumption about both women and men... These theories charged that cultural ideologies favored men that social institutions reflected these ideologies and men as a group benefited from the subordination of women as a group.
The ‘new woman’ is free from conventional social and moral constraints. She possesses a heightened sense of individuality and self awareness. She is middle class or upper middle class, well educated and self conscious caught in dilemma. She struggles for fulfillment of her individuality. The modern new woman challenges the injustice and demands redress.

Jhumpa Lahiri writes about the situation of women and their success and failure in the fast changing socio-cultural milieu of diasporas. Through her protagonist, she highlights that the women are the victims of gender discrimination as a girl child, wife and mother from male as well as from their female counterpart. They are trapped between tradition and modernity. She presents a social and the tradition bound world consists of the modern world. Women have been tutored right from the day they had the glimpses of this world, to follow unquestioningly and relentlessly the ideal of the patriarchal set-up of the family. The woman has been asked to put up all sorts of repressions and suppressions in the name of family honor and for the good name of the children. Women’s sexuality, her experience of pain, pleasure, love or sorrow, desire or respect were matters which were routinely ignored. Jhumpa Lahiri highlights their inferior position and the subsequent degradation in a culturally dominated society. Lahiri, being the second generation immigrant herself states;

She faces a greater problem–with fixity in space hardly possible, and an identity which seems elusive, with attempts to transcend marginalization by bridging the gap between the centre and margin.
The Namesake (2003)

*The Namesake* is essentially a story of two generations of Bengalis in the United States. In this novel, Lahiri introduces Bengali upper-caste people and their specific culture and rituals. Her novel brings out the bewildering and complicated voyage that emigrant families make in order to have a better life in a land that promises abundant openings. Bengalis in this novel are apparently a close-knit ethnic group, but still far from being assimilated into the general current of life around them.

In the early 1960s Ashoke Ganguli came to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a graduate student in engineering. After a two-year stay in America, Ashoke returns to Kolkata for an arranged marriage with a nineteen-year-old Bengali girl Ashima Bhaduri. The marriage of Ashima and Ashoke was arranged by their families, and the couple’s idea and experience of marriage and love were defined by the cultural norms back home. The closest intimacy they share prior to their wedding is when Ashima steps briefly, secretly, into Ashoke’s shoes before she would meet her would be in-laws in the drawing room of her house.

Leaving their tradition-bound life in Kolkata, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli settle in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Ashoke does his best to adapt while his wife pines for home.

Ashima tries to adapt herself to new spatial and cultural setting. Since her landing in America, Ashima endures both Boston’s harsh winter and cultural isolation.

*The Namesake* opens with the pregnant Ashima trying to make a spicy Bengali snack from American ingredients.
Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion to which she adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chilli pepper - a humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks but as usual, there’s something missing. [TNS:1]

Jhumpa Lahiri points out that Ashima feels out of place ever since she arrives in Cambridge. She does not have any professional skill. She comes along with her husband in U.S.A. only to perform her role as a good housewife.

While Ashoke spends most of the time in the campus of University, she remains alone in their three room apartment which is too hot in summer and too cold in the winter. She avoids going outside because she does not like American culture. All these things create a sense of homesickness in her mind. She is emotionally and spatially dislocated from her real home. Physically, she lives in America but psychologically she remains in Kolkata and constantly thinks about her family and wants to join them in India.

Most of the time she rereads her parents’ letters and Bengali short stories, poems and articles from the Bengali Magazines. She carries along it with her from Kolkata. She is pregnant and to become mother in a foreign land is quite unacceptable for her. Lahiri beautifully portrays the in-between situation of Ashima in the foreign land in these lines:

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy a perpetual wait, a constant burden, continuous feeling out or sorts. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same
curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. [TNS:3]

Thus, in her state of pregnancy Ashima is seen satisfying her Kolkata taste with this strange hybrid of American cereal and chillies. She would spend the rest of her life making more such accommodations. Many times she realizes that her previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Jhumpa Lahiri delineates the Indian woman, the member of the first generation diaspora cherish and retain memories of her homeland and eagerly wait for the moment of their actual visit to the country. She is nostalgic and tries to keep the bond alive through visits, observing rituals and seeking repose and consolation in the letters they receive from homes.

Ashima is expecting her baby in a couple of weeks. She is hospitalized and wonders if she is the only Indian in the hospital; had it been in Kolkata, there would have been plenty of relatives to stand by her, she reflects sadly. When she was boarding the plane for the States, there were twenty-six members of her family in Dum Dum airport to bid her farewell. Now there is just a dry obstetrician Dr. Ashley who assures her- mechanically- that everything is normal. Nothing however feels normal to Ashima. Jhumpa Lahiri tries to convey the feeling of typical Indian housewife about her insecurity and longings for her relatives who always take care in such critical situation.

Before leaving the hospital after delivery, the hospital administration demands a name for the baby, to be entered in the birth certificate as it is a practice in American hospitals. On the contrary, in India, a baby gets an official name mostly when he or she enters school.
Till then the baby is known by its pet name for years to pass. Ashima’s
grandmother’s letter containing the baby name did not received so it
becomes inevitable for Ashoke and Ashima to decide on a name for the
baby to be discharged from the hospital in Cambridge. Ashoke names
the child **Gogol** after the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. Ashima too
approves of this name as it is closely associated with the life of Ashoke.

In the early days of the Couple’s stay in the new land Ashima has
to live in the 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 realise 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. [TNS:3]

Ashima, despite all her efforts to settle to a new way of life, feels
homesick, uprooted, and therefore resorts to a world of nostalgia.

On more than one occasion, Ashoke has come
home from university to find her morose, napping
and sulking in bed, rereading her parents’ letters
and the same five Bengali novels. She cries after
the mailman’s visit because “there are no letters
from Calcutta. [TNS: 34]

Once a year she dumps the letters onto her bed and goes through
them, devoting an entire day to her parents’ words, allowing herself a
good cry. She revisits their affection and concern, conveyed weekly,
faithfully across continents- all the bits of news that has nothing to do
with her life in Cambridge but which have sustained her in those days nevertheless. Ashima preserves dearly

A tattered copy of Deshi magazine that she brought to read on her plane ride to Boston and still cannot bring herself to throw away. The ed pages of Bengali type, slightly rough to the touch, are a perpetual comfort to her. She’s read each of the short stories and poems and articles a dozen times. [TNS: 6]

Lahiri in her novel projects a young Bengali girl’s fear, apprehension and helplessness at the unfamiliarity of everything around her, at the thought of motherhood and rearing children in an unknown land far away-from home. Being alone, Ashima spends a lot of her time crying, depressed at the lack of company, at the distance from her family: “I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not right. I want to go back”. [NS: 33] Ashima views the new world around her differently from her husband and children. She arrives in the US as a traditional obedient and dutiful Bengali wife, asking no questions and without an opinion of her own. She views the land with trepidation, disinclined to make it her home:

For the past eighteen months, ever since she’s arrived in the Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all. It’s not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow she will survive. It’s the consequence; motherhood in a foreign land . . . That it is happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved ... she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems to be so tentative and spare. [TNS: 5-6]
Gradually, Ashima learns to cope but, nonetheless, her life, her diasporic translocation remains a continuous struggle to adapt to a totally new set of circumstances and surroundings. Ashima’s grandmother believed that Ashima would never show any signs of betrayal meaning that: “She will not change even after living in a different culture”. [TNS: 37] The grandmother was right. Ashima’s life in America of course brings certain changes in her, but not with regard to her ethical and cultural mores; while she learns to adapt in the United States, she sticks to her cultural heritage.

Though Ashima continues to wear nothing but saris and sandals from Bata, Ashoke, accustomed to wearing tailor made pants and shirts all his life, learns to buy ready a tenured full professor, he stops wearing jackets and ties to the university. [TNS: 65]

And it is not until she is over forty that she takes a job at a public library and makes American friends. When Ashoke leaves for semesters to a university near Cleveland, she decides to stay back so that she can continue her work, asserting her independence for the first time. Certain aspects of American attitude are still confusing to Ashima. In India, the burial grounds or cemeteries are considered to be the most haunted and forbidden places whereas in America these places are of cultural importance. Out of disgust to such culture, Ashima says:

Only in America (a phrase she has begun to resort to often these days), only in America are children taken to cemeteries in the name of art. What is next she demands to know, a trip to the morgue/in Calcutta the burning Ghats are the most forbidden
of places, she tells Gogol, and though she tries her
best not to, though she was here, bodies,
swallowed by flames. [TNS : 70]

In order to safeguard her culture in the alien land, Ashima as the
first generation immigrants educate her children in the native language,
literature and history and guide them about their religious customs,
traditions, beliefs, food habits, and social etiquettes. In the novel,
Ashima teaches Gogol to memorize poems by ‘Tagore’ and the names of
gods who embellish the ten-handed Durga. She also drives to Cambridge
with her husband and children when Apu Trilogy plays at the Orson
Welles, or when there is a Kathakali dance performance or a sitar recital
at Memorial Hall. When Gogol is in the third grade, they send him to
Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday, held in the
home of one of their friends.

In Bengali class Gogol is taught to read and write
his "ancestral alphabet" and also reads handouts
written in English about the Bengali Renaissance,
and the revolutionary exploits of Subhash Chandra
Bose. The children in the class, however, study
"without interest, wishing they could be at a ballet
or softball practice instead. [TNS: 66]

It is a difficult task for the first generation immigrants, how to
raise their children? Either by Indian way or American way, Ashima is
well aware about this problem and brings up Gogol according to Indian
and American cultures:

She teaches him to memorize a four-line
children’s poem by Tagore, and the name of the
deities adoring the ten-handed goddess Durga
during puja.... Every afternoon Ashima sleeps, but before nodding off she switches the television to Channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch Sesame Street and the Electric Company, in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school. [TNS: 55]

Lahiri tell us that though Ashima is rigid in her conventions but it is for their children’s happiness, she learns and makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef for the children. She celebrates the American’s festivals including Christmas and Thanksgiving. Long years of stay in the foreign land, makes her to understand and celebrate these festivals.

Most of the toys of her baby boy Gogol come from yard sales as do their furniture, curtains, toaster and the like. At first Ashima is reluctant to introduce such items into her home, ashamed at the thought of buying what had originally belonged to strangers, American strangers at that. But Ashoke points out that even his chairman shops at yard sales that in spite of living in a mansion an American is not above wearing a pair of second hand pants, bought for fifty cents. [TNS: 52]

Jhumpa Lahiri introduces American girl Maxine, who is culturally different from the Indian woman. First time Gogol meets her in a party, she is very attractive and outgoing girl. Gogol begins a relationship with her. Maxine’s parents are financially well off and live in a four-storey house in New York City, with one floor occupied entirely by Maxine. Gogol moves in with her, and becomes an accepted member of her family. When Maxine’s parents visit her grandparents in the mountains
of New Hampshire for the summer, they invite Maxine and Gogol to join them for a couple of weeks.

Lahiri juxtaposes two domestic spaces of love and sexuality – that of Ashoke’s house and that of Maxine’s parents – to indicate how two different cultures object and appreciate love and sexuality on different moral grounds. In contrast to the apprehension of Ashoke and Ashima, Maxine’s parents Gerald and Lydia, allow Gogol to sleep with her at their home. Maxine, too, is quite open about her past love affairs. She confesses her affairs with her ex boyfriends to Gogol. The Indian moralist in Gogol interprets Maxine’s confession as her flirtatious nature. ‘Smita Mohanty’ interprets Gogol’s situation in terms of a double consciousness of being caught between Indian morality and Western liberalism:

In the inter-civilization cultural alliance and marriage of true minds this is not preferred. This becomes a foil while each one accuses the other a cultural limbo in their uncelebrated love through the over valorization of own culture that reminds us the Forsterian forecast that the east and west shall never meet together in their extra-territorial condition and ‘double consciousness.’ Indian psyche prefers purity and sanctity in culture which establishes their identity in post-national ethics.9

Lahiri highlights cultural differences between two women Ashima and Maxine. In American culture they feel nothing wrong in kissing before parents to a beloved, drinking wine with lunch or sleeping with a boy friend before marriage. But it is taken seriously in the Indian family. It is an act of sin for a virgin girl.
Ashima as a typical Indian woman, become nervous to receive her son’s white girlfriend:

..... Gogol had brought Maxine to the house, Ashima doesn’t want her for a daughter-in-law. She’d been startled that Maxine had addressed her as Ashima, and her husband as Ashoke. And yet Gogol has been dating her for over a year now. By now Ashima knows that Gogol spends his nights with Maxine, sleeping under the same roof of her parents, a thing Ashima refuses to admit to her Bengali friends. [TNS: 93]

We sense significant change in the personality of Ashima. Initially, Ashima dislikes Gogol’s affair with Maxine, she dislikes the way Maxine hugs Nikhil in front of her and dislikes Maxine for addressing her by her name. But in the end, Ashima reconciles with all these manners and discerns that Maxine loves Gogol and for Gogol’s sake she likes these manners and behaviors. Difference in the life styles and culture bring disaster to every character in the novel. Not only Indian people suffer because of different cultures but also native people come under its sway. For Gogol’s family the death of Ashoke is the unforgettable sad moment in their life the but for Maxine it does not make any difference in her life. Maxine has no serious concern for Ashoke’s death rather she enthusiastically attaches with the prospect of future planning of fun-making. It clearly shows that Maxine world remains same but for Gogol’s family everything has changed. Cultural difference is one of the reasons that are why Gogol and Maxine end their relationship without any earlier conflict in their life. However, and not unexpectedly, Gogol’s affair with this Manhattan girl, Maxine ends abruptly.
Ashima wants Gogol to marry with a girl of Indian origin. She suggests Gogol to contact Moushumi, the daughter of one of her friends. She tries to make an attempt to renew their relationship with the Mazoomdar family. She wishes to renew the links with their motherland. Gogol knew Moushumi when they were children. Gogol is reluctant to meet with Moushumi because she is Bengali. Moushumi is always warned by her parents not to get involved with American boys, but she is determined not to allow her parents to have a hand in her marriage. By the time she was twelve she makes a pact, with two other Bengali girls she knew, never to marry a Bengali man. In her past, as a teenager she had rejects a series of Indian men,

She had rebuffed the Indian men she wasn’t interested in… In college she had harboured lengthy infatuations, with students…, with professors and TAs. In her mind, she would have relationships with these men. [TNS: 213-214]

Unlike her mothers’ generation, Moushumi wants to feel that she is capable of being on her own even after marriage.

This assurance is important to her; along with the Sanskrit vows she’d repeated at her wedding, she’d privately vowed she’d never grow fully dependent on her husband, like her mother who could not stand on her own even after thirty-two years abroad, though she is a perfectly intelligent woman - an honours student in philology at Presidency College before she was married off at twenty two. [TNS: 247]

At Brown, her rebellion has been more of an academic nature. At her parents’ insistence, she has majored in chemistry, but without telling
them, she has pursued alongside a double major in French. As the narrator describes,

Immersing herself in a third language, a third culture, had been her refuge - unlike things American and Indian, she approached French without guilt, or misgiving, or expectation of any kind. It was easier to turn her back on the two countries that could claim her in favor of one that had no claim whatsoever. [TNS: 214]

Moushumi thus reinvents herself, without misgivings, without guilt. While teaching French at NYU she feels flattered when her students assume her to be French/half-French:

She enjoys their looks of disbelief when she tells them that she grew up in New Jersey, born to Bengali parents ... It’s the only thing about her parents’ lives she truly admires - their ability, for better or for worse, to turn their back on their homes [TNS: 253-54]

After the break up the wedding with Graham, Moushumi and Gogol are attracted to one another and eventually married. However, by the end of their first year of marriage, Moushumi becomes restless. She feels tied down by marriage and begins to regret it. Their relation proves to be a mismatch because Gogol is too ordinary a person for a research scholar like Moushumi who has travelled through Asia, Latin America, the American continent and Europe and has acquired a wide cultural perspective. The irony of the situation is that even while their families try to prevent mongrelization of their tradition, both Gogol and Moushumi have transgressed the ethical boundaries of love and sex. Both have experienced sex before their marriage. Gogol feels like a poor
substitute for Graham. Eventually, Moushumi has an affair with Dimitri, an old acquaintance, the revelation of which leads to the end of their marriage. This arranged marriage, based on the principles and moral values of India, fail in the context of America. Gogol’s experiences with American girls make him develop distaste for Indian girls. Similar is Moushumi’s case,

From earliest girlhood, she says, she had been determined not to allow her parent to have a hand in her marriage. She had always been admonished, never to marry a Bengali man. [TNS: 212-13]

Thus, Moushumi’s notion of life partner and sexual relationship are conditioned by her aversion for Indian men and a fetish for White men. Lahiri also presents Moushumi’s psychedelic affair with Dimitri for pure lust and its effects on her in the form of moral sickness. Her open narration of her unforgivable affairs before Gogol leaves him in utter humiliation. It is the residual Indian patriarchal self that prevents Gogol from accepting Moushumi with her past. At a psychological level, Moushumi’s confessions too could be questioned for their purpose. Her confessions also reveal her obsession with alternate and at times, pervert sexuality.

Ashima does not seem to refuse to perform any of the roles she was taught. Although she seems downhearted in the beginning, when she writes home she includes in her letter only the positive aspects of her life abroad, which illustrates how resilient she is as a wife and daughter. As a mother, she does everything she can to teach her children the Indian culture, but as they grow up, she seems to understand that she has to accept the fact that they do not feel the same attachment to her home
culture and that they are both Indian and American. Ashima cooks mostly Indian food, only making exceptions every once in a while to her children when they start asking her for specific American dishes. She only dresses saris, and only stops wearing vermilion in her hair when Ashoke dies. She only makes American friends at her job in the library, as she and Ashoke surround themselves of Bengali friends during most of their time in the United States. Thus, although she seems to accept the changes she notices in her children over the years, she is mostly faithful to her culture, even after Ashoke’s death.

**Unaccustomed Earth (2008)**

The novel focuses on the Indian immigrants and the ways in which they shuttle between cultural milieus, developing capabilities to negotiate alien world. Lahiri also deals with the cultural division between American-born Indian children and their Bengali parents in this novel. This is the second collection of eight short stories grouped in two sections.

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, Jhumpa Lahiri illustrated the different stories of desperate housewives and their miserable conditions. Every short story delineates the female predicament in the alien county. Longing for own culture and homesickness is the common feature among the stories in this novel. Most of the Indian women of first generations do not have any working career outside of the home, either as students or as working professionals. They feel lonely at home. They are expected to cook, clean and otherwise care for their husbands and children. Their success lies in the careers of their husbands and the extent to which their children excel. Many of these female first
generation immigrants seem to turn into desperate housewives and detest suburban American life. Being suburban stay-at-home-mother seems to equal an unhappy and isolated existence. Professor Robert Gnanamony considers that:

Lahiri’s stories do documents the characters’ trauma of cultural displacement and the feeling of cultural nostalgia. But there is no ill will and malice against the host country and no clash between Indianness and Americanness unlike her fellow litterateurs. This is not to deny that her stories are also documentation of exiled souls chained in muted boundaries of space and time.

(104) Professor Robert Gnanamony.  

Jhumpa Lahiri has pronounced the desperateness in *Unaccustomed Earth*. She indicates that a major source of the unhappiness and loneliness that the women characters feel is due to their lack of an independent career. When their children begin school and later move out, they are left to their own devices for most of the day, and do not have much to do except prepare the family’s evening meal and watch soap operas, daily rituals that do not fulfil them. Their feelings trapped and loveless marriage lead the wives to attempt suicide. They do not have any other source of employment than housework. At one point when the wife complains about the loneliness of living in the suburbs, her husband merely suggests that she go back to Kolkata.

*Unaccustomed Earth* primarily deals with the generation gap, exposing the oppositional experiences of the first and the second generation immigrants. Ruma’s memories introduce us to her late mother who was an expatriate by nature. She died of heart failure as
anaesthesia triggered the anaphylactic shock during her gallstone surgery. Throughout her stay in America, she clings to her ex-status. She longs for the regular trips to India. Being the propagator of her traditions and nationality, Ruma’s mother sincerely performs her duties as a wife and mother, and tries to extend her culture, ethics, religion and language to her children.

Her mother would complain, having to keep dinner waiting until nine at night. ‘Go ahead and eat,’ Ruma would say, but her mother, trained all her life to serve her husband first, would never consider such a things. [UE:16]

Even in America, she continues to dress in her brightly colour saris, her dime-sized maroon bindi, and her jewels. She wants her children to learn Bengali. She had been strict so much so that Ruma had never spoken to her in English. Being an outsider and a victim of culture-based marginalization: “She is on the cusp created by the intersection of two cultures, which one identifies as the space of the exile”.11 She continues to occupy this in-between space, quite distant from the present and clogged in the past. Swamped in her old culture she takes shelter in a multi-cultural existence. She manages to keep the Indian habits and lifestyle surviving in America:

In addition to tomatoes and eggplant and zucchini, her father had grown expert over the years at cultivating the things her mother liked to cook with–bitter melon and chilli peppers and delicate strains of spinach. Oblivious to her mother’s needs in other ways, he had toiled in unfriendly soil, coaxing such things from the ground. [UE: 16]
She feels outrageous at Ruma’s decision to marry an American which jeopardizes her mother’s Indian identity and values; as a result, she continues to warn Ruma against it: “You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian that is the bottom line”. [UE: 26] She witnesses a marginal character who cannot accept her ethnic values. Therefore, Ruma remains an émigré and never becomes an immigrant like Mrs. Bagchi. Mrs. Bagchi marries a boy she loved, but after two years of marriage he gets killed in a scooter accident. At twenty-six, she moves to America to decline her parents’ decision of her remarriage.

Being the victim of gender-based marginalization, she breaks all traditional bounds by adopting American lifestyle and subverts the patriarchal restrictions by deciding to remain single the rest of her life. She lives all alone and teaches at Stony brook University. She wears Western clothing, cardigans and black pull-on slacks and styled her thick dark hair in a bun. Therefore, her immigrant character is contrary to Ruma’s mother’s who yearned for those trips to India and continued to dress in a sari. Mrs. Bagchi has completely assimilated with the American culture by negating the insider-outsider conflict. She enters into a dialogic relation with the native culture and moves away from the periphery towards the centre. For Mrs. Bagchi identity is an invention: “... which is never complete, always in process, and always continued within, not outside, representation.12 Breaking the Indian patriarchal code of a woman being an obedient daughter, a sincere wife and a responsible mother, Mrs. Bagchi lives a life free of any such limitations. Though, she still loves her late husband and denies sharing her home with another man, yet her decision to befriend Ruma’s father in her old
age is a drastic step against what Mickelson calls the role of a woman. “designed by nature to bear, nurture children, act as her husband’s helpmate, help him to fulfil his potential and resign herself to her ‘limitations’.” Mrs. Bagchi’s experience of displacement and her dual marginal status do not degenerate her identity but coax her to restructure a new self. Ruma’s mother was equally miserable with life in the suburbs and her husband seems to feel guilty for not having provided her with a happier life. She raised two children in America and spoke to them exclusively in Bengali, made elaborate Indian meals and owned more than two hundred saris. These aspects of her life in America show how she was able to cling to the Indian ways of life.

Jhumpa gives Mrs. Bagchi’s example to indicate that if a Bengali first generation woman joins the work force, she will naturally integrate into society and abandon many of the traditional Indian customs, such as dressing in saris. Mrs. Bagchi is an independent woman who has made a life for herself without the aid of a man, and here too she emerges as the exact opposite of Ruma’s mother, who if were widowed, would have moved in with her daughter instead of living by herself.

Ruma’s father recognizes that Ruma is echoing her mother in making herself overly dependent on her husband, and that she is leading a life as an isolated mother. This makes Ruma’s father concerned that his daughter will become as unhappy as his wife was, and he wishes for a different life for her.

Mrs. Bagchi stands for the opposite choice in life from Ruma and all the other female characters in *Unaccustomed Earth*. She immigrates to the USA by herself, completed a doctorate in statistics and has been a
lecturer at an American university for close to thirty years. Gayatri Gopinath has studied how the heterosexual Indian married woman is the norm within the Indian Diaspora, and how anyone who does not conform to this ideal is suspicious. Amongst these outsiders, she counts single women who “negotiate their function both as threat to home/family/nation and as perennially outside the confines of these entities”.¹⁴

Mrs. Bagchi illustrates how the only way for Bengali women to be truly free to pursue careers, is if they do not have families, and thus challenges the confines of the Indian American society.

In Unaccustomed Earth, the first generation characters in the main adhere more to Indian tradition and values than the second generation characters do. The second generation, having been brought up in America, also identify with typical American values such as freedom and marrying for love. In some cases, the second generations strive to live up to both sets of values.

In Only Goodness Sudha double-majors in college, works hard and honours her parents by eating their food and helping around the house. However, she later chooses to live in London and to marry the white Englishman, Roger. In her choices she is able to reconcile the two sets of values, and seems to successfully negotiate her Indian American identity. When Sudha gives birth to a son, she names him Neel giving him a name that will allow him to appear both Indian and British or American.

Hell-Heaven seems to be a saga of broken hearts. The important woman characters: the narrator, her mother and Deborah are presented in
such circumstances where they feel alienated in relation to their men. Aparna finds a source to get rid of her tedious and monotonous domestic life in Pranab, and their intimacy grows to such an extent that they might have been taken for husband wife: “Wherever we went, any stranger would have naturally assumed that Pranab Kaku was my father, that my mother was his wife”. [UE: 31]

However, the entry of Deborah, an American, in the life of Pranab fetches a jealously bitter touch in Pranab-Aparna episode which enhances to such an extent that Aparna feels a sea of change in Pranab brought out by Deborah: “He used to be so different. I don’t understand how a person can change so suddenly. It’s just hell-heaven, the difference”. [UE: 32]

Aparna turns more bitter and isolated after Pranab-Deborah wedlock as she starts viewing anything American to be unethical deducing from the experience of Deborah - Pranab relation where the latter denounces his family, the family which has cherished a lot of expectation from him. Significantly, she conflicts the Indian social values with the new and changing values that she dwells amid and suffers excruciatingly. Her daughter, the narrator, with her biological growth, adjusts with her American social milieu contrary to her advice. Aparna turns so isolated and at times frustrated that she appears to be grudging or complaining soul:

When my mother complained to him about how much she hated life in the suburbs and how lonely she felt, he said nothing to placate her. ‘If you are so unhappy, go back to Calcutta,’ he would offer, making it clear that their separation would not affect him one way or the other. [UE: 33]
Usha is a perfect example of the victim of the fragmented pattern of diasporic relation and existence. Deborah, like Aparna, also suffers the pang of alienation caused by her inability to understand her husband despite their long conjugal life. Aparna has always feared the fact that someday Deborah will go out of Pranab’s life in preference of an American man, which is common conception among the most Indian about the Americans. However, it is Pranab who divorces Deborah despite their two children, and marries a Bengali woman, leaving Deborah in the lurch to look after the kids.

*Once in a Lifetime* is a story that introduces us to Hema’s mother, Shibani and Kaushik’s mother, Parul who depict the expatriate and immigrant traits, respectively. We learn through Hema that Kaushik and her mother came from two contrasting worlds in India–one upper crust, the other middle class. Though, Kaushik and his family return to America after a gap of certain years, yet they haven’t shed away their Anglophile tastes or American consciousness. It seems that:

Bombay had made them more American than Cambridge had. . . . There were remarks concerning your [Kaushik’s] mother’s short hair, her slacks the Johnie Walker, she and your [Kaushik’s] father continued to drink after the meal was finished. . . . [UE: 235]

On the other hand, despite having stayed for a longer time in America than Parul, Shibani is trying to create *home* in a place that is far removed from time and space. Like Rushdie, she creates an ‘imaginary homeland’ where:
Home becomes primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past. It exists in a fractured, discontinuous relation with the present.\textsuperscript{15}

Her efforts to preserve her past are clearly visible in the Indian atmosphere she has struggled to maintain in the four walls of her home through language, food, dress code and traditions. This \textit{Indianness} begins to appear magnified when the Americanized Choudhuris come to stay in their house. They seem to be leading antipodal lives under the same roof. She makes Hema sleep on a cot in their room till the summer before she starts middle school.

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, a woman is considered to be a metaphor or sign for her nationality and tradition. Therefore, Shibani realizes her liability to propagate her ethnicity and culture to her children. Hence, she continues to weave the fragments of her past into the texture of her American life, so as to relive her Indian experiences and have a multicultural existence. Parul, on the other hand, lived an immigrant’s life.

Hema, being a second generation immigrant, develops a bond with Parul. Their attempts at assimilation act as an adhesive that strengthens this bond between them. Like second generation immigrants Parul wants to step out of her “double consciousness.”\textsuperscript{16}

When at the first time Hema meets Parul, Parul is wearing slacks and a tunic, a silk scarf knotted at her neck. Parul breaks the Indian patriarchal code of conduct by wearing Western clothes, smoking and drinking every evening to be relished by the Choudhuris. Thus, we see
that Parul adopts Americanization as a shelter against her cultural as well as gendered marginalization.

The second story of Part-II, *Year’s End*, is narrated by Kaushik. The story begins with Kaushik’s father Mr. Choudhuri, finding refuge in a second marriage after he loses his first wife, Parul, to cancer. Mr. Choudhuri marries Chitra who lost her spouse two years back to encephalitis, and is a school teacher in Kolkata. Chitra is thirty five years old, nearly twenty years younger than Mr. Choudhuri. She has two daughters—her elder daughter, Rupa, is ten years old and the younger one, Piu is seven years old. The main focus in this story is on these three displaced female characters, who on account of the matrimonial alliance, have to leave Kolkata and move to Massachusetts. These characters pass through multicultural or assimilatory phases during their identity crisis. Throughout the narrative, Chitra’s expatriate sensibility is being compared with Parul’s immigrant nature:

She [Parul] had never allowed a cloth to cover the table, but one was there now, something with an Indian that could just as easily have been a bedspread and didn’t fully reach either end. In the centre, instead of the generous cluster of fresh fruit or flowers my mother [Parul] would have arranged, there was a stainless-steel plate holding an ordinary salt shaker and two jars of pickles, hot mango and sweet lime, their lids missing, their labels stained, spoons stuck into their oils. [UE: 259]

These minute changes brought about by Chitra in Mr. Choudhary’s house are indicative of Chitra’s steady attempts at asserting her ‘self’ in the American ambience. She continues to dress in a Bengali saree, declines to learn English, and is unwilling to drive. This attitude is
suggestive of her inclination towards Indian values and traditions. Although Chitra’s life is split between the past and the present, yet she tries to regenerate her past by creating and preserving the Indian atmosphere in her American home. Chitra is one of those expatriates who are neither capable to cast off their inherited cultural legacy nor are they able to encapsulate themselves in a new socio-cultural environment. As a result of which they experience a contra-acculturation and hybridization in their attempt to syncretism the two. They take refuge in their native culture as an antidote or a moral resource to checkmate their decentred consciousness. Through every little detail, we can assess the extent to which Chitra values her ethnicity and wants to transmit it further to her daughters and husband. Therefore, we observe that it is not Chitra whose identity is degenerated, but Mr. Choudhuri who is reverting back to his roots under the influence of Chitra. She succeeds in altering Mr. Choudhuri’s life from an independent immigrant into a multicultural ghetto existence. Piu and Rupa, on the other hand, are on a cross-cultural borderland where the border is “a crucial if ambiguous site of vital reconstruction, a position replete with contradictions and difficulties, but regenerative promise”.17

In Year’s End we encounter Dr. Chaudhuri’s second wife, Chitra, who has a hard time adjusting to suburban life in America. She is scared of being alone in the house, and does not know or care for American traditions. When Kaushik suggests her to learn driving, she answers, “Oh, no,’I would not like to learn, not as if she were incapable, but as if driving were beneath her.s”. [UE: 270]
This reluctance to interact with American society in one of the only ways possible for a wife living in a remote, suburban area indicates how alienated Chitra feels in America. Here she is on the same page as several of the other first generation wives that we encounter in Lahiri’s fiction. She makes us acquainted with the dirty facet of materialistic attitude as aftermath the globalization. The confluence of various cultural and social values under the aegis of globalization, unfortunately, transfers man to the level where individual materialistic concern matters more than anything else.

In the contemporary global society, everything is tested on the anvil of production and reproduction. It is the productive and reproductive aspect of an object or entity that determines its value and utility. And relationship is not impervious to this paradigm. Such paradigm of globalized world couple with de centred, de-rooted, and displaced realities of diasporas that accounts for incomprehensible and abysmal alienation of diasporic existence as couched in the above discussion of relation and circumstances of characters in the novel. Alienation is diasporic realities is mostly the artefact of conflicting personalities. Since the personalities are shaped by socio-cultural values and the immediate milieu, conflict of values, over to convert, might be regarded as the root of alienation. Lahiri as writer utterly embroiled in the existential challenges and opportunities of the humanity and practically inventing remedies to address most pressing of our times’ ills.

Jhumpa Lahiri elegant stories tell the lives of Indian in exile, of people navigating between the
strict tradition they have inherited and the baffling 
new world they must encounter every day.\textsuperscript{18}

In her novels, Jhumpa Lahiri represented Indian women in 
manifold and conflicted position. She shows a considerable degree of 
cross-cultural sensitivity and a kind of ironic modernity, because of 
which she serves to separate the traditional from the westernized 
characters in her fiction. Her women characters are especially caught in 
immigrant situations. She has portrayed some of the problems 
engendered by the experience of migration and diaspora such as 
displacement, fragmentation, discrimination, marginalization and crisis 
of identity. While the first generation female immigrant feels proud of 
their cultural past, the second generation expresses its aberrations and 
deviations. In the process of self actualization the former do not like to 
violate the cultural dignity of their past while the latter neither demand it 
nor demonstrate it, living as they do in the American plenitude of 
cultural availability. Time also plays an important role, as gender issues 
involving first generation female immigrants might be rather different 
from those which the second generation female immigrants face. This 
difference may be related to the fact that first generation immigrants 
often have stronger connections and memories of their homeland than 
those of second generation. As Brah explains,

Within each generation the experiences of men 
and women will also be differently shaped by 
gender relations. The reconfigurations of these 
social relations will not be a matter of direct 
superimposition of patriarchal forms deriving from 
the country of emigration over those that obtain in 
the country to which migration has occurred.
Rather, both elements will undergo transformations as they articulate in and through specific policies, institutions and modes of signification.\textsuperscript{19}

*Unaccustomed Earth* focuses on immigrant’s adulthood and mixed marriages. Ruma and Adam, Pranab and Deborah, Amit and Megan, Sudha and Roger, Sudha’s brother Rahul and Elena married according to their choices with interracial partners rather than Bengali. Ruma, in the title story, marries an American and her relationship with her widowed father is fragile. Amit in *A Choice of Accommodations* marries an American woman and his life in America is in no way related to his homeland and parents. Pranab’s failed marriage with an American woman, Deborah, after twenty-three years and his union with a Bengali woman in *Hell-Heaven* convey the conventional reality of life that one’s root culture can never be forgotten but can be hidden for some time. Sudha, in *Only Goodness*, marries an Englishman, Roger. Her scrambled relationship with her brother, Rahul, and the eventual reunion mars her own marital life. Sangeeta’s relationship with an Egyptian Farouk in *Nobody’s Business* ends in disappointment. Usha in *Hell-Heaven* and Hema in *Going Ashore* sleep with many a man but setting a family of their own with any of their American boyfriends is still a question of sustenance. All these culturally-exiled characters struggle initially to accept either the native or the adopted culture but later they decide to move on with the culture of the settled country as they have had enough of humiliating experiences in every phase of their lives. Iwona Filipczak an author writes on Jhumpa Lahiri’s writing:
Inhabiting the fictional world of large-scale transnational migrations, in which borders of cultures are frequently traversed and need to be constantly negotiated Lahiri’s characters are identified as cultural hybrids, whose hyphenated identities are troubled by tension and anxiety.\textsuperscript{20}

Jhumpa Lahiri in her \textit{Unaccustomed Earth} seems to have attempted to make it clear to the world at large that the humanity in its custom of perpetuating differences and hatred in all the ways possible has the need today to set up the culture of cultures in love only. It is love to which the world has to both heed and hold. It is love that has to be realized in the form of the global culture of the humanity in our times. It is for this perhaps that she has in her own characteristic way shown how love heals and ensures a happy home and happy life, and when love’s basic needs in the form of sincerity, honesty, openness of dealing with each other etc. are not fulfilled, there could be only deluge and destruction.

Jhumpa Lahiri sketches her characters in a very realistic manner. They are accounting for much of their suffering Ashima and Aparna; show how strong the cultural bonds to the homeland are for the ones who, in adulthood, move to a new country with a cultural tradition that is very different from their own. They both struggle to maintain the Indian culture at home, doing their best to perpetuate the traditions through their children, and dutifully performing the gender roles they were taught in India. Aparna, unlike Ashima, seems unhappy as she is married to an absent husband who has married her only to placate his parents’ complains. Although she seems unhappy with her marriage and appears to be in love with another man, she does not end the relationship, even if
she lives in a country where it would be perfectly acceptable. Besides, she dutifully performs the roles assigned to her, as a wife and mother. Apart from her unhappiness as a wife, she continues to follow the traditions the same way Ashima does, since she tries to teach her daughter all the Indian customs and warns her that she will not be allowed to behave like any other American girl. She cooks only Indian food at home, wears saris, and surrounds herself only of Bengali friends. The only change which can be noticed is that, also like Ashima, she seems to accept her daughter’s boyfriends and relationships when she becomes an adult. Ashima’s and Aparna’s attachment to the Indian culture is very similar and it seems to follow a pattern. Clifford contends that:

> Women in diaspora remain attached to, and empowered by, a ‘home’ culture and tradition, selectively. Fundamental values of property and religion, speech and social patterns, and food, body, and dress protocols are preserved and adapted in a network of ongoing connection outside the host country.\(^{21}\)

Both Aparna and Ashima are able to remain attached to the Indian culture, instead of the culture that surrounds them, because they still keep strong connections to their homeland. Because they befriend mostly Bengali friends, they are constantly reassured of their attitudes, no matter how different these attitudes are from the ones surrounding them in the public space. Lahiri has portrayed efficiently and effectively the problems of immigrants in the migrated country, even after having found a place to settle in. She projects the difficulties faced by an Indian wife in a foreign culture. Living in the foreign land, Lahiri’s female
preserve their self and try to establish their own identity as an Indian woman.

References and Notes:

3. Ibid p-43


