4.1 Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri continues to deal with the theme of the cultural disconnection experienced by immigrants trapped between the culture of their Indian origin and the unknown ways of their adopted land in her second short stories collection *Unaccustomed Earth*. The collection more prominently highlights the lives and diasporic sensibility of second-generation immigrants who are passing through both traditional values of their immigrant parents and the mainstream American values of their peers. *Unaccustomed Earth* secured the prestigious Frank O’Connor award of $35,000, the richest short story prize in the world.

In all stories of the collection Jhumpa Lahiri applies the metaphor based on the epigraph, that is introduced in the beginning and which is taken from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Custom-House” which reads, “Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall sterile their roots into unaccustomed earth.” Through this epigraph, Hawthorne recommends that resettling people into the new land of the unaccustomed earth makes them prosper better as they become hardier.

It should also be noted that Jhumpa Lahiri is autobiographical in her writings as she investigates into her characters’ diasporic sensibilities and experiences. Her
diasporic concerns are powerfully depicted through the anguish of Indian migrants in America.

Lahiri deals with the same theme in her first collection of stories *Interpreter of Maladies*. However, the publication of her second collection *Unaccustomed Earth* brings a change in theme. The stories revolve less around the dislocation and more around relocation. Lahiri’s second generation expatriate characters strongly discard values respected by their parents in favor of American lifestyle and partners.

In the past few decades, the forces of globalization have shifted more Indian intellectuals—professors, students and professionals that can also be seen in her stories. All the eight stories in the collection have North America as the essential place of the enactment of the dramas of life. Disease and death, frustration and desolation have occupied more space. Cultural dissonances too have become more prominent. The present chapter will examine the diasporic dilemma of second generation expatriates in the framework of four elements of diasporic sensibility discussed in the first chapter. The chapter will attempt to analyze the stories to search out how these stories present intense studies of individuals caught in emotional twist, between clash of family tradition and freedom offered by the adopted culture that resulted in their identity crisis. The chapter will also study expatriate characters of the collection who try to establish their individual identities in a new milieu, experiencing at the same time the sense of displacement, alienation, and isolation and intergenerational gap which ultimately forms their diasporic sensibility.

### 4.2 Sense of Alienation and Displacement

Jhumpa Lahiri presents her observations of the second generation Indian Americans engaged in the Western milieu in *Unaccustomed Earth*. The deep sense of alienation and isolation experienced by her characters are excellent soul studies on the background of uprooting and assimilation.

The sense of alienation and displacement is strongly reflected in the stories ‘Hell-Heaven’ and ‘Unaccustomed Earth’.

In the title story ‘*Unaccustomed Earth*’, the loneliness of Ruma is well understood by her father as he finds her in the situation of her wife. His wife has also experienced the pang of managing the family alone in the foreign land and has
suffered deeper solitude. Like her mother, Ruma, though second generation expatriate and familiar with the American lifestyle, is not an exception to the solitude of life.

The story deals with a father-daughter relation and duty in a filial relationship. The story commences with the prospect of the visit of Ruma’s father to her home in Seattle. Her mother being dead and the only brother settled in New Zealand, she feels that the visit of her father will be an extra burden on her as he is retired and has distributed with every possession that he had.

Ruma’s dilemma is the result of her upbringing. Children obtain the sense of filial duty from their family set-up; and the second generation diasporas, like Ruma, are aloof from the concern for the aged members, the concern that connect the family in India. On the other hand, the modern western family is mostly nucleus, and hence, isolates the elders; everyone composes a family for himself / herself. It is the impact of such Western family pattern that put Ruma in dilemma despite her Indian origin.

However, very soon Ruma realizes that her father turns out to be a great help, rather than a burden. Her father’s living pattern has built on the foundation of self-reliance, and he prefers to do everything himself, the habit keeps him busy even after retirement.

Moreover, she recalls the past life and its joys merely with the company of her father. She observes how her son, Akash, mixes with her father. Her father too involves in memories of her wife as Ruma now resembles her a lot.

At the level of relation, both Ruma and her father behaved in the somewhat similar way. Her father has been escapist right from the beginning as far as the implementation of his filial duty is concerned. To make his life and career abroad, he disregarded the need of his aged parents in India, and ironically, he is left in the similar conditions though self-chosen.

Ruma, a westernized daughter, married to an American. She finds that she is imitating the lonely life of her mother, whereas her more traditional father discovers ways of remaking himself through travel and new love. Ruma is nostalgic for the emotional safety she had enjoyed with her mother, and also remembers her childhood home. Through this story, Jhumpa Lahiri reveals daughter’s nostalgic remembrance or longing for a revisit to a childhood of security and lack of responsibility. Ruma
empathizes and understands her mother’s loneliness and displacement as a newly arrived immigrant. There were times Ruma felt nearer to her mother in death than she had in life, a closeness born simply of thinking of her so often, of missing her.

Ruma is torn between the claims of the two cultures, the Bengali culture that she inherited, and the mainstream American culture that she willfully accepted. She was uncertain of whether to include her lonely father in her family or not. She was forced neither by her father nor Adam to make any choice.

The representative of the second generation depicted in the story is in a different situation. Born in America to Bengali parents, Ruma lives in the Third Space all her life. As a result, her life is marked by a permanent conflict between the culture inherited by her parents and of her birthplace and homeland, America, which results in bewilderment and failure to accept the American culture completely. Ruma is an example of upward mobility. Well-educated, hardworking, she becomes a lawyer in New York. Her thriving professional life is accompanied by equally successful family life: an American husband, a three-year-old son, Akash, one more pregnancy and a new residence on the west shore, in Seattle, the place where the family shifts after Ruma’s husband gets another job. Unexpectedly, the pursuit of her professional life comes to a sudden halt; she quits most of the things she has accomplished so far: her career and independence. She decides to take care solely of the family and household, but this does not make her happy.

Ruma’s existence stuck between Indian and American culture is a continuous reconciliation between them. Her mother’s demise makes her recognize strongly with Indian heritage. Ruma lives engrossed in the reminiscences of her departed mother, and even though it goes against her American upbringing, she starts replicating her example. She does not refuse American clothing, flavor for American cuisine, nor does she make use of Bengali, her parents’ language. She discards something more essential: her independence and professional achievement, and sense of equality with her husband. She acknowledges her position according to the Indian tradition: assisting the husband (her mother always did it), being mainly a mother and a homemaker.
Ruma is able to identify neither with her homeland India nor with America, as she suffers from “double displacement”. She suffers from her rupture as a woman and as a second-generation immigrant.

The story reveals that the India-born parents have their dreams for their children by way of education and career; they also have their doubts about their life in a foreign land. The children match into neither Bengali nor American cultures fully and feels the pangs of alienation and displacement. The inclination of person and different value systems have also resulted in the pangs of alienation. As Brinda Shah rightly remarks; ‘Alienation in diasporic realities is mostly the artifact of conflicting personalities. Since the personalities are shaped by socio-cultural values and the immediate milieu, conflict of values, overt or covert, might be regarded as the root of alienation.’(Shah, 2010: 153)

In her story, ‘Hell-Heaven’ as in Mrs. Sen’s’ Lahiri highlights the isolation faced by the narrator’s mother, Aparna in an alien land. Aparna is an Indian-born woman married off to Shyamal Da, a workaholic Indian husband who ignores his wife’s needs. Though the both of them were strangers to each other, Shyamal had approved this traditional union in exchange for the probability of his parents’ consent to study abroad, his requirement of marriage takes place as a way of compromising personal life with professional ambitions. Aparna, on the other hand, considers this merger as an opportunity to go away from the background and suffocating environment where she lives, an area in Calcutta. They both had married in India before the couple moved to Berlin where Shyamal completed his training in Microbiology prior to his acceptance of a position as a researcher at Mass General. Aparna’s isolation and displacement become more apparent when Pranab Chakraborty, a young Indian bachelor from Calcutta, arrives in Massachusetts to carry on his education. The attractive and delightful personality of Pranab, hosted and fed at nights by the Das, compares with that of Shyamal Da, as the narrator describes her father in the following words;

My father was a lover of silence and solitude. He had married my mother to placate his parents; they willing to accept his desertion as long as he had a wife. He was wedded to his work, his research, and he
existed in a shell that neither my mother nor I could penetrate...

(Lahiri, 2009: 65)

The sense of isolation becomes more heightened in Aparna when she trapped in
the suburbia life, to which her husband responds: ‘If you are so unhappy, go back to
Calcutta.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 76) Aparna, as many other female characters in Lahiri’s
stories, shows a deep attachment to her homeland, her roots and Eastern traditions,
thus confirming that in terms of diaspora, immigration and displacement, male and
female experiences are diverse, at least to some extent. When it comes to parting their
original land in order to migrate to a new country, men are likely to adjust to the alien
condition and attempt to assimilate themselves in Western cultures. They work, study
and live as it is expected of them, as the male protagonists of ‘When Mr. Pirzada
Came to Dine,’ ‘Mrs. Sen’s,’ ‘The Third and Final Continent’ or ‘Hell-Heaven.’ Once
they settle in America, once the process of adaption is over, their wives are relocated
with them in a different context making the sense of displacement and alienation
acute and sharp.

The same thing happened with Aparna as narrator becomes aware of her
mother’s profound loneliness when she informs; ‘I began to pity my mother; the older
I got, the more I saw what a desolate life she led. She had never worked, and during
the day she watched soap operas to pass the time. Her only job, every day, was to
clean and cook for my father and me.’ (Lahiri, 2009:76)

Aparna finds a source to get rid of her dreary and dull domestic life in Pranab, and
their proximity grows to such an extent that they might have been taken for husband
and wife. Both of them are homesick, isolated, and alone in the United States, but
they find ‘home’ in each other. They have various things in common: both of them
come from rich families in North Calcutta, they actually lived within walking distance
from each other, and Even though they were neighbors in India, they came together
only in the United States; their relationship flourishes here, but it is rooted back home.
In addition to the homeland nostalgia, they are also linked by a love of music, film,
leftist politics, and poetry.

However, the entry of Deborah, an American, in the life of Pranab brings a
jealousy in Pranab-Aparna episode which increases to such a level that Aparna
observes a sea of change in Pranab brought out by Deborah. This change and
difference are compared with hell – heaven difference by Aparna. She turns more harsh and isolated after Pranab-Deborah marriage as she starts considering anything American to be immoral, concluding from the experience of Deborah – Pranab relation where the latter denounces his family, the family that has cherished a lot of expectation from him.

Aparna’s daughter, the narrator, with her biological growth, adjusts with her American social milieu, contradictory to mother’s advice. To avoid her annoyance, or any argument, the narrator hides many details about her life from her mother, mainly her experience with boyfriends and alcoholic treat. Aparna turns so isolated and at times upset.

The narrator also began to apply her father’s method of avoiding Aparna and thereby heightened her alienation. Aparna, thus, has none to call her own who can really give her company and counsel. That she means nothing to her husband is quite clear from the beginning, and the one whom she had loved deeply and secretly also betrays her, apart from her own blood, that is the narrator, Usha. She is, in fact, a perfect instance of the victim of the disorganized structure of diasporic relation and existence. Deborah, like Aparna, also becomes the victim of alienation caused by her inability to understand her husband despite their long marital life. Aparna has always feared the fact that someday Deborah will leave out of Pranab’s life in favor of an American man, which is a common notion among the most Indians about the Americans. Contrary to expectations, it is Pranab who divorces Deborah despite their two children, and marries a Bengali woman, leaving Deborah alone to look after the kids. Here, we witness dirty aspect of materialistic attitude that is more prominently surface aftermath of the globalization. The union of various cultural and social values under the aegis of globalization, unfortunately, brings down man to the level where individual materialistic concern matters more than anything else. Pranab is a typical global materialistic man who denounces his parents to obtain the young of Deborah, and when she loses her youthful charm he leaves her too in order to get another woman of his community. Pranab is, by nature, flirtiest and fluid in his relation. However, those who come in his company are moderate and devoted. Both Aparna and Deborah are associated with the parallel game of fortune which leaves them to suffer the pang of alienation throughout their lives.
It can be observed that the note of alienation is strongly reflected throughout the story that seems to be an account of broken hearts. The important woman characters: the narrator, her mother, and Deborah are presented in such circumstances where they feel alienated and displaced about their men. At the center of the story lies the mismatched relation of the narrator’s parents, Shyamal, and Aparna, resulting in the alienating feeling of Aparna.

The story ‘A Choice of Accommodations’ also deals with displacement in the marital life on the backdrop of the diasporic milieu. The title ‘A Choice of Accommodations’ indicates Amit’s experience of displacement having been estranged from his parents and confronting his marital life in fear and nervousness. It is a story about an interracial couple. Amit and Megan attend the wedding of Amit’s college crush Pam Borden at his old prep Blurt school, Langford Academy. The rising stress in their marriage is witnessed as Amit, in a drunken condition discloses to a stranger at a wedding party that his marriage had collapsed after the birth of his two daughters. Amit is the son of rich Bengali parents, and he had a privileged education in the high-class boarding-school, Langford Academy in America. Despite such fortunate background, he does not have any self-confidence and is anxious and extremely nervous about himself. He feels a profound sense of rejection by his parents for putting him in a residential school. He feels no memories towards his alma mater and does not keep any contact with any of his old classmates. His anguish is revealed in the lines; ‘He could not imagine sending his daughters to Langford – couldn’t imagine letting go of them as his parents had let go of them.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 86)

In all anticipated situations, he would obviously do something foolish and rash or thoughtless which would result in the girls’ perishing under his supervision. He would be the only survivor and his scenarios always concluded with Megan divorcing him as she accuses him of what happened to their girls. In the end, he would lose it all, his wife and family. This is a very disturbing thing that Amit involves in. It reveals that he is an alienated soul suffering from an identity crisis. He has no confidence, does not appreciate his own worth and, therefore, feels that he is not good enough for being loved. Despite his affectionate family, he seems to be always on the periphery, almost as if he is making ready himself for them to discard him one day. This may have to do with the sense of desertion he experienced through his parents’ act of putting him in a residential school without his approval during his early youth.
His parents’ decision to put him in a residential school without having his consent in the matter had alienated them forever from him. As a young child, he was unexpectedly enforced into complete new environment for which he was not mentally geared up to face. There troublesome thing is happened but the blow of a new surroundings disturbed his subtle and emotional state of mind adversely.

Distress, alienation, and isolation occur when there is an unexpected change in surroundings and environment. In the case of Amit, the trauma had shocked him to the level of showing physically in the form of premature gray hair while still in school. This may be because unlike many diasporas or immigrants placing the foot in the new land, he/she had a definite deficiency. He was not prepared psychologically for the change in environment as his parents had haphazardly made the decision for him.

Amit’s upsetting experience of loneliness and nostalgia is representative of the feelings of alienation which a diaspora experience in a foreign land. In the end, he learns to survive without his parents and slowly becomes accustomed to new life in Langford but not without psychological harm.

Reminiscences of emotional trauma are always present even as a grown up, and Amit asserts never to send his children to a residential school because of what he had experienced.

His feeling of defectiveness in a deeper relationship with his white wife Megan is portrayed very delicately by Jhumpa Lahiri. Lodging in a hotel or at a known place does not make a deviation in the relationship between couples, if there is reciprocal understanding and connection between them. The story presents a powerful portrayal of an interracial marriage, calling for the reconciliation of discrepancies, negotiation and adjustments between the protagonists Amit and Megan.

In the trilogy ‘Hema and Kaushik’, both Hema and Kaushik suffer from anguish because of their displacement. However, for Hema, the suffering is an only memory because she can have a negotiation with her past. On the other hand, Kaushik cannot work through his loss in the past, so he becomes a person who always lives in the downhearted condition and dies at last.
Kaushik is torn between cultures: he desires for a home, but as soon as he finds one he has to depart and follow his parents. These dislocations make him baffled and unable to relocate. Hema, born in the United States and not enforced to relocate, raises up like an American, visiting McDonald’s now and then, dutifully working on school assignment, and trying to restrict the Indian influence her mother frequently makes on her.

The story unfolds their commencement from young children to adult people, the affiliation between two families and the sad love story between Hema and Kaushik. The families of Hema and Kaushik commence to be familiar with each other when they are living as Bengali Americans in an Indian community in Boston.

As children, Hema and Kaushik have a puppy attraction for each other. When they become adult, they meet in Rome and restart their affair. As a young woman, Hema often experiences isolation because she is a second generation Indian American who suffer from an identity crisis. She does not want to regard herself as an Indian, so she wants to marry an American husband. However, after getting intertwined with a married white man Julian for ten years, she finds no result from such an affair. So she has to confess her Indian side and accept the Indian companion her parents have approved of her. However, she knows that the marriage has died before it commences.

Hema has a retrospective tendency, and she can connect herself with the past comfortably. She is a researcher who studies Etruscans, a deceased people in Rome. She loves Kaushik because of their collective past. She is well aware that they will never go back to the past. The bangle she forgot to take at the Customs after the security verification in Rome indicates that she is firm to break away from her gloomy past and look forward to a fresh life. She has understood the significance to maintain a balance between her past and present, tradition, and future. However, Kaushik is dissimilar. His mother expired due to breast cancer when he was a youngster. His father remarries a traditional Indian lady when he is in college. He cannot reconcile with his personal tragedy. He cannot recognize and accept his father's remarriage and two step-sisters, so he becomes a wanderer, living a rootless and dislocated life. His profession as a newspaper photographer also forces him to lead a mobile life in order to arrest the exciting moment in the world. Kaushik cannot able to adjust himself to
his past and the death of his mother. He cannot keep the balance between reminiscence and forgetting and at last dies in a tsunami in Indonesia.

Contrasted with their parents, the second generation Indian Americans suffers more from their exile and displacement because they have no preference for their life. If their Indian parents can argue India as their homeland, they have nowhere to claim as home. All the characters in Unaccustomed Earth are victims of forced dislocation. They suffer from a sadness of deep loss. As a daughter of an Indian diaspora family, Jhumpa Lahiri shares her characters’ longing for a homeland and belonging in a press conference, as she argues, ‘No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile whichever country I travel to, that is why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile.’ (Lahiri, Interview)

4.3 Nostalgia and Cultural Assimilation

Nostalgia and cultural assimilation have become prominent aspects of diasporic sensibility in the literary works of Jhumpa Lahiri. She presents cultural assimilation in all the short stories of Unaccustomed Earth. It should be noted that unlike their parents, the sons and daughters of immigrants are not at all nostalgic about India. They are born in America and feel full of pride of leading American style of living. Their parents exercise some burden on them for following the traditional values of India. However, the younger generation does not feel any affection for India except their parents. On the other hand, they consider themselves as sons and daughters of America where they live.

The title story ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ is about a retired Bengali father, recently widowed, who visits his daughter, Ruma, now a mother, in Seattle. After the death of her mother, Ruma thinks it is her ethical and social responsibility to look after her father. However, she is unable to carry out her responsibility as the American culture is totally different from the Indian one. There is the concept of nuclear family in America: husband, wife and their children. They do not welcome any outsider in their family. This cultural clash in the mind of Ruma becomes clear in the as the text states: ‘She knew her father did not need taking care of, and yet this very fact caused her to feel guilty, in India there would have been no question of his not moving in with her.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 6)
On the other hand, the father enjoys his liberty after his wife’s death by going on the world tour. During these tours, he met a Bengali lady Mrs. Meenakshi Bagchi who was a widow. Being the only two Bengalis in the tour group, obviously they’d involved in the conversation. They started eating together, seating next to one another on the bus. Because of their common look and language, people regarded them as husband and wife. Initially, there was nothing far-fetched; neither of them had been fascinated by anything like that. He enjoyed Mrs. Bagchi’s companionship, knowing that at the end of a few weeks, she would take a separate plane and disappear. However, after Italy he had started thinking of her, looking forward to getting her emails, checking his e-mail inbox five or six times a day. This is a clear-cut indication of the fact that he had developed a romantic relationship with Mrs. Bagchi, and he was waiting earnestly for the next tour to begin. He would soon meet Mrs. Bagchi again in Prague this time, they’d agreed, they would share a room. However, before this tour, the father wanted to visit his daughter Ruma in Seattle. Ruma tried her best to offer a homely environment to her father. She even planned to welcome her father at the airport itself. However, the father did not want to create any difficulty for Ruma, and he came to her house by a rented taxi. Not only that, at Ruma’s house he did most of the kitchen and household work that is completely against the norms of an Indian culture. In fact, self-reliance is the key feature of American society. No one wants to be dependent on any other. Every man and woman wishes to be self-dependent in America. The father has lived a major part of his life in America, and he has also accepted and practiced this American quality in his own way. His only son has gone to New Zealand for the job, and his daughter Ruma is leading a married life. So he does not want to upset and disturb the life of his children. He goes on the European excursion to get pleasure for himself. However, Ruma notices her father’s newfound love and his passion for traveling only after his exit. The story reveals the emotional coldness between father and daughter, which stopped them from sharing each other’s emotions.

A moment earlier before his departure from Ruma’s house, Ruma’s father thought his grandson, Akash one day left his parents, Ruma, and Adam, similarly like him. A sense of nostalgia grips his mind as the text writes, ‘He imagined the boy years from now occupying this very room, shutting the door as Ruma and Romi had. It was inevitable. (Lahiri, 2009: 51)
We observe that the Indian characters of the story have certainly adopted cultural features of America. Americans are very much career-oriented. They gladly abandon their parents for the sake of their career and ambition. Many years ago, Ruma’s father also did the same. He forsook his parents in India and came to America to accomplish his aim, and now the similar thing has been done to him by his only son Rumi who has gone to New Zealand for the job. As the title indicates, first-generation Indian immigrants create an environment for their children to strike roots into ‘unaccustomed earth’. At the end of the book, one realizes that some of them do and are happily transplanted and resettled; others do and are not satisfied. Others decide to immigrate in their turn and reopen the cycle while others prefer to free themselves from any roots.

The story portrays the father does who not want to become a burden for his children after the death of his wife. That is the reason, as he decides to live in his own place and lead his life in his own way. Self-dependence is also an important trait of American culture which has been adopted by the father.

The characters of the first generation expatriates in the narrative are Ruma’s parents and Mrs. Bagchi. Ruma’s parents came to the U.S. to gain better educational opportunities: after her father obtains Ph.D. in Biochemistry he gets a rewarding job in a pharmaceutical company, which enables the family to live in ease. The mother remains at residence, and she is only an inactive member in the quest for professional and economic development, her objective is to nurture the homeland traditions in an alien country. The economic strength achieved in America brought the feeling of satisfaction – happiness – which is a word often emphasized by the narrative, is a pointer of a successful life. Ruma’s father, as he grows older, feels happier and happier with his life in America having his way towards cultural assimilation. In an interior monologue, he confesses that he is used to having tea with milk, sugar and “Nice” biscuits deeply with his wife; their kitchen cupboard always contained a box of them. These immigrants have adopted features and traditions of the new culture such as celebrating Christmas or Thanksgiving, or certain food habits while maintaining some Indian traits of Indian culture. This thing indicates their hybrid identity and transculturality. Cooking represents a way of maintaining their Indianness, but American ingredients and dishes fill their well-stocked cupboards and
fridges. Therefore, the kitchen of Indian immigrants is hybridized, but the merging of cultures gives them and their children an opportunity to develop dual cultural lenses.

Mrs. Bagchi is driven by a different aim when she comes to America. This is related with her widowhood. She is also successful – she fulfills her wish for freedom and independence. She escapes India for fear of being enforced by her parents to remarry after her beloved husband’s death. America offers a shelter: the woman can make a decision about her life in America the uninhibited by traditions or social restrictions. She achieves a doctorate in Statistics, becomes a professor at a university, and is completely independent in her life, even though in the opinion of an Indian community she is considered as a freak, an abnormality, because she is a lonely Indian woman. In both instances, Ruma’s father and Mrs. Bagchi, the achievement of success is linked with a gradual assimilation process.

Ruma’s father feels more relieved when the last connection with India is broken after his wife’s death. With a sense of pleasure, he submerges himself in American culture. After he retires, he carries out activities distinctive for Americans. He becomes a volunteer for a Democratic Party in Pennsylvania, and he begins to travel preferring package excursion to Europe. The drive from the east to the west coastline to meet his daughter is also not difficult for the seventy-year-old man. Furthermore, coming to Seattle, he still feels at home, well-known with the American scenery, which is contrasted with his European travels. The change takes place also in his look. Ruma is astonished when she saw how her father looked like an American in his old age with his gray hair and American clothes. Mrs. Bagchi, his fellow tourist, has also Western clothes and hairstyle, but more notably, her life is a kind of revolt against Indian values and customs, at the same time being a willing adjustment to the American value system. Even though passing through cultural assimilation the representatives of the first generation immigrants are however, cultural hybrids. They are familiar with their roots, but they also recognize that to get the success they need to adapt to the new cultural system, which they do unavoidably, because of the contact with another culture. Commenting on this aspect of cultural assimilation of second generation immigrants dealt by Jhumpa Lahiri, Nandini Sahu rightly observes;

While she also writes judiciously about the residents of India and the United States, Lahiri makes her most momentous to endowment to
contemporary American literature by arresting the flimsy balance between cultural choices and personal bureau in the lives of second-generation South-Asian Americans. In particular, she expounds the necessary detachment from the originating culture of immigrant parents and the daily lives of their American-raised children, an aspect of the second generation experience. (Sahu, 2007:93)

The second story ‘Hell-Heaven’ also deals with cultural assimilation. It is about a Bengali family now settled in America. The story is narrated by the young girl Usha. Usha’s father is a professor engaged in the research most of the time in his institution. His wife is simply a housewife doing the domestic works and going for shopping in the evening. Her life is almost empty without any passion for life. She spends her time with her daughter Usha, whereas her husband remains busy with the research project in his department. In these circumstances, a young Bengali guy named Pranab Chakraborty enters her life. Pranab Chakraborty was from an affluent family in Calcutta and had come to America to study engineering at MIT. He became a frequent visitor to the house of the narrator as he belongs to Calcutta, and he himself was a Bengali. The emergence of Pranab brought a dramatic change in behavior of the narrator’s mother. The narrator could easily presume the romantic affair was going on between her mother and Pranab.

After some period, Pranab came in touch with an American girl named Deborah. Slowly and steadily Deborah substituted the narrator’s mother from the life of Pranab. Soon the marriage between Pranab and Deborah took place. The narrator’s mother gave her approval to their marriage thinking that soon American girl would divorce Pranab and in this way Pranab would come to her again. It was a very hard situation for the narrator’s mother as her heart was broken by this marriage. She was seriously thinking of committing suicide but changed her decision for the sake of her family. In the end, Pranab left his wife Deborah and failed in love with a married Bengali women and thus damaging the two families in the process. Indians are very sincere and honest in their marital life while American goes on changing their companions like their shirts. Pranab being an Indian imbibed the American feature and left his wife. He developed a new relationship with married a woman that is totally unethical from an Indian perspective.
The narrator Usha was deeply attracted by the American lifestyle. She wanted to dress in jeans and shirt. As she grew up, she imbibed the American traits. She started drinking alcohol and kept boyfriends also. She is totally opposite to her mother. There is no clash in her heart and mind. She did everything courageously. She did not wish to share secrets of her free American lifestyle with her mother. However, in the end, narrator’s mother has to adjust to the fact that her daughter is not only a child of India but a child of America as well. The reader can observe that both Pranab and Usha fully adopt the traits of American culture and enjoy their life. They have not shown any favor for the traditional Indian morals and values as such there are no conflicts in their minds between the culture of the East and the West.

Usha, the narrator, belongs to the second generation Bengali immigrants in America takes stock of the emotional satisfaction of the various characters including herself in their intercultural relationships. Though acculturation occurs in most cases, some characters remain victims of contra-acculturation, yearning for their own Bengali culture.

The narrative technique exercised with the child’s perspective is handled very deftly by the writer to probe deep into immigrant sensibilities. The child belonging to the second generation of immigrants is in a better position to join the gap between the cultural dissimilarity of the two worlds- Indian and American. The child Usha in the midst of her in-between life in America is best to link the gap of the two homelands.

Usha’s mother’s prejudiced views towards Americans are mainly built on her growing jealousy resulted in her hatred for Deborah. Usha’s mother began to stop her car rides in the company of Deborah with the justification of her pregnancy.

Lahiri goes advance in time fourteen years later to inform how Pranab and Deborah divorced as had been guessed by Usha’s mother. It is to Usha’s mother that Deborah turned to for relief in her grief. Their hearts have been broken by Pranab. Usha’s mother had learned the lesson and in her old age drew nearer to her husband out of sheer habit. Usha also get reconciled with her mother who started to value her identity as a child of America. She had no option but to accept the reality that Usha dated several American men. One turning point in her mother’s life was her obtaining a degree in library science while in her fifties, to fill the emptiness in her life.
The story reveals surprises in the lives of people and their relationships. It is a strange American neighbour that rescues Usha’s mother proving that biased view in the diaspora must to disintegrate. Deborah adjusts herself to live a life with Pranab but finally divorces her for no fault of hers.

The third story ‘Only Goodness’ is a beautiful example of cultural assimilation. The American culture seems to be so attractive and full of glamour that the younger generation of India replicate and accept it almost blindly. Sudha, the elder sister, first launched her brother, Rahul to alcoholism, later on she attempts to free him from his habit. She wants to give an American upbringing to her younger brother, which she did not get in her own childhood, by purchasing toys, making separate room for him, providing a swing set in the yard, etc. However, as he enters into college life, she introduces him to alcohol, a habit he acquires devastatingly.

Meanwhile, Rahul’s drinking habit proves to be a great barrier in his career. He could not clear his examinations and was finally thrown out of the college. Along with drinking, he had developed a new habit i.e. dating with girls. During the event of dating, he came across a woman named Elena who was thirty-eight years older than Rahul. Once Rahul invited Elena in his house and disclose his intention before everyone that he wanted to marry Elena. This stunned and upset his parents. They opposed their marriage but didn’t prevent it.

Sudha moved to London to study Economics, and finally marries an Englishman, much older than her. Rahul goes away from his home and her life for some years. Later, she receives a letter from him. She instantly reacts and invites him to her home in London. The story is about a sister and her guilt conscience, who tries to renew her efforts to free her brother of the drinking habit for which she is exclusively answerable. Since old habits die hard; Rahul’s addiction not only ruins his life, but makes Sudha to drive him out of her house when he almost kills her son, Neel, by leaving him in the bath tub. Thus, the story revolves around Rahul. Jhumpa Lahiri indirectly attempts to convey the lesson that blind replication of the American and western way of living leads us nowhere and at last one spoil his or her life and career as an absolute failure like Rahul.

Another second-generation diasporic woman is seen in Sang in the story ‘Nobody’s Business’. Sangeeta likes to be called Sang, a name that has no Indian
connection, and she is not concerned in any of her Bengali suitors, who call up every
day, and propose marriage. She is very confident about her relationship with Farouk.
However, Farouk deceives her. However, unlike Twinkle in ‘This Blessed House’ in
*Interpreter of Maladies*, she does not get married to a Bengali; instead, she leaves
Farouk and all her suitors and goes to London. Indians settled abroad sometimes think
that with a change of their Indian names they will be able to alter their identities too.
However, the truth is that they are unable to run away from their identity and in the
end get squeezed between two cultures.

The second part of the collection is a trilogy in which Hema remembers with
nostalgia her roots in Calcutta. This is typical of diasporic longing for one’s roots.
Following precisely the time and location, Lahiri develops her setting very vividly
with details of the geographical location, time, weather conditions, social conditions
and the atmosphere. Kaushik’s father was better off among the Bengali families as he
possessed a car, had a Ph.D., and was engaged in a job in an engineering firm. The
first person narration advances the story through Hema’s eyes as she experiences and
knows the events .and views their nostalgia as she remarks; ‘Our mothers met when
mine was pregnant … They became instant friends, spending their days together
while our fathers were at work. They talked about the lives they had left behind in
Calcutta.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 224-225)

Narrating the social environment of the two women, the child finds it immaterial
in Cambridge as both of them are equally alone in a foreign land.

Human relationship in a diasporic dilemma is affected by the basic cultural
dissimilarity between Indian and Western American culture. It is important for
Lahiri’s characters are, for various causes, unable to strike a meaningful connection
either with their partners or parents, sibling friends, etc. This is perhaps because when
individuals lose their feeling of community, intrinsic in them that connect them with
the surrounding world, they fail to cultivate any kind of strong and constant
relationship either with themselves or with others. In fact, even marital relationships
in India are dependent upon other relationships and therefore it is generally said that
marriages in India are more between two families than between two individuals. Since
this contingent and sustaining relationship is not present in the immigrated land, a
kind of void develops between individual in a relationship, which if not understood
and acted upon in time can be resulted in creating big gaps. This point is apparent in stories such as ‘A Temporary Matter’, ‘Mrs. Sen’s’, ‘This Blessed House’, ‘A Choice of Accommodations’, etc. In all these stories the tension in relationships between characters is because there is a dichotomy between family-centered culture and career-centered culture. People, who are products of a collectivist culture, find themselves as strangers in an individual-centered society such as the one prevalent in the US. Living between values of collectivist and individualist cultures these characters are completely prepared to deal with the universal and the individual relationships. However, they find the homogenizing forces of globalization and the machine-oriented lifestyle of the western world as a severe threat to their cultural identity. From this perspective, in all description of the relationship in the text, we find diaspora playing a decisive role in defining the human relationship.

Significantly, Jhumpa Lahiri's works present a blending of the Indian and the Western culture coming to terms with each other through her literary works. The complicated Indian tradition and culture is presented with all its energy in her narration in both Indian and American contexts. The West could be seen as presented with a sense of sentimentality by Lahiri. This is evident in the epilogue to Unaccustomed Earth in which she suggests that there is a need for an alteration in the perspective of diaspora towards host culture. The adoption and acculturation can answer many problems of the Diaspora. The foreign land is not just a way for the materialistic improvement, it can also nurture them psychologically and they can find kinship and sustain the relationship in foreign places as well.

The garden metaphor in the title story, ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ becomes a unifying aspect bringing three generations in the diasporic synthesis of optimism of further sustenance in their own new found world. This movement drives the garden metaphor to further connectedness to cultural and linguistic roots in diasporic alienation. Akash uttering “Lal” “neel” connects the distance created between Ruma and her father. Cultural and linguistic identity cannot be vanished in the diaspora as the feeling of being rooted in culture and tradition is inherent in any human being. This sense of belonging to a diasporic experience is powerfully portrayed in the sequence by Jhumpa Lahiri.
It can be observed that most of the second generation immigrants depicted by Jhumpa Lahiri in *Unaccustomed Earth* did not engage in nostalgia and also did not oppose cultural assimilation. Their marriage, alcoholism, relationship with other men can be considered as their journey towards hybridity. As Rajeshwar Mittapalli rightly comments,

They are not passive beings allowing other to define them but self-confident individuals, often constituting the cream of Indian society, who have come to America (and what appears to be a reversal of the colonial situation) to ‘conquer’ and take over, foreign hybrid identities along the way, for it is in hybridity that the hope for survival lies, not just for Indian-Americans but for the whole mankind. (Mittapalli, 2007:161)

**4.4 Identity Crisis and Family Relationship**

The stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* have been commended for presenting different aspects of the Bengali diasporic sensibility. The eight stories in the collection highlight the quest for identity in the diasporic situation. They scrutinize numerous identities and dilemma in the lives of immigrants. The diasporic experiences of the central characters in the stories also focus their sense of exile, alienation, and uprootedness. Being essentially autobiographical in her writing, Lahiri captures details from her Bengali community and personal experiences in her fiction. The portraying life of the Indian migrants to America, Lahiri has been very poignant in capturing the diasporic spirit of her characters tangled in various emotional twists. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri makes her observations of the second generation Indian Americans engrossed into the Western environment, yet going through a profound sense of isolation and alienation and displacement. All the stories deal with the theme of uprooting and assimilation with efforts made to establish connectivity in the relationship.

Lahiri dealt with a multicultural society both from ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ and attempted to find her native identity as well as new identity in the adopted country. This brings in a conflict of cultures and also aspects of dislocation and displacement.
This resulted in the formation of diasporic sensibility that Lahiri attempts to focus on her stories.

Diasporic experience is one of exile, migration, dislocation and displacement that brings in identity confusion and problems of identification in the backdrop of alienation from old and new cultures. Jhumpa Lahiri’s stories focus on relationships and on specific cultural experiences and the difficulties of human existence by which the character yearn backward and forward in time.

These stories are passionate studies of persons trapped in between conflicts of interpersonal relationship and cultural traditions. They try to establish their individual identities in a new environment, experiencing at the same time the sense of displacement, alienation, and isolation. These individuals, trapped in the confusion of their migrant lives, attempt to get connected to family and friends for emotional fulfillment. The stories make a compendium of all Lahiri’s ideas and thoughts about life and its fascinating dilemma surrounding in one’s pursuit of identity.

The basic theme of her writing thus appears to be a human relationship in all their varied and variegated shades. The relationships between parent and child, siblings, lovers, husband and wife and even simply between the residents of the same building are dealt with in these stories. Jhumpa Lahiri as a writer of human relationship investigate how diaspora creates tensions that ultimately can manage or damage both conventional and unconventional human relationships.

The title story, ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ is a story about the diasporic experiences of first, second and third generations. The story highlights isolation and emptiness experienced by second generation expatriate Ruma as she is torn between family requirements and demand of adopted culture and social norms which resulted in an identity crisis. She faces identity crisis just like her mother. Though she is born and brought up in America yet she is not able to give up her mother’s impact on her perception. She imitates her mother’s lifestyle, as she is portrayed in this story an image of a traditional mother as well as an Indian wife.

Ruma in her late thirties, with a young son Akash and expecting another one in America. She missed for maternal comfort with the unexpected death of her mother.
Ruma cannot defy anguish of her mother’s vacant space, which makes her mentally alienated. Ruma’s life is at two different worlds before and after her mother’s demise.

Ruma was exhausted by her household work with the lack of her mother’s helpful guidance. Taking care of Akash required Ruma’s full concentration leaving very little span for a social life. She becomes so dispassionate in everything that she avoids human links and social relationship in Seattle. Ruma’s social alienation and her isolation lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. The death of her mother proved a great shock to her and had brought a remarkable effect on her conjugal life. Whatever freedom and happiness Adam attempts to offer Ruma, she finds herself alienated from her spouse Adam and feels the sense of emptiness in her life.

Ruma is struggling between the sense of self and filial responsibility, American civilization and inherited Bengali roots. She enjoys the bliss of American individualism concerning the important decision of education, marriage, job and finally her way of life. However, there is a pull of innate culture and value system of her parents’ homeland in her consciousness, creates stress within her and puts her in an identity crisis. It is because of this pull; she favored to imitate her mother’s lifestyle of a homemaker. As the writer observes, ‘Growing up, her mother’s example moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household – had served as a warning, a path to avoid. This was Ruma’s life now.’ (Lahiri, 2009:11)

While dealing with conventional relationships, Lahiri also presents some of the traits that do not fit into the frame of a conventional relationship. Especially mentioned here are relationships outside the institution of marriage. Though these relationships are often regarded as extramarital or illicit relationship, Jhumpa Lahiri knows for sure that they have been formed out of some emotional or physical need but are not approved by society. The relationship between Usha and Pranab on the backdrop of the diasporic environment is dealt with in ‘Hell-Heaven’ can be considered under this category.

The story begins in the early 1970s when Pranab Chakraborty, a Bengali from Calcutta, becomes a family friend of her parents. The intimacy built up in relationship led to the great proximity between them. Usha was taught to address him Kaku
(uncle), like her father’s younger brother. Pranab in his turn politely addressed Usha’s parents Da (elder brother) and Boudi (sister-in-law).

Lahiri gives a glance into the family’s Diasporic life. Usha’s family had been living in the Central Square for the last three years, prior to which they were in Berlin where Usha was born and her father had completed his education in Microbiology. After an arranged marriage in India, her parents migrated to the west looking for better opportunities.

Pranab happened to meet Usha and her mother at Harvard Coop along Massachusetts Avenue. His actions were very well designed. Tapping the woman on her shoulder and pardoning himself to be a newcomer to America, he tries his fate in building familiarity. Her mother reacted by inviting him home, suggesting the secret of love at first sight. The familiarity built in relationship led to her mother offering him tea and food and letting him stay on for dinner after her father returned. From then onwards he frequented dinner almost daily. Pranab came to the USA to study engineering at MIT. His wealthy family in Calcutta anticipated him to return after his education and settle down in Calcutta with a girl of their choice. Meanwhile, for him life becomes difficult as he lives in the loft of a divorced woman with two kids on Trowbridge Street. In such awful conditions, Usha’s parents took pity on him and let him frequent their home. Her mother took a liking for the young man, and he took the freedom to be very close to her. Usha’s parents admired his smart and playful ways. His regular visits to their apartment gave a relief to her mother who had to live a lonely life most of the day. Now, with his appearance, she was engaged cooking dishes for him and wearing new sari in expectation of his arrival. Usha began to get a liking for Pranab and eagerly waited for his visits as he entertained her with his actions. It was his hobby to take photographs as he took the opportunity to snap pictures of the three of them together. In the beginning, her mother took precaution to meet him only when Usha was around. However, in the passage of time he spent time alone with her mother and was developing a deep proximity with him. They shared several interests unlike between her parents, such as music, film, politics and poetry. Since Usha’s mother and Pranab came from the same neighborhood in Calcutta, they shared many common interests. This is indicative of the Diasporic longing in people striving to find resemblance in dispersal. Playing the role of a younger brother, Pranab found it easy to draw sympathy from Boudi. Jhumpa Lahiri highlights on the drift in
relationships between Usha’s parents as they behave toward the guest as their family member. Usha understands the differences between her father and Pranab Kaku.

Usha’s father was glad as Pranab frequented the family and offered company to his wife who missed her life in India. The diasporic dilemma is brought to spotlight very precisely by Lahiri, inquiring the thoughts of her characters. The development of the emotional relationship between Pranab and Boudi expanded after Pranab bought a Volkswagen Beetle and started to take them out for outings and picnics to Walden Pond. Usha began to see the budding love relationships between the two. Usha’s mother’s occasional teasing him about his assumed relationships with girls is a point that pinpoints of her growing possessiveness and fear of losing him to another woman.

This kind of growing emotional relationship between Pranab and Boudi is abruptly disturbed by the entry of Deborah, the American girl who started to offer her companionship to him. The increasing jealousy of Usha’s mother is seen in her apathy and finding fault with her dotted face and small hips. Usha’s mother had no good opinion of Deborah and began complaining about the changed approach of Pranab terming the difference ‘hell-heaven’. Through the title of the story derived from this assertion, Lahiri takes her readers into the center of human emotions and searches for identity in relationships. In contrast to the emotional unrest and bitterness in her mother, Usha began to find in Deborah a close friend with whom she could be herself.

Pranab and Deborah continued to go consistently in their relationship and by summer he wanted to put a diamond ring on her hand, after trying it on Boudi who rejected the offer. This is again indicative of the psychological shock Usha’s mother was undergoing after she felt that Pranab was getting more and more detached from her. Her disturbance in losing his warmth is shown in the way she broke the cup of tea which Pranab used as an ashtray. In the process, she also injures herself cutting her palm. Emotional frustration lets her scratch herself, finding consolation in self-imposed pain.

Pranab’s parents were upset about his marriage to an American girl as they had already arranged a girl for him in Calcutta. Though Pranab had implored Usha’s parents to speak in his favor about Deborah with his parents as a decent girl, Baudi
avoided doing it. Pranab’s parents were upset with Baudi for not having mediated and ended the growing affair between Pranab and Deborah.

The special dinner Usha’s mother prepared only for Pranab before few days of his marriage is remarkable. Usha also remembered the way her mother touched him. In her disappointment, she always told her friends that Deborah would leave him and so for that reason Pranab was precisely throwing his life away.

After Usha’s family had attended the marriage, her mother kept insisting her not to marry an American like the way Pranab did. This led Usha to conceal some secrets from her mother. Her mother also found an alternative for her gloominess by watching soap operas and cooking. To add to the increasing gap between her parents, Usha’s father would keep asking her wife to go back to Calcutta if she feels unhappy in USA. Such comments made the situation bad as her mother’s isolation intensified by day after day. The heartbreaking experience came for Usha’s mother when she had also started to avoid her as her youthful attraction towards American peers.

This story takes readers forward many years when Usha’s parents were invited for a Thanksgiving at Pranab’s home, where all Deborah kith and kin were present, including her brother Matty with whom Usha had danced and developed some proximity. After grace before meals, Deborah’s father raised the toast to the ‘Thanksgiving with the Indians’ (Lahiri, 2009: 78). The most heart touching moment came when Pranab stood up to recount his story in America, how his meeting with Usha and her mother made all the difference in his life. As the narrator informs Pranab’s feeling about her mother when pointing at her, he argues, ‘this woman hosted my first real Thanksgiving in America … It weren't for that meal; I would have gone back to Calcutta.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 79) He stirred emotionally and went to Deborah to tell her that it was such an experience that made him marry her.

Jhumpa Lahiri goes further in time fourteen years later to tell how Pranab and Deborah divorced as had been anticipated by Usha’s mother, Deborah called up Usha’s mother one day and told her how she had failed to understand Pranab like the way Boudi understood him. She confessed that it was her plan to arrange the Thanksgiving dinner years back to bring them all together. She had felt at fault for having taken Pranab away from them all.
Usha was heartbroken when a man whom she wanted to marry abandoned her. It was then her mother disclosed something she had kept as a secret for years. Being brokenhearted after Pranab’s marriage, she had attempted to commit suicide by soaking herself with a can of the lighter solution when no one was at home. As she was just going to strike the match, a neighbor Mrs. Holcomb, called out to her, assuming that she was admiring the sunset from the backyard. Moved by the thought of a stranger calling her out, she stopped her suicidal plan to live once more for her family.

The heartrending story highlights the dilemma of individuals attempting to establish their identity in the diaspora, looking for emotional fulfillment.

A stranger like Mrs. Holcomb, who is far removed from Usha’s mother, becomes central to rescue her life. Identity in the relationship is established in different ways by the various characters in the story.

The title of the story Hell-Heaven aptly sums up the central topic of love relationships between the characters. Lack of concern of Usha’s father towards her mother brought about the crisis in the relationship leading to harsh consequences and emotional havoc.

The story highlights certain facts behind the lives of Indian immigrants in America in quest of identity and happiness. Most of them immigrated for economic reasons, they required to live in between the culture of their homeland and adopted home, striking roots in the unfamiliar earth as they cope up with their interpersonal relationships.

The third story ‘A Choice of Accommodations’ is a story in which space is used, once again, in order to show how migrants reconcile their identities. The story depicts the particulars about a wedded duo Amit and his white wife Megan and their two daughters Maya and Monika. The story spotlights the conjugal relationship between Amit and Megan and that was gradually deteriorating after the birth of their second daughter.

Amit and Megan decided on sharing some time jointly without their children. Pam Bordem’s, a college companion of Amit, marriage gave them a chance to live together for some days. They left their daughters with Megan’s parents and went to participate
in the wedding ceremony. The marriage was to take place at Langford Academy, a residential school where Pam’s father was Principal, and from where Amit has completed his graduation prior to eighteen years.

Making choices in life is the central point in the conjugal relationship between Amit and Megan. In this process, they have to accommodate with each other, unlike the way they keep changing hotel rooms while away on trips.

Now on this wedding tour, they had booked for two nights at Chadwick inn though accommodation could have been arranged for the alumni of the school in its premises. The lodging at the inn was far from their expectation as they found everything in disorder. The disorder in the room is figurative of the characters and their meaningless relationship.

Amit had been detached from his parents who had left for India when his father, an ophthalmologist, got a job at a hospital in Delhi. He suffered due to lack of close familial connections. The only loose connection Amit had at Langford was with Pam whose father was he headmaster of the school. However, he had no reminiscence for his alma mater and never thought of admitting his children there like the way his parents did.

Amit and Megan had the tendency of changing hotel rooms while on tours. However, this time their stay being only for two nights, they did not shift to another room. Frequent shifting of rooms is pinpointing the adjustment problem between them. Megan did not want to be present at the wedding as she feels unsafe about Pam and also doubtful about their school days love affair. However, in fact, Amit and Pam were simply friends and never lovers.

Megan was a doctor by occupation while Amit worked as an executive editor for a medical journal. However, he lacked the self-confidence and elegance that Megan possessed. Megan exploited his weakness and blamed him for the various problems in their lives. When it was time to leave for the marriage, Megan found a burn mark in her cloth. That was adequate justification for her not to attend the wedding. However, they made an agreement that Amit would stand beside her all the time to conceal the burn. At this moment, Lahiri focuses on the couple’s physical mismatching – she was forty-two, older to him by five years. However, he looked older having turned fully
gray from an early age. At the marriage ceremony, the two would have to be close to each other to hide the burn spot. This is a strange coincidence, where the two though psychologically in disorder, have to be physically close in manifestation. Amit’s identity crisis remains to be distinct as his daughters looked nothing like him, nothing like his parents. His children looked more like Megan though they had Indian names. He was more upset when people wondered if they were his children at all.

Jhumpa Lahiri focuses on the background of the couple that comes from totally different strata of society. Megan being from a very average background, his parents had strongly opposed their marriage despite her being a doctor. Amit’s parents, when they settled in Delhi, sent Amit off to Langford Academy. His annual trips to Delhi during holidays left him friendless and depressed. Being the only Indian student at school, he was taken for an American by his good accent. He felt harsh towards his parents for having left him in the residential school. However, Amit spent every Thanksgiving with Pam’s family and grew in his love for her like the other boys but she was not interested in any of them. From Langford, he went to Columbia University for medical studies. When Pam joined Columbia University, her father requested Amit to keep an eye on her. Though he loved her, he could only be a friend as she was engaged in various affairs. She assigned him the role of a brother and asked him to inspect the boys. She in her turn instructed him how to flirt with girls. After they had parted from the University, she kept him on her mailing list and sent cards every Christmas.

Amit met Megan at the medical school at Columbia and fell in love with her. He lacked her devotion to study and dropped out of school. However, Megan did not part with him but pressed him to take up a job in a medical journal.

During the wedding party, Amit and Megan kept close to each other as they had thought-out. They met the newlyweds Pam and Ryan. Pam was pleased to see Amit along with Megan and invited them to attend the campus brunch the next morning.

In the course of the table discussion with Felicia, Megan disclosed how they had to elope to be married as Amit’s parents did not give approval to his marrying an American girl. Though they were open-minded, they wanted him to marry Bengali girl. After marriage, it was Amit who was keen to have kids and begin a family. Going against Megan’s wish he also wanted a second child. After the birth of the
second child, their relations come under great strain. It resulted in their estrangement from each other. Megan worked all the time for the sake of Amit and the children. After the birth of Monika, they started to do things individually so that each could have some time alone. Amit began to appreciate such solitudes.

As the party advanced, Amit left Megan with his classmate Ted, searching for a pay phone to call his children. Having found no such service nearby, he went to the hotel to make the call. Sitting on his bed, half drunk, he snoozed off and slept the whole night. On waking, having found no hint of Megan returning to sleep, he doubted her dancing with Ted the whole night. However, to his sheer surprise, she had come back by early morning dropped by Felicia and Jared. That cleared his doubt of Megan’s affair with Ted. He expressed his regret for having returned and slept off in the hotel in an intoxicated mood. He requested her to join him for brunch at the school. Though apparently upset, out of compassion for him she approved to go with him. When they arrived at the location, no one was there apart from the maintenance men at work. As they headed towards the parking lot, Megan happened to go into one of the dormitories. She wished they had stayed there—a better option of accommodation. It would have saved them two hundred dollars without having to agonize about his departure the preceding night. Taking the signal from her for having missed a romantic night, Amit closed the door, but couldn’t lock it. She was interested to know if he had his first sex in one those rooms, indicating his affair with Pam. When he confessed that he never had sex with Pam, Megan was quite pleased.

Amit pulled down the shades of the windows and darkened the room. He knelt down on the floor and seized her legs, and she positioned her hands on his head brushing his hair. He began to make love though she had turned her head away. Although she said it was not a suitable location for sex, he continued to experience the conjugal satisfaction with her. That was an unusual experience outside their bedroom, with the apprehension of someone snooping. It was a right choice of accommodation for their passionate unification that saved their marriage and cemented way for happy family life.

The couple’s final romantic moments on the background of a wedding seems to link the gap between them in a relationship of many years, making the correct choice of accommodations.
The story spotlights on unspoken expectations of Amit and Megan, which create barriers between them. The event of Pam’s wedding brings to highlight his past and Megan’s misapprehension about his relationship with Pam. His rootedness in his past has ceased to strengthen his familial relationships. Lahiri probes into the unarticulated wishes of the protagonists in their disturbed marriage leading to distrust and loneliness. They had made too many wrong choices in life which the author climaxes in the final choice of accommodation in a hotel than in the school dormitory. Though, by themselves without their children, they are soul’s miles away from each other and psychologically living separate lives. Their feeling of monotony throughout their stay in Massachusetts is brought to a culmination when they engage in sex in the school dormitory, opening their eyes to a new world of intimacy in the relationship. Amit had been long left by his parents, has no other choice but to reconcile his relationship with his wife. The couples making accommodations in their lives can only go on to begin life anew together. The weekend brings about a distinctive meeting point between the Bengali-American husband and his workaholic American wife. The final incident of experiencing intimacy in the school dormitory seems to bring about the settlement in a diminishing interracial marriage.

Their relationship disturbs due to Amit’s lack of confidence and nervousness connected with his bitter past of separation from his parents. Although coming from a rich background, he was left with nothing and had to fend for himself. On the other hand, Megan’s lower background made her a workaholic to earn and prove herself.

The deteriorating relationship wrought about by misapprehension and suspicion among the duo is settled on a final choice of accommodation in intimacy. The fictionist has very suitably chosen the title ‘A Choice of Accommodations’ to investigate the disturbed marriage between the couple leading to their resentments, guarded secrets, and sexual distress –culminating in an impulsive sexual unleash in love making.

The story shows how on the background of the diasporic dilemma of characters, Lahiri examines the problems of familial relationships and interconnectedness between people. The fictionist explores deeply into emotional tangles of her characters and emphasizes the need for reaching out renewed emotional
communication between them to settle clashes and problems of mutual fine-tuning and identity crisis.

Hawthorne’s epigram from ‘The Custom House’ on how children “strike their roots into unaccustomed earth.” (Lahiri, 2009: ix) Gets applied to ‘A Choice of Accommodations’ where Amit’s difficulty in establishing roots in between two cultures is examined. His sense of inadequacy in the interracial marriage and the consequent restlessness and uncertainty leads to lack of affection in wedlock.

Through the story, Lahiri examines how the mixed marriage between an Indian-American and an American work out in the diasporic situation. Amit feels totally lost in the differences between the family he has created and the one in which he had grown up. He has to find meaning in his relationship with his wife and children, getting rooted in the newly established dispensation. The story set in Amit’s old prep school Langford Academy in Massachusetts, where the couple spends a weekend, becomes an opportunity for the duo to introspect on their individual identities and interpersonal relationships as spouses and parents. The accommodations they need to make in their relationship are indicative of Lahiri’s characters in search of identity in an unaccustomed earth.

In the story, Amit tries to make the occasion of the wedding of Pam a romantic experience with his wife, Megan. However, the events lead to more annoyance and distrust among them. As the title indicates about choices in life, Amit has to introspect his own life and his choices as a husband and father in search of fulfillment. The weekend reveals how the couple will accommodate themselves in each other’s life. Lahiri’s description of sex between the couple in a high school dormitory, though shocking, romantically adds to prove the significance of the title.

Transplantation of characters from one milieu to another continues to run through ‘Only Goodness’ as a recurring motif. The parents of Sudha move from India to London and America, seeking greener pastures. Their children are growing up in a foreign land keep moving from place to place in pursuit of their education and careers. Their in-between lives in the diaspora, leave them to themselves to set up their own inter-racial families in the unaccustomed earth.
The story focused on relationships of siblings that get ruptured in the course of time. It is different from most of Lahiri’s stories that have the themes of displacement and alienation. However, the central theme of rooting and uprooting in unaccustomed earth runs in a different manner in the story. The elder sister Sudha attempts to groom her brother Rahul in an improved atmosphere of building intimacy, in the midst of their parents living in secluded marriage. Sudha inspects the reality of her parents’ married life. It was neither cheerful nor miserable, and the lack of passion in their relationship was what upsets Sudha most. She would have understood disputes; she believed she would even have comprehended divorce. She always hoped some indication of love would visible itself; the only things that pleased her were a few photographs taken during their London years. The unease in her parents’ marriage upset Sudha. They led the life as if they confronted a life sentence of being alien in their diasporic survival. Though Rahul never concerned about helping his parents, Sudha understood their dilemma and their disconnection from India like a cancerous growth.

Sudha introduces her brother Rahul to alcohol that ultimately betrays their relationship. Dropping out of school and alienated from family, he becomes a victim of substance abuse. Her attempt at improving him rebounds as the story ends in the final rupture in their relationships. Lahiri delicately deals with the psychological analysis of her characters in familial relationships.

The story of Sudha and Rahul begins with their school days when Sudha introduced Rahul to alcohol offering him the beer on weekends. He felt it revolting to drink in the beginning. Later, hiding from their parents, they stored cans of beer in his room. They shared their drinking spouts when their parents were asleep. Lahiri takes note of the way the two become friends to do the wrong thing. Sudha wishes to establish her independence from her parents and offer her brother a happy childhood. She studied very attentively as a challenge perhaps to her parents who always favored Rahul, who was smarter. She secured double major in Economics and Maths. However, on the other hand, she went unruly, frequenting parties, drinking and sleeping with boys. She went directly against what her parents expected as they were quite orthodox when it came to drinking and loose living. Sudha did not care for any moral her parents respected. All that counted to her was competency.
Sudha’s parents regarded themselves successful having both their children achieve well at school. They rejoiced it when Rahul graduated from school. He would go to Cornell and Sudha would continue in Philadelphia for her Masters in International Relations. Her parents bought a car for Rahul as present. Lahiri refers to the high expectations Sudha’s parents had of their children. Her father used to keep clippings of the remarkable performance of children and tape them on the refrigerator. Sudha was inspired by her father to get into Harvard Medical School when she was just fourteen. He had got an application for her and placed it on her desk.

Sending Rahul to college at Ithaca is portrayed quite vividly by Jhumpa Lahiri. His mother cried, and Sudha wept as they parted company. Their emotional attachment to Rahul is evident while parting, but he did not feel any such emotional turmoil being parted. His behavior is indicative of breaking of relationships. From henceforth there is continuous estrangement in relationships. When he returns from Christmas vacation, he shows his real face. Scheming with Sudha, he makes a trip to the liquor store to get more stock to drink in secret with his sister.

Narrating their infancy, Lahiri glances into details of the family in the diaspora. Sudha was born in London. Later her parents shifted to Massachusetts since her father was transferred from Badger to Raytheon. Sudha had no account of her childhood toys and clothing, which was embarrassing for her at grade school when she was asked to present her autobiography. All she had was to show some boring pictures of her childhood, unlike others who could bring many their childhood toys and clothes. When Rahul was born, Sudha was firm that her little brother should establish his merit on American land. She was very much concerned for him more than anyone else.

Sudha began to perceive the odd behavior of Rahul, who kept aloof and began to avoid and despise her. It was a thing to be bothered for everybody in the family. Sudha understood from his body language that she was no more his close friend. He never bothered to call her for trips to liquor store since he had his own supply. She was informed by her mother that Rahul had done poorly at school obtaining C grade mostly. Her mother asked Sudha to discover what was disturbing him. When she cornered him, he admitted his inability to do better at school having experienced a sense of loss. She felt at fault as she had been his counselor. However, Rahul
continued his drinking in the house, sliding the cup under his bed. On the night before her leaving to Philadelphia, he agreed to go with the family for a dinner out. However, he excused himself from attending the party due to some other engagements. Later when the phone rang, it was Rahul, calling from the police station, having been pulled up for drunken driving. Being past midnight, Sudha had to wake up her father to do and get Rahul bailed out. Her mother, on the other hand, began to agitate and criticize the police force for having charged Rahul on racial grounds.

The sequence transfers to London where Sudha has appeared to pursue her studies along with her parents. After they depart, Sudha felt at home in London, the place of her birth. She felt a new found liberty away from home, but couldn’t think of drinking without having thoughts of Rahul. Meanwhile, Rahul was instructed to participate in alcohol education classes at Ithaca, after having had his license suspended, and his father had to pay almost two thousand dollars as fine.

In London, Sudha happened to meet a man named Roger Featherstone at the National Gallery. He had a Ph.D. in art history and worked as editor of an art magazine. He began to court Sudha. Though born in Bombay, he remembered nothing about his early life in India. He had married a girl in his twenties, but she left him. His new found relationship with Sudha grew day by day, and she found the expected competency in him. Eventually when she came home, she told her parents, that she would be marrying Roger and move to London permanently.

Rahul continued to do badly in life. He was back home and employed temporarily in a Laundromat to the awkwardness of the family. He had become a shame every parent terrified of. Sudha had become successful as a project manager for an organization that encouraged microfinance in poor countries. She and Roger visited Massachusetts to arrange for their marriage. He kept a limited contact with her family and stayed in a hotel than with Sudha’s parents. Rahul was quite impressed by Roger. Meanwhile, he began dating Elena, an aspirant actress. During lunch, Rahul silently helped himself liberally to liquor. Observing him, Sudha concluded that he was not just a social drinker but had become obsessed with it.

When Rahul declared his engagement to Elena, his father objected as he says, ‘You are only a boy. You have no career, no goal, and no path in life. You are in no
position to be getting married. Moreover, this woman … is practically old enough to be your mother.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 155)

The argument led to the boy insulting his father and calling him a wretched old snob. That was the end of their relationship as Rahul and Elena walked out of the house.

Sudha had experienced for herself Rahul’s disorderliness and drinking that his father recognized now as a problem. They feared that Rahul would replicate the same during the wedding function. Sudha felt perturbed as she could not talk to him anymore. In her frustration, she walked with annoyance. Rahul turned up at the wedding reception without Elena. Though his father had warned the bartender to keep an eye on Rahul’s drinking, it was of no benefit. He got drunk as usual, making a funny scene before he walked out, to the relief of his parents. However, Sudha bothered about him being rounded up by the police. She still had her compassion for him. She was being agonized by the thought of her letting Rahul into drinking. She did not have the courage to tell it all to her husband as she was afraid of her being accused of it.

Both Sudha and Roger were off to their honeymoon and returned to London to set up their new home. She was disturbed by the thoughts of her marriage reception where Rahul made awkward scenes. In the course of time, however, Rahul moved out altogether from her thoughts until her parents called to inform that he had left home and departed with no address. A week later a letter arrived home with a note;

‘Don’t bother looking for me here … I am only spending the night. I don’t want to hear from any of you. Please leave me alone.’ (Lahiri, 2009:158)

Meantime his mother had become aware of that all the ornaments she had accomplished over the years were not there.

Sudha was delighted with her pregnancy. However, often her thoughts went back to Rahul, recalling reminiscences of her childhood. She thought good of Rahul that he required to get away to put life back together. She became anxious about that the contrary would happen whereby the police might find his dead body in some ditch. After her child Neel was born, Sudha forgot all about her brother. Her parents frequented their visits to her and found their grandson fill the void left by Rahul.
As she lived her most challenging and rewarding life, one day she received a letter from Rahul telling her that he was regretful for his unruliness and that he had a job of a cook in a restaurant. He informed that he was living with Elena and desired to visit Sudha in London. Sudha was speedy in her respond and without even telling Roger that she had invited him to visit her. Sudha was thrilled to meet Rahul nearly after a year and a half. Rahul was playful with Neel and showed his great warmth for his nephew.

During dinner, Rahul declined the offer of white wine and flavored club soda with some orange juice, convincing Sudha he had reformed himself. She informed him about their parents’ plan of retiring at the end of the year and settle down in Calcutta. It was all news for him since he had no contact with them and didn’t want her to tell them of his visit. He was also told that their father would be undergoing the operation of his knees, and with Rahul out of the scene, she would be the only child they would depend on. Rahul was interested in the know of Sudha’s Christmas plans. She spoke of her parents’ plan of visiting her during Christmas and invited Rahul, Elena, and crystal to join them. Though she expected a negative reply, he gave a positive indication. Sudha was breathless to know that was a perfect way to bridge the gap and establish broken familial relationships.

With the excuse of walking around, Rahul had gone out one day. However, Sudha wondered all the while what he did in the streets of London as there were numerous pubs around which would attract him. When she returned home from her work, she found Rahul playing with Neel. He did not drink that night when they went out. This continued the whole week as he kept up his normal activities. Rahul becomes so friendly with Neel; he carried him on his shoulders all the while on their visit to the zoo. Next day Rahul suggested that Sudha and Roger take a break and go to a movie while he looked after Neel. When she called Rahul from the movie house, she found everything was well with Neel. She felt comfortable when Rahul assured her about well being of Neel. Being at ease, Sudha and Roger did some shopping on the way. On returning, she did not find Rahul and Neel in the sitting room though the TV was on. She thought Rahul was giving a bath to Neel. Reaching the bath tub, she found Neel sitting in it without the plastic ring on him. He was wavering with water getting up to the middle of his chest. The dreadful scene made her weep with fear and cry. They were shocked to find Rahul slept in Roger’s study with a glass placed under the
bed. They were unable to wake him up, instead shouted at each other. Though they accused each other, she admitted the secret she had kept from Roger all the time. Hearing the past stories of Rahul, Roger showed his repulsion for her. That night she could not sleep. All of them went to bed hungry. She pondered over her parents’ attitude. Early next morning as Rahul was making coffee, Sudha interrupted him saying that he had to be off to the airport. She was firm when she said; ‘You passed out, and you left our baby alone in the tub. You could have killed him, do you understand? … You have to go now.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 172)

The whole night she had vexed and fumed. When he attempted to defend his helplessness, she was furious all the more. Rahul is packed off to Heathrow very abruptly. As he stood in the sitting room, Sudha called for a minicab and handed him a fifty-pound bill. Lahiri portrays Sudha’s mental frame of mind with a poetic description. As Rahul slipped into the back seat, and the cab pulled away Sudha gazed out at the gray morning light. The image of the exhausted balloon is remarkably used by Lahiri. Sudha cut the ribbon that held the shrunken balloon to throw it into the garbage, signifying her resolve to throw overboard her connectivity to Rahul who should be replaced by giving her all to her family, captivating the faith of her husband, living for her son.

Finally, Sudha had to take full responsibility for having created a monster out of her brother by her misleading him and joining him in their drinking session. In the end, the table is turned on her when her son was almost killed by Rahul. The message is clear; no relationship can be authentically developed by a protective and doting approach towards erring siblings. She had a wrong sense of responsibility towards Rahul despite his drinking problem. She made a mistake in depositing her faith and trust in him and concealing the truth even from her husband she risked inviting him to London to reform him. However, her plans boomeranged.

At long last she became conscious that her trusting her brother has been a mistake as he could never be transformed by her positive attitudes full of goodness. She had to accept her limited accountability in attempting to transform a self-destructive brother. The story culminates with her total cutting off all relations with Rahul and to dedicate herself completely for a life with her husband and child.
Jhumpa Lahiri has very deftly dealt with the theme of uprooting for a fresh beginning. Ruptured family relationships are shown as signs of characters seeking self-identity in the midst of trust and mistrust. Lahiri’s treatment of the theme of familial relationships in the diasporic dilemma of Sudha and Rahul becomes universal in significance.

‘Nobody’s Business’ is the fifth and last story of the first part of the book. Sangita, a second generation Bengali-Indian immigrant, is the principal character of this story. Though her name is Sangita Biswas, she loves to be name as Sang. Sang is of marriageable age. Therefore, every so often men phoned for her with the desire to marry her. She studied Philosophy and completed her graduation from New York University. She was obtaining her doctorate degree at Harvard University. However, she dropped out after a semester and took up part time at a bookstore.

Paul and Heather are Sang’s roommates who always update her whenever there was a probable groom on the phone. One day Paul noticed her boyfriend who wore entirely discolored jeans, a white shirt, a navy blue blazer, and brown leather shoes. His name was Farouk as Sang introduced him to Paul, but he went for Freddy.

Paul observed that Sang was never at home, and when she was she resided in her room, often on the phone having the closed entrance. It was something of a shock to locate Farouk in the house. Whenever she was not with Farouk, she did things for him. She used to read through proofs of the articles he’d written, examining it for typographical errors. She also planned his doctor’s appointment, etc.

During one winter break when she went away to London to visit her sister and her baby boy, a woman called at their house a number of times to know about Sang. She asked to Paul whether Sang and Freddy are cousins. Furthermore, she began crying and when she stopped crying she said that she loved him. She informed him that she was Freddy’s girlfriend. When Deirdre asked once more about whether Sang and Farouk are cousins? Paul told her the truth that they are boyfriend and girlfriend. When Sang returned, she asked Paul about Deirdre, he told her everything. Now she began to avoid him; she criticized Paul for making all these stories about what he told her about Deirdre. Paul did not say anything to Sang. One day he searches out Deirdre’s number and phoned her and left a message on the answering machine, asked her to call him back. When she picked up the phone, she said she will call him later.
the same night at ten. Then the thought came to him immediately; he brought a phone and an adopter with two jacks. When Sang came home Paul told her that he called Deirdre and she will call him at ten o’clock and if she wishes to listen she can listen without her knowing as he has hooked up another phone to their line, and she agreed. Exactly one minute past ten, both the phone rang. They slowly picked up both the phones. Deirdre told that she made Paul into an impostor because it was Freddy’s idea; he was furious because she called Paul. He refused to see her and talk to her. She said that Paul should inform everything about Freddy to Sang because she has the right to know that she is not the only girl in Freddy’s life. Next morning Paul woke up with the sound of a car, Sang was going to London. She left a note on the kitchen table that gave him thanks for yesterday. Farouk called many times to know about Sang and Paul told him that she left the country. In the end, we come to know that Paul has cleared his exams, and two of his professors took him to the Four Season Bar for the drink and celebrated. After the party when he moved out he saw Farouk and a woman. He directly looked at Farouk and thought, as the text narrates; ‘...for this man, Deirdre had called a perfect stranger; made fool of herself. For this man Sang would rush from the house, had refused all her suitors.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 218)

Through the story, Lahiri portrays the life of the Indian migrant to America, encapsulating the diasporic sensibility of her characters tangled in manifold emotional twists.

In part two of Unaccustomed Earth, Jhumpa Lahiri takes the readers through a tragic love story of two young Indian Americans through a trilogy of stories, viz. ‘Once in a Lifetime’, ‘Year’s End’, and ‘Going Ashore’. This trilogy of stories in the collection investigates the emotional tangles of Hema and Kaushik dealing the histories of the duo belonging to two Bengali immigrant families in America. The illustrative presentation of the integrated stories probes into the emotional strain, the characters suffer over the years.

‘Once in a Lifetime’ beings to narrate the story of the two families in 1974, as Kaushik’s parents have left America to settle down in India. However, they later come back to America to the sheer surprise of Hema’s parents. An intimate relationship is developed between the two women in their various household activities. They were so close to members of one joint family. Hema and Kaushik
grew up like siblings in the family. A strong empathy is established between Hema and Kaushik since they both had shared the same furniture and tools as kids. The reference to the ‘high chair’ and ‘old pram’ is props to build a deeper relationship between the protagonists. When Kaushik’s family moved to Bombay, they left many objects with Hema’s parents including some clothes of Kaushik, which was later used by her with distasteful memories. She recollects how Kaushik’s physical presence in the house began to weaken with the passage of time as the families did not keep up the contact. However, on the New Year’s Day in 1981 Kaushik’s father called Hema’s parents to inform that they were returning to Massachusetts since he got a new job. He requested if they could stay with Hema’s parents until they got a house. From then on the conversation in the family began to be on Kaushik’s parents.

When the story advances six years, Kaushik’s parents return to Massachusetts and lives as guests with Usha’s parents. Because their return to USA was a new job Kaushik’s father got. However, the real cause was Kaushik’s mother was dying of cancer. However, it was kept a much protected secret from Hema’s parents.

Kaushik being sixteen was given Hema’s room. When Kaushik’s family arrived, Hema minutely observed Kaushik and took him to show her room where he would be housed, engaging in thoughts of their intimacy grow. She liked Kaushik’s stay with them. She begins to think of some moments as she lay in her cot dreaming of Kaushik kiss her.

One day Kaushik led Hema into the thick of the forest and showed her a bunch of tombs and began to let know that his mother was dying of breast cancer. His family came away to US to be left to themselves, estranged from relatives and friends. Shockingly, Hema wept in his presence. Returning home, she was disturbed at the thought of having a dying woman in their home. In due course, Kaushik’s family shifted to a new home. Hema kept the information to herself though her parents came to know of it when Kaushik’s mother was dying in the hospital.

The story ‘Once in a Lifetime’ is an experience for two young people, attempting to establish a relationship with each other in the midst of Kaushik’s dying mother. They are emotionally getting nearer to each other as friends and lovers.
‘Year’s End’ plunges Kaushik into an emotional turmoil after his mother’s death. He cannot get adjusted to the fact of his father’s second marriage after the shocking loss. His frustrations in his relationship with his step-mother and her daughters reveal his sense of loss and identity crisis.

It is Kaushik who takes up the narration and tells about his uprooted predicament to Hema. He was woken up to school one Sunday morning by his father’s phone call to tell him of his safe returns to Massachusetts from Calcutta with a new stepmother and two stepsisters. He was told that Chitra, his stepmother, lost her husband two years ago. A school teacher by profession, she was thirty-five, with two young daughters of seven and ten. Kaushik did not like his father’s decision. It was a registry marriage with a small feast at a hotel. Kaushik knew that the marriage was not forced on his father as he wanted a life companion. He recollected how his father had loved his mother especially after she was confirmed as a cancer patient.

The day when his father called, Kaushik had a girl named Jessica in his bed, who knew nothing of his mother’s death or about his father. They had spent only a few weekends together, and he had not concerned to tell anything about his family. This sequence brings in the element of free life in diaspora. He recollects how his mother had packed her ruby and pearls to be given to his future wife.

When Kaushik reached home to meet his family, he found the young timid girls who were told by their mother to address him, Kaushik Dada. Rupa and the younger Piu spoke in their broken English and introduced themselves.

Kaushik went into the kitchen as he used to do in the last days of his mother, trying to do the work. He went in for the bottle of Scotch his parents used to enjoy. His father came in to tell him he had stopped taking Scotch giving the reason that Chitra was rather old fashioned. However, he poured the drink for his father.

Next morning Kaushik thought of going to Dunkin’s Donuts to pick up some coffee since Chitra found no coffee in the house. He asked the two girls to accompany him the drive; this very first communication between the trios breaks many barriers between them. He comes to know that the girls were over sheltered by their mother as they never went out anywhere without her. Their holding hands together while walking through the parking lot is yet another sign of building warmer relationships.
Now his father in-between them was no more relevant as the two girls were like him, having lost a parent. During the conversation, the kids spoke of their premonitions of difficult times at forewarning due to poor language skills. Kaushik assured them that the adjustment problems would be overcome in the course of time as he faced it after returning to US at sixteen. At this moment, little Piu was interested to know if it was before his mother’s death. The question made him think of his own vulnerability in their presence. They expressed their wish to see his mother’s photograph. He made excuses though there was one in his wallet. The girls were excited, so too their mother searched the house for a picture.

As they returned home, Kaushik observed Chitra restlessly watching for the car. The girls informed that it was an enjoyable outing, and they expressed their fondness for Kaushik.

Calling Jessica, his girlfriend, on the phone, brought him a comforting feeling as she invited him to her parents’ home. In the confusion of his coping with the problem of establishing relationships, this was an opportunity – but he just couldn’t do it.

His observing the girls with their mother combing and retying their hair, a daily ritual, spontaneously done by the trio, made Kaushik remember his mother wearing a wig even to her last days. Chitra, unlike his mother, had such silky strands flowing almost to her waist. The mere sight disgusted him since his father and Chitra would mature into old age.

His daydreaming was broken by Chitra offering tea, and making remarks on the way the house was built. She was anxious about the steps too slippery with no fence on the floating stairs, which might let the girls’ trip and fall. Being irritated at such stupid comments he cut short the discussion stating that it was the way they liked it to be. That was the end of the conversation, and he longed for his father to return with the Christmas tree.

Kaushik was asked by his father to get the box in the basement with all the Christmas decorations. Spotting the box labeled ‘X-MAS’ in his mother’s hand, he did not want to bring it up letting Chitra go through. Kaushik could not endure the way Chitra handle the things his mother had handled. He was all more annoyed at the way his father had attempted to eliminate all symbols and signs of his mother in the
house. The Christmas tree was adorned, and his father hung the gifts with their name cards. The girls were charmed to see the tree so beautiful. Impulsively, his father asked him to take a snap. He refused it saying he had not brought his camera. An argument proceeds, the depth of which only Kaushik and his father understood.

Kaushik was compelled to join the family tour to Boston to show the city to Chitra and the girls. It was an unusual trip for him, yet significant since they never went on any such trips when his mother was ill except for the transit trip to Rome on their way back to US.

Kaushik had his share of Christmas gifts from his father, a sweater, a shirt, and $1000 which he felt was too much. His father had also organized a special trip for the girls to visit Disney World. Though his father invited him to join, he felt it not a credible invitation. However, the girls were keen on having him for the trip.

Kaushik began to be kinder towards the girls as they established some kind of a resemblance to each other with their losses in the life of a mother and a father. He took them out to visit the Science Museum and the Aquarium. The incident when Piu lost a tooth while eating her cone and Kaushik sopping up the blood in her mouth is indicative of the mystery surrounding blood ties.

In the diaspora, relationships seem to get easily disrupted being in a different social milieu, but at the root of it all blood ties remain a great bond.

When the family was invited to a party before the New Year, the girls wanted to remain home since Kaushik was not going. The children favored their own party with Kaushik. The trio once again affirmed their unity in the division. The three went out together for their pizza at the restaurant. Kaushik’s releasing his tension by smoking cigarettes is a sign of the conflict in him. The girls kept repeating about his joining them for the Disney trip. As they return home, Jessica called him and was glad the family would be off to Disney World, and she could keep him company. He longed for her in such times of difficult relationship with his father. He missed her and desired her at night in bed, but at the same time yet he did not want to see her in his parents’ house. He showed his unwillingness to her invitation. He felt at fault being sandwiched her as his only escape was to tell Jessica the lie he told the girls that he would think it over.
Observing the two girls look at his mother’s photograph in a shoe box makes him fume with rage. In his fury, he took all his things and drove off in the night and landed up a motel. Next morning, he felt guilty for what happened the night before. He felt at fault for having ill-treated the young girls. He felt that he should pray an apology to them. When calling his father on the phone, he understood that the girls had not reported against him for having terrified them. Instead, Chitra felt it was due to her fault that he was off at night.

Kaushik kept driving for four days devoid of any map and was told he would hit Canada. His psychological nervousness is symbolically presented through the awe-inspiring landscape. He was consumed by the freezing and terrifying landscape that uncovered his guilt and fear. This was the first time he ever took a journey unaccompanied. As he says; ‘No one in the world knew where I was, no one had the ability to reach me. It was like being dead, my escape allowing me to taste that tremendous power my mother possessed forever.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 290)

He had spent five days on the road to reach the border of Canada and headed back as the year came to an end. The title is derived from this experience of Kaushik at the ‘year’s end.’

Kaushik remembers the past when his family lived with Hema’s parents. Though he despised to be with them, now recollects those days with nostalgia He had not experienced the affection of his home when mother was ill, as every corner was scattered with medicine bottles and all paraphernalia of her illness. He was never happy in that own home.

Close to the Canadian border, he found a striking spot where he brought the shoebox of photographs of his mother. Scanning through them, he could not but think of scattering them. However, he avoided the temptation and put them back in the box. It was his symbolic funeral of mother’s pictured memory in the unaccustomed earth.

A few weeks before his graduation day, his father informed him of the family shifting to a new more traditional house in the suburb of Boston. Kaushik had decided not to go after his father to the new house, instead would be traveling to South America after graduation. Herein Jhumpa Lahiri highlights her central motif of ‘unaccustomed earth’ in the diasporic life of her protagonists.
The story concludes with Kaushik’s graduation ceremony where all meet for a final time. He was glad to know from the response of the girls that they had not exposed his mean behavior when he threatened them and walked out of the home. The bitter incident remained only between the three of him and the girls. In his present condition of isolation, Rupa and Piu were the nearest siblings he could ever have. The story ends symbolically. Kaushik is an emotionally broken person, alienated from his father and his stepmother and her daughters. The subsequent rootless life enforces him to go globetrotting and escape into a world of photojournalism.

In ‘Going Ashore’, Lahiri becomes an omniscient narrator bringing together Kaushik and Hema in Rome after about two decades of estrangement from each other. She, very craftily brings self-consciousness in both the protagonists as they get very close with each other. However, the break in narration comes with Hema taking over in the last portion of a code.

It is a Latin professor at Wellesley that Hema comes to Rome. Neither her parents nor her would-be husband Navin knew what she was doing in Rome. She merely called it a visiting lectureship at the Institute of Classical Studies. Her academic life was an obscurity to them. Her friend Giovanna had arranged for her research at the American Academy. However, in October she would take an ad hoc leave of absence to visit her retired parent in Calcutta, and to get married to Navin in an arranged wed-lock. She had only three-weekend contacts with Navin before their engagement. From Rome, she kept contact with him by e-mail and through occasional phone calls, exchanging words purely out of formality. Navin was a professor of Physics at Michigan State. They were both physically attracted to each other, and since they got on well with each other, it would ultimately conclude in their life together. In the meantime in Rome, she continued an affair with a former lover Julian, a married man with wife and daughters. She expected Julian to divorce his wife and marry her. Since it did not happen, they had to separate bitterly.

She could never go intensely into any relationship with people as something blocked it. The text precisely comments on her inner conflicts; ‘Now she was free of both of them, free of her past and free of her future … She was alone with her work, alone abroad for the first time in her life, aware that her solitary existence was about to end.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 298)
Now, as a professor, having researched on Lucretius, she was drenched in the Latin literature that facilitated her to bring a dead world to life. Focused on further research into Etruscans, she was trying to flee from her own loneliness, and she spent her days, in quiet study. In her earlier days, she never went about flirting and men kept away from her, since she had made up her mind for Julian. Now, she was into a new relationship with Navin, yet she knew for sure that her heart did not belong to Navin in the similar manner.

Being an introvert, she never frankly shared her life with anyone, and it remained one of the denials. Being aware of her age, Navin kept reminding her of his keenness to begin a family. The plot hardens as Lahiri introduces Kaushik coming to Rome as a photojournalist who had roamed for about twenty years, mostly in Latin America. He had been to war zones of Israel, Guatemala, Mexico, Buenos Aires, Africa and the Middle East, eking out a living by taking pictures of dead bodies. He had little connection with his family apart from occasional emails. His father and Chitra had visited him in Rome on their journey to Calcutta. He was preparing to move to Asia working for a magazine.

Since he possessed little, moving was easy, in the same way, his mother had set up households again and again. The concept of diaspora as a recurring theme is very brilliantly portrayed by Lahiri. For Kaushik, migrant life began from childhood as he was always happiest to be outside, away from the personal collection of life. His photojournalism harmonized with his life. He became a man from nowhere, devoid of psychological and physical attachment to anyone. What was his identity? His origin did not matter to him as a photographer though in Europe he was regarded as an Indian.

In Rome, Kaushik got an opportunity to meet Hema, who memorized their living together when she was thirteen and how she nurtured her longing for him. He took her to his apartment. It was quite clear that they would not part yet. Having spent a long time talking about her endeavors, finally she told him she was going to marry Navin. His impulsive reaction is revealed through his smoking a few cigarettes. Meanwhile, she placed her hands flat on the table, revealing her gold bangle that she wore from childhood in remembrance of her grandmother. When Kaushik indicates her wearing no engagement ring, she admits the truth she hardly knew Navin.
Missing each other for decades, that was a night of obsessive intimacy between them as they tried to get released from their emotional knot. They spent much time together in the night, in out of the way restaurants, bars and abandoned squares, sitting together like the teenaged couple kissing one another. She talked about belief in Estrucan’s love of the natural world and portents. They never worried to say anything about their own future. Strangely, they never recalled their past lives together and the friendship between their parents over the years; he let her surf his website on his laptop and saw innumerable images of bomb blasts, bodies on stretchers and other war sights he had observed. The images now affected her because he had become her lover. She respected his eagerness to connect with strangers and vice versa. Hema found that such willingness was also required to disappear at any moment as he did in his life. It was her guess that he had been with many women in his life as well. That night they fell asleep without having sex since familiarity was growing between them.

When Navin called, she did not answer because; Kaushik was busy involved in passionate moments with her. However, she knew that it would all end within weeks as they would be in different countries. Whenever they had having their sexual intercourse, he wore a condom, clearly demonstrating that they remained disconnect even in sexual union. At the same time when Navin called, she brushed him aside, telling him lies about her travels around, to avoid his calls.

After traveling together in Italy for some time, both Hema and Kaushik would prefer different routes – she would go off to India and Kaushik to Hong Kong. After the last meal together, Kaushik asked her to go with him to Hong Kong and refrain from marrying Navin. This came as a shock as she felt him telling her what to do than to join her instead. She was quick to reply, ‘It’s too late, Kaushik.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 322) Retorting in fury he called her a coward, and she knew he would never pardon her for rejecting him. Hema argued that though he told her not to marry Navin, he had not asked her hand in marriage. All she could do was to cry her tears out. Spending the night apart, they parted company the next day when she realized she had left her bangles. She had left it at the security check while boarding the aircraft. The bangle is a symbol of her traditional and cultural connection with her family and others with whom she had established relationships. Kaushik had symbolically hooked onto it to pull her into his life. However, she had other bangles would leave the past behind to
begin anew. Though the bangle would be replaced tenfold at her wedding, she recognized the importance of the lost bangle as the text remarks: ‘… she felt she had left a piece of her body behind. She had grown up hearing from her mother that losing gold was inauspicious.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 324)

Lahiri employs the importance of the flight of the aircraft to portray Hema’s aspiration and dreams, which she wished at that moment, would end up with a blast in the sky.

Kaushik’s route takes him to Thailand. However, he keeps longing for her all the time. He speculated what went wrong in his effort to get linked to her, though she happened to be the only one in his life, who knew his past, and the only person to whom he wanted to remain connected to.

The story comes to an end with Hema taking up narration as if to put an end to the story she began, recollecting from her childhood memory. She could not just forget the past. She searched for information of Kaushik, to get in touch with him. She surfed his website and found the last images he had posted with the backdrop of the coastal scene they had both seen from Volterra.

The coastal scenes are symbolic of migrant spirit as well as emotional split in relationships that the two have experienced. Now they have to live their lives on different shores, pining for each other – so close, yet so split apart. The rest of the events in Hema’s life take place as planned. She is married to Navin. However, things did not click. Hema returned to her life in Massachusetts thirty years after Kaushik and his parents left for India. The cycle of life is complete: sprouting – blooming – dying – and sprouting again.

In February, she came to know from an obituary in the New York Times that Kaushik was no more. It was a shocking piece of news to which Hema reacts passionately, and her grief became more painful as Kaushik had left nothing behind since the child in her womb was not his. Though the story is one of intense love and passion, it does not end in marriage, rather in grief, separation, and death. Through the story, Lahiri has described the anguish of people trying to survive in a situation of having lost familial and cultural relationships due to circumstances in migrant existence.
The stories of **Hema and Kaushik** are full of pathos concluding in unfulfilled love. ‘Once in a Lifetime’ can happen to any family in the diaspora, leading to establish family ties and growing up in love. The feeling of uprooting and being replanted recur in the stories. The breaking point comes with the death of Kaushik’s mother. However, life must continue with revival. In ‘Year’s End’ when Kaushik’s father marries Chitra, he fails to appreciate the emotional and physical needs of his father, Chitra and the two young children. Both Kaushik and Hema attempt to escape their own protected worlds. Kaushik’s search leads him to globetrotting as a photojournalist, trying to take roots in the unaccustomed earth. Succeeding nowhere, he finds the turning point of his life in the arms of Hema. However, that too is shattered, climaxing in his final uprooting from life itself. Life moves on with Hema, though unfulfilled in love, with the fetus growing within her, giving meaning to life through ‘Going Ashore’ to new places.

It can be observed that Kaushik is an estranged soul, suffering from an identity crisis. He cannot experience a sense of belonging to any place or sustain an emotional link with anyone. The ill-fated death of his mother, when he was very young, disturbed him all throughout his grown-up life. He is still like a missing child searching for his mother’s support. His deep attachments to his mother had caused him a lot of agony after she passed away. This is the cause for his fear of promise and commitment as he is suspicious of attachments. He meets Hema after many years and finds she is the one person he could feel a real connection to. Despite loving each other intensely, they are both too emotionally injured and have too many scars. Lahiri is a master of psychological truth, and these stories focus her emotional wisdom. Through this trilogy of stories, Lahiri highlights the anguish of two nomads attempting to survive in a world where they have lost all familial and cultural relations. This is due to circumstances in the immigrant experience.

The Diasporic dilemma in relationships is well highlighted by Jhumpa Lahiri when she let her characters take diverse roads, quite contradictory of those traveled by their immigrant parents. This is where the cultural and familial links are broken in the unaccustomed earth. They all become outsiders in their own worlds and have to struggle for their own survival in the diaspora. Both Hema and Kaushik have to escape their pasts and their parents’ way of life to begin to live in unaccustomed earth, striving to set up homes.
The stories in the trilogy are intense studies of individuals caught in emotional twists, between conflicts of family relationships and cultural traditions resulted in their identity crisis. They try to establish their individual identities in a new location, experiencing at the same time the sense of displacement, alienation, and isolation. These individuals, trapped in the bewilderment of their migrant lives, need to get associated with family and friends for emotional fulfillment.

In the nutshell, it can be argued that all the eight stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* are well planned on the backdrop of diasporic dilemma of characters struggling to cope up with intricacies of familial relationships and interconnectedness between people. The novelist probes deeply into the mind of her characters and establishes the need for reaching out in improved emotional communication between them. These stories portrayed the diasporic sensibility through interpersonal and family relationships among characters who attempt to cope up with their emotional dilemma seeking to establish their identities in an alien land. As Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz has commented on the predicament of second generation immigrants;

> This identity formation process proves especially challenging- and often torturous-for second generation immigrants because, while they can rarely achieve a complete assimilation into their host society, they cannot easily identify fully with their ethnic roots or seek the support of their co-ethnics, as their progenitors did. (Ibarrola, 2010:44)

The title ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ also got great importance as the stories are about Indian immigrants relocated to the unaccustomed earth of America and becoming adapted to the Unaccustomed Earth. There is recurrent of relocations of families and relationships such as; father-daughter, brother-sister, and many others, that have changed how someone felt towards that person and vice versa. Lahiri highlights disturbed families and the clashes they confronted as immigrants had to redefine relationships after their relocation.

### 4.5 Intergenerational Gap

Through the stories of *Unaccustomed Earth*, Jhumpa Lahiri is continued to spotlight on the conflicts between the first and the second-generation immigrants, the communication problems they confront every day, and the discord between Indian parents and their half-American children. Indian parents wish their children to absorb
Indian values even when they themselves live far away from them. According to some thinkers, the reason for the difference in reactions between the generations is because of their contradictory ideas about the word ‘home’. For the first-generation immigrants ‘home’ can never be any other place but India, but for their second-generation children ‘home’ is the place of their birth and nurture and not their parent’s native land. In her stories of Unaccustomed Earth Lahiri has mainly dealt with the lives of second generation immigrants who are fully occupied in their life struggle in America.

The first generation immigrants, who have been living in the new society and enjoying the economic benefits of that society, anxiously try not to get influenced by the culture of the adopted land. They attempt to shun their children from accepting the American lifestyle. It is perhaps easier for their parents to maintain the ‘sanctity’ of their ‘culture’ but for the children, who are born and brought up in an alien land; it is quite hard to maintain the culture narrowness their parents have adapted in the foreign land. Her second-generation characters are torn between affection for their parents and a wish to form their own family and pursue their own path, free from their parents’ values and expectations. At the same time, they have to accommodate their hybridity. These dilemmas between two different generations coping to live in the migrated landmark the spirit of Unaccustomed Earth. In this connection, Shubhashree Mukherjee rightly points out;

A cultural drift, pulling the second and third generations embracing a new and fascinating way of life is brought forth through the espousing of Americans by the non-native Bengalis. Several couples in the stories are shown to perform inter-community marriages or possess secret ties with American or British nationalists of the opposite sex. Untoward happenings failed love affairs, unsuccessful marriages, alcoholism and unlawful relationships make the lives of second and third generation immigrants miserable. (Mukherjee, 2010:63)

The title story ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ revolves around a father-daughter relationship on the background of the recent unexpected and premature death of Ruma’s mother. The story has highlighted the generational issue with fresh and new viewpoint. Earlier stories by Lahiri focused mainly on the conflict between the
teenager second generation ignoring parental cultures whereas holding fast to American ways of life and the first generation parents enforcing their native culture on their wards. However, in this story, the second generation character, Ruma is a mature mother and her father, a first generation immigrant, is already an aged man. Tejinder Kaur has captured the different situation of this generation on the issue of culture and value system. As Kaur observes;

They also face the cultural dilemma when their cultural practices are mocked at, and there is a threat to their cultural identity. They stand bewildered and confused and show resistance also to the discourse of power in various forms. In the following generations, these confusions, problems and yearnings become less intense as they get less influenced by the culture of the native country and also adapt themselves to the culture of the country of their residence. (Kaur, 2002:192)

The relationship equation, as depicted in this tale, has been changed a lot in comparison to earlier stories. Thematically the story shows and sets trend for the other stories in the collection about the inclusion of an American in the ‘sacred’ family space as we see the daughter; Ruma is married to Adam, a white American. In a greater perspective, this inter-racial marriage can also be regarded as an important progress of interculturalism that preaches not only nonviolent coexistence but also convincing, meaningful and positive interaction among cultures. Another development indicated here in the story is the succession of Bengali diaspora in terms of generation. With the depiction of Akash, Ruma and Adam’s child, Lahiri’s literary world enters into the discourse for the first time with the third generation of this diaspora in the US.

Ruma is portrayed by Lahiri as torn between the expectations of the two cultures, the Bengali culture that she got by inheritance and the mainstream American culture that she willfully accepted. She was uncertain of whether to include her lonely father in her family or not. She was forced neither by her father nor Adam to take any decision.

The lack of personal communication between Ruma and her father is indicated by the writer’s referring to number of impersonal means of public communication. During her father’s Europe tour, Ruma hardly ever has remained in touch with him.
Rather, she watches news to make sure that he is secure, and there has not been any plane-crash anywhere.

The rift in the parent-child relationship in case of Romi, Ruma’s brother, has been so absolute that we never see him in the story. Unlike Ruma, he does not maintain even a frail link with his family. Disconnected from his family, he lives in New Zealand, working in the team of a German documentary filmmaker. The emotional estrangement has been so acute for him that the sale of their parental home has not made a difference to Romi.

Ruma’s reluctance to pursue her career is a sign of her problems with identity. It indicates of her lack of belonging, which is focused in the story by her movement, going on ‘routes’ rather than growing ‘roots’ – she left her home in Pennsylvania to work in New York and then shifted with her family to Seattle. The situation of in-betweenness, living between two cultures, is awkward and baffling for her.

Lahiri does not suggest Americanization as a preferred identity that could satisfy her protagonist. Although Ruma’s father advocates returning to the career path, and he also thinks that to accepting American values: work, self-reliance, and ultimately attaining contentment, he does not force Ruma to complete acculturation. The story indicates that everyone has to acknowledge the position in which they have found themselves.

It is impossible to eradicate one’s place of origin, and immigrants’ children need to safeguard the realization of their original roots and accept their living in the Third Space. This message is communicated best by the instance of Ruma’s father’s impression on his grandson, Akash.

Justifiably, since Akash is the third generation, he is “an American child” even more than Ruma was. The older he grows, the more reluctant he is to learn and practice fundamentals of Indian culture that Ruma wishes to imbibe in him. Ruma gives up her attempts, but her father disagrees to this situation. In his short visit he attempts to familiarize Akash with at least essential basics of Bengali culture, training him simple things: colors and numbers in Bengali, while some features of Indian tradition, such as eating with fingers or taking off shoes when entering the house, are enthusiastically picked up by the boy himself.
In the story, Lahiri promotes a festivity of hybridity but with a view to dissimilarities between generations of immigrants. The progression of acculturation and cultivating roots into the host country, which for next generations becomes a homeland, is definitely important and called for; however the consciousness of one’s origins is also significant. The message is consolidated by the image of planting a garden, arranging a piece of landscape near Ruma’s new house. Ruma’s untilled, unaccustomed garden indicates Ruma’s dislocation and lack of belonging. It unfolds the sense of oddness, loss of roots and the need to cultivate them, the need to make the unfamiliar earth – America – familiar. Ruma’s father nurtures the garden by connecting various elements: his Indian wife’s favorites, American daughter’s needs, and American grandson’s toys and garbage collection. Those elements from dissimilar backgrounds share one space, which can be considered as a manifestation of Ruma’s national identity comprised of Bengali and American cultural influence.

Ruma’s concept of ‘home’ significantly differs from her parents. Her parents used to visit their native place Calcutta regularly. Their trips to India are depicted as an epic for the parents of the first generation, and returns from India is a fact for children belong to the second generation. Ruma remembers how her mother had lived for those journeys ignoring the awkwardness they roused in her husband. However, as the older the children grew, the less they wanted to go. She had an even little emotional attachment to their ‘home’ at Pennsylvania. She only recalls it in the context of her mother but for her brother Romi who lives at a far-away place the selling of the house had not made any difference.

The story also suggests an attitudinal difference between the expatriate generations about language. Ruma’s parents used to encircle the names of Bengali friends in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and communicated with them in Bengali as Mr. and Mrs. Biswas used to do in the story ‘When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine’. It was as if this first generation expatriates taken upon themselves the duty to pass their language and dress code to next generations. It was Ruma’s mother who sang songs to Akash and trained him Bengali nursery rhymes and Ruma’s father engaged him in parroting the language. However, the next generation expatriates like Ruma and her son have little interest in knowing and mastering the language. For Akash, it is like a foreign language and for Ruma it is a second language. For her, Bengali had never been a language in which she felt like a grown-up. Her own Bengali was slipping
from her. Her mother had been firm, so much so that Ruma had never spoken to her in English. (But now) On the odd occasions, Ruma used Bengali to some extent, with very less ease, when an uncle or aunt phoned from Calcutta to offer their wishes to her a Happy Bijoya or Akash a Happy Birthday. In dress code too, the first generation immigrants belonging to womenfolk are very specific as if they are the guardian of Bengali culture abroad.

In ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ Ruma’s mother lived throughout her life in America in her brightly coloured saris, along with marooned bindi and jewels. She displeased and fumed over Ruma’s wearing jeans. However, Ruma feels at ease in pants and skirts.

This second generation, more they grow, the less they seem to resemble either parent as the text remarks; ‘...they spoke differently, dressed differently, seemed foreign in every way, from the texture of their hair to the shapes of their feet and hands.’ (Lahiri, 2009:54)

Ruma’s father reflected about his children when he felt how his grandson, with whom he had a direct genetic relation did not even have a Bengali surname.

In socializing also, the difference in approaches persists. In his tour through Europe Ruma’s father seeks the companionship of Mrs. Bagchi, a widowed woman who fled India about thirty years ago after the death of her husband and lives in America alone, only once visiting Calcutta to attend the funerals of her parents. She escaped India after the accidental death of her husband with whom she had a love marriage knowing well that otherwise her parents would try to remarry her. She dressed in western clothes, cardigans, and black pull-on slacks and styled her thick dark hair in a bun. The woman retains only the title of her husband but in attitude she is an American. She does not experience the anguish of alienation because she does not feel the pain of exile and homelessness. She accepts America as her home and adopts its way of life.

In the case of Ruma’s father, a widower, at seventy falls in love with a Bengali lady. He manages to look like an American, who was often wearing a baseball cap that said POMPEII, brown cotton pants with a sky-blue polo shirt, and a pair of white leather sneakers. However, Ruma’s mother had vigorously pursued Indian clothes and
jewelry. For the next generation, the adaptation was easier, for being born in their parents’ host land they were far removed from any emotional attachment to their supposed homeland India. After her mother’s death Ruma circulated the saris among her mother’s friends keeping only three for herself. As the text narrates; ‘And she remembered the many times her mother had predicted this very moment, lamenting the fact that her daughter preferred pants and skirts to the clothing she wore, that there would be no one to whom to pass on her things.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 17)

These lines, actually speaking of material things signify more. The first generation found no takers among their children, of neither material nor cultural inheritance. The chain process of heritage through generations ended at this point. The emotional outcome was pain and nervousness for the first generation and irrelevant and indifferent for the second generation. For the next generation, the alienation is severe and strange. Unlike their parents who share through community activities, they are introverts, having no common grounds and they cannot open up to their parents. Ruma wants to marry Adam, but her mother believes that Adam would ultimately prefer an American. After the declaration of Ruma’s engagement with Adam, her mother doubts that Ruma is embarrassed to be an Indian. However, Ruma is an American. For the Indians like Ruma’s father, or the parents of Sudha and Rahul in ‘Only Goodness’ the host land is a ‘conceptual outside’. However, do Ruma, Sudha or Rahul feel themselves ‘inside’? For the diaspora, the stay may be multigenerational, but they remain outsiders in the eyes of indigenous. For the ‘insiders’, even if they are attracted toward the members of the Indian diaspora, it is only because they carry an impression of a strange, mysterious land.

The stories in the collection also deal with relationships between Indian-American and Westerners. Lahiri focuses on the effects of mixed marriages in the lives of Indian-American as they spotlight the inability of spouses to accommodate two different ethnic and social backgrounds. Thus, ‘Hell-Heaven,’ the representation of a mixed relationship is investigated through the remarks of Aparna and her daughter and narrator, Usha. Aparna, married off to Shyamal Da, condemns Pranab Chakraborty for going out with Deborah, an American girl whose parents were professors at Boston College. Aparna’s fascination of Pranab develops into a complexity of feeling in which observance of tradition mingles with the fact of her having been scorned. For her, the relationship is bound to break down within a few
weeks as she’ll leave him. None the less, once the relationship settles and wedding plans are made.

In this Indo-American world, there is a set of unwritten norms to be respected and mixed marriages weaken its stability. In this context, the foreign element is the one to be responsible for the only possible clarification accounting for the community member’s misconduct. At least first generation immigrants believed in it. This is what must be inferred from Aparna’s words; ‘… and it was universally agreed that she [Deborah] had stripped Pranab Kaku not only of his origins but his independence.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 75)

Alien (or non-Indian) spouses are often considered as a threat to community tradition as western values and beliefs brought by them may endanger the marital status.

A contradictory view is held by American-born generation. Usha’s approval of Deborah should be interpreted as the narrator’s readiness to break away from the constraining impact of her Indian cultural background so as to grab the opportunity made available by Deborah, an open window to the American way of life. Her temptation for free life is possibly the effect of popular club culture encouraging among the second generation Indian-American girls. This may also be regarded as a reaction to the first generation immigrants’ repressive efforts to enforce the ethnic culture where sex is a moral taboo. However, there is hardly any doubt that it has surfaced as a very common youth culture among the Americans.

The generational gap on the issues of language and dress code has also been dealt in the story. Usha, a second generation expatriate feels at home in English as she informs; ‘Deborah and I spoke freely in English, a language in which, by that age, I expressed myself more easily than Bengali, which I was required to speak at home.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 69)

The first generation never concerns to master the grammar of the language of their adopted land despite their stay there for quite a long time.

In the matter of dress, Usha is too enraged with her mother for making a scene before they left the house for Pranab-Deborah’s home on the occasion of
Thanksgiving party as she forced her to wear a *shalwar kameez*. She was reluctant to do for an outing with her peer group in Indian dress as she felt at ease in the jeans.

As far as socializing is concerned we see that in contrast to Mrs. Bagchi, Usha’s mother discouraged her daughter from freely mixing with American peers. She did not permit her to spend more time in dancing and singing songs at Deborah’s marriage celebration. She was disgusted and dejected at the thought of her child inculcating Americanness.

Dissatisfied with the world around, some of the second-generation immigrants turn to old Eastern traditions and precepts to survive in a multicultural world and find personal happiness. The words of Hema in ‘Going Ashore’ support this particular approach to outdated arranged marriages as the text remarks; ‘After years of uncertainty with Julian, Hema found this certainty, an attitude to love she had scorned in the past, liberating, with the power to seduce her just as Julian once had.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 298)

The identity-formation process proves especially demanding – and often complicated – for second-generation immigrants because, while they can seldom attain a complete assimilation into the host society, they cannot easily identify fully with their ethnic roots or seek the support of their co-ethnics, as their progenitors did. This truth is vividly brought out by the story ‘Only Goodness.’

Sudha and Rahul are the children of Indian immigrants in America and are very close to each other. As the older sibling Sudha always thinks she has to assist Rahul to become more American, freer than their Indian parents, who adhere to the past and its values. However, she does not understand she is leading him off track, not to freedom or an American identity when she teaches him to drink. Like most children of Indian parents, Sudha and Rahul are expected to do well academically. However, where Sudha fulfills her parents’ expectations Rahul deteriorates into alcoholism and is the reason of gloom for them. Sudha’s love for her brother remains, and she becomes a connection between her parents and her brother. She marries an American, proves to be devoted wife and a mother, too, but she fails as a sister. Not only has she led to her brother’s drinking habits, when Rahul becomes a menace to her baby son and marriage, she does not stand by him; rather like a typical Indian wife she sides with her husband and discards the brother.
Defective parenting by the Indian migrants is clearly revealed in the story. Rahul and Sudha’s parents accused his American upbringing of his addiction to alcohol. The mother calls Rahul’s drinking ‘an undergraduate hobby’ and is certain that he would soon outgrow it and would not let it ruin him. Sudha, however, understands it well, as the text describes; ‘…she pitied her mother, pitied her refusal to accommodate such an unpleasant and alien fact, her need to blame America and its law instead of her son.’ (Lahiri, 2009:143)

The story faithfully reflects the gap in values and expectations of the two generations, painting a portrait of a small, close-knit family slowly falling apart. In the extract below, Sudha, the daughter in the story perceptively reflects on the rift and gap between the two generations. Sudha had never dared until college to violate her parents’ norms that they got by Indian inheritance. Before entering the college life, she had lived as per their expectations. She had done very well academically; her social life limited as if only to guarantee that one day she would be set free. Out of sight in Philadelphia she studied attentively ‘but on weekends she learned to let loose, going to parties and allowing boys into her bed. She began drinking, something her parents did not do.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 129)

Her mother declares that the problem with America was as the text describes; ‘[t]oo many freedoms, too much-having fun.’ “When we were young,” she says, “life was not always about fun.” (Lahiri, 2009:143)

The children, on the other hand, are irritated with the nostalgia that shapes their parents’ existence. While Sudha considered her parents’ partition from India as a sickness that ebbed and flowed like a cancer, Rahul was resistant to that aspect of their life as well as he comments;“No one dragged them here,” he would say “Baba left India to get rich, and Ma married him because she had nothing else to do.” (Lahiri, 2009: 138)

The disconnection between the two generations and the way that they approach nostalgia and assimilation is brought out vividly in the story by Jhumpa Lahiri.

‘Hema and Kaushik’, that appears at the end of the collection is a triptych of three interlinked story. They tell a single story about a Bengali-American girl and a boy, whose lives make up a poignant tale of love, loss, and death. They deal with a
passionate affair that ended not with a fairy story happy ending but with a conclusion that speaks of missed opportunities and inevitable grief.

Most of the women in this trio are either immigrant mothers or their daughters who are threatened with the dichotomy between their Indian values and an American way of life. The first story, ‘Once in a Lifetime’ is narrated by Hema, a young girl, born and brought up in America, to Kaushik, who is her childhood love, son of her parents’ friends. Hema remembers the time when she had first met Kaushik. This was when his family had first come to the US, and the two families had quickly become close as fellow-Bengalis attempting to make a home in a foreign land. Hema’s mother, a typical example of the Bengali diaspora, had taken Kaushik’s mother under her wing. However, Kaushik and his family soon return to India.

Then, suddenly, they return and revive their old friendship. However, Hema’s mother cannot understand or like the change in her old friend, who has become completely westernized during her first stay in the US. Hema, though, is now fascinated by Kaushik’s mother, who now wears western clothes and make-up and has an open-minded approach to life. She is stunned when she learns from Kaushik about his mother’s cancer. She is equally astonished to know that the reason for their re-migration to the USA is Mrs. Choudhuri’s wish to breathe her last in a land far away from relatives and friends, unlike most other Indians, who would favor to breathe their last in the motherland.

The differences between Kaushik’s westernized mother and Hema’s traditional one are focused on the story. Both are diasporic Indian women, with children of about the same age, but they deal with their lives, their clothes, and their children in a different way. Hema’s mother still wears a ‘sarree’ and ‘sindoor’, and attempts to prevent her daughter from mixing with American boys, while Kaushik’s mother is fashionable, wears make-up, western clothing, and smokes cigarettes. Hema, not surprisingly, is more fascinated to the later Mrs. Choudhuri than to the earlier one, more conventionally Indian. Hema also has a “crush” on Kaushik, which she knows is unreciprocated.

‘Year’s End’ the second story of this trilogy, is narrated by Kaushik, who has found it very hard to acknowledge his father’s second marriage, especially since his new stepmother seems to be the very reverse of his own dead mother. Chitra is a
traditional Indian woman, wife, and mother. A former widow with two young daughters from her earlier marriage, she marries Kaushik’s father and accompanies him to the foreign country of the USA and makes a home for him, very dissimilar from the one he had set up with his first wife. Just like Mrs. Sen of ‘Mrs. Sen’s’ in *Interpreter of Maladies* she wears saris and sindoor. She attempts to befriend and even wants to be the mother of Kaushik, but he dislikes her having taken over his mother’s place. Her daughters also try to get nearer to him, but he refuses their company. In the end, he becomes completely alienated from his father and turns, instead, to his hobby of photography for some sense in life, and he focuses his thoughts on death and destruction for his subjects.

‘Going Ashore’ narrated mostly in the third person and by Hema at the end of the story, revolves around the relationship of Hema and Kaushik, rejuvenated after a number of years in Rome, where they meet by accident. Hema has had an unhappy affair with a married westerner and has determined to prefer for an arranged marriage with an Indian, a Punjabi. She goes to Rome as part of her research, while Kaushik is also there on an assignment. Their unexpected and sudden meeting brings them close together, emotionally and physically, as they share common reminiscences and have had unhappy life experiences behind them. For Kaushik, these memories are valuable, as they are linked with his sick mother, and Hema relives her earlier fascination for him, as the text narrates; ‘She remembered the ridiculous attraction she had felt that night, when she was thirteen-year-old, and that she had secretly matured during the weeks they lived together. It was as if no time had passed.’ (Lahiri, 2009: 311)

Even after sharing intimate moments together, however, they depart, Hema going to her marriage to Navin and Kaushik to his photojournalism. This departure remains a lasting one, for Kaushik is killed in a tsunami, and Hema loses him forever. She tries to attribute it, in a superstitious manner, to the loss of a fortunate gold bangle, as she has heard from her mother since childhood that losing gold was inauspicious. However, she cannot forget him, and when she is pregnant believes that the baby is Kaushik’s.

One more point that should be observed is that the diasporic Indian women in *Unaccustomed Earth* do not always have to face the difficulties that her earlier women had done. Living in the US from childhood if not from birth, and in different
times, they are much more independent. They have the freedom of choice, even when they are from traditional Indian backgrounds or are first-generation immigrants, such as Mrs. Bagchi in the first story or Kaushik’s mother in the last. Mothers and daughters, and often fathers and daughters as well, continue to share a close understanding while sons can and often do become distant from their parents and siblings. Family matters remain a primary concern to all women though they may deal with these in different ways.

Like many women writers, Lahiri’s women express and disclose themselves through their cooking and their food habits, and even the most Americanised of Indian women are at ease with Indian/Bengali food. Above all, what they share is their compassion and their emotional attachments, which is usually related to their gender. The diasporic Indian women in this collection of stories remain Indian to the core even after they become accustomed to changing environments and changing times. As Shubha Mukherjee comments;

In her earlier collection the first generation Indian-American immigrants and their desperate struggle to care take their family in a country very diverse from their own. The stories relate their incessant efforts to keep somehow their children acquainted with Indian tradition and culture- the Indian brand with the foreign label. In her later collection, the characters ascend to new stages of occurrences as they disclose the fate of the second and third generation of immigrants. These succeeding generations who are quite incorporated with foreign customs and are comfortable in countries outside their origin comprehend unlike predicaments and Lahiri shifts to the desires of individuals. (Mukherjee, 2010:180)

The stories of Unaccustomed Earth have persuasively portrayed diasporic sensibility of second generation immigrants and attempted to show how the two generations of Diaspora are virtual strangers. The first generation migrants remain clustered together, sharing their combined memory, dream or legend about their original homeland. Though they left it for the possibility of unique life in a liberal adopted country, yet they know that they are not accepted by their host society and,
therefore, feel cut off from it. The second generation, being acquainted with the host culture moves from ‘dislocation’ to ‘relocation’.

It is also observed that second generation diasporas face the typical predicament of being caught between two worlds; two cultures and yet fit into neither. This creates a severe sense of loss of identity. They are born and brought up in the United States and, therefore, adopts a distinctive American lifestyle. This lifestyle gives them a lot of freedom and independence that makes it unfeasible for them to accept the traditional rituals and customs that their first generation diasporic parents appreciate. At the same time, they cannot run away their Indian roots that are steeped in tradition, and this stops them from fully accepting the American culture. In this connection, Nigamnanda Das has rightly commented, ‘While Lahiri’s first generation Indian Americans cherish their past and its memories as an indispensable, integral part of their roots and their being, her second generation Indian American reflect both proximity and distancing from it.’ (Das, 2012:16)

Decline in parent-child bond in immigrant families is a direct result of the lack of a common language between two generations. The second generation immigrant children learn the language of their host country, which remains perpetually foreign for the parents as the latter’s social communications outside workplaces, remain confined mainly to co-ethnic friend-circles. This loss of a common language experienced by both the generations hinders effective personal communication, for sharing of the most private feelings depends on the command over the language shared commonly among the people.

In the connection of turning away from native culture, it may be noted that the gender of the second generation immigrant child decides to a great degree the extent of his/her alienation from parents. Immigrant girls likely to be decided to spend more time at home and accordingly familiar more with parental cultural value than boys. Unlike to Romi’s complete detachment from the family, Ruma assimilates some of her parents’ values and shows cultural hybridity. She has learned to speak Bengali.

4.6 Summary

The collection spotlights on the second generation children of the immigrants have been nurtured in two cultures and have often married non-Indians. As they have
started families of their own, they have to fight both with tense filial relationships and the burden of parenthood. The clash of two cultures has been added to the gap between the two generations. Almost each story deals with children who struggle to fulfill their parent’s traditional expectations as well as the cultural demands of their American peers.

The volume begins with Ruma who is ultimately transplanted to a new American city. She moves across the country in which she was born, not without difficulty though. Unlike her, fellow second-generation characters Sang and Sudha relocate to London (in a third country, promising a ‘third space’ they need to explore). While Sang seems to cover the distance with ease, Sudha seems closely attached to her family in the United States, yet she starts her own family on a different continent. Sudha’s brother, Rahul, is not able to cope with his hybrid status. He stays in the United States, but one feels he is disengaged from his Indian inheritance and lost in American culture at the same time. Kaushik is in a similar position, but he cuts all roots after losing his mother and travels the world without any intention to settle down. Yet he is unhappy with his mobility and rootlessness and finally loses his life in an alien ocean. Hema also travels, but she does not have the courage to uproot herself and follow Kaushik. She chooses a safe, semi-arranged marriage with an Indian-American, although this path is bound to make her unhappy. After a lifetime in the United States, Hema’s parents have moved back to Calcutta and this might contribute to her decision of staying put in the soil where she was born. Feeling unhomely in America and India, Amit finally manages to settle his position of in-betweenness. He is a successful transplant, like Usha, who narrates her mother’s story in order to understand how difficult it is sometimes to immigrate. Aparna is powerfully affected by the move from India; her husband is insensitive to her emotional needs, and the younger man she falls in love with, Pranab, does not match her feelings. However, she finds the strength to deal with these troubles and to raise Usha in a balance between Indian and American culture. Her daughter needs the third space opened up by narration in order to make sense of the two spaces she has had to negotiate while growing up.

Like the title proclaims, first-generation Indian immigrants generate circumstances for their children to strike roots into ‘unaccustomed earth’. Yet at the end of the book one understands that some of them do and are happily transplanted,
others do and are not satisfied. Others choose to immigrate in their turn and reopen the cycle while others free themselves of any roots.

In the final analysis it can be argued that the present chapter has attempted to investigate diasporic sensibility reflected in the eight stories to find out how on the backdrop of diasporic dilemma of characters Jhumpa Lahiri mirrors the problems of familial relationships and interconnectedness between people resulted in the search of identity after going through the phases of alienation, nostalgia and assimilation. The chapter also highlighted the change and new development in Lahiri’s writings from her earlier short stories as she focused on second generation expatriates with more emphasis on relocation. The chapter also examines intergenerational gap that is dealt with on more subtle and psychological level.

Works Cited:


Manohar, Murali D. *Contemporary Indian Women Novelists in English.* New Delhi: Serials Publications, 2010


**Articles:**


**Websites:**

Interview of Jhumpa Lahiri


http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/unaccustomed-earth-byjhumpa-lahiri-841034.html

Gebbie, Vanessa. A review article on “ Jhumpa Lahiri’s Unaccustomed Earth”, www.theshortreview.com/ reviews jhumpalahiriunaccustomedearth.htm