Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 in London, in an Indian Bengali family. Jhumpa Lahiri's real name was Nilanjana Sudeshna. When she was enrolled in school, her teacher decided to call her Jhumpa, as it was easy to pronounce. Thus Jhumpa Lahiri became her proper name. She grew up in Rhodes Island, U.S.A. and graduated from Barnard College in English literature. At Boston University, she completed one M.A. in English, another M.A. in Creative Writing, and a third M.A. in Comparative Studies in Literature and the Arts. She was awarded a Ph.D. in Renaissance studies, as well as granted fellowship at Provincetown's Fine Arts Works Centre (1997-1998). Her stories were published in various American journals including *New Yorker*. Lahiri was conferred several awards for her literary genius in fiction and short story writing. The awards that have been bestowed on her, include Trans Atlantic Award from the Henfield Foundation, O' Henry Award for short story *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), PEN/ Hemingway Award (Best Fiction debut of the year) for *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), Addison Metcalf Award from the American Academy of Arts and letters (2000).[1]

Lahiri became the first American of Asian descent to bag Pulitzer Prize, the highest literary award of America for her debut collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. M.F.K. Fisher Distinguished Writing Award from the James Beard Foundation (2000) and Guggenheim Fellowship (2002) were also awarded to Jhumpa Lahiri. In 2003, *The Namesake*, her second literary work appeared on the arena. Like her previous book, *The Namesake* also exposed her subjective approach to immigration and exile. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa applies various perspectives of narration, viz male, female as well as children perspective of narration whereas in *The Namesake* she presents only the male point of view.

In 2008, another collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* was published. Jhumpa once again exposes the diasporic communities, trying to root themselves into the unaccustomed earth. Immigrant experiences of the characters are similar to those of the characters of her earlier works.

As Jhumpa's writings deal with diasporic experiences, definition and scope of diaspora should be elucidated at the outset. The term 'Diaspora' is originally derived from the Greek word '*diaspirein'* that means to disperse. The term diaspora was applied to the dispersal of the Jews from their homeland.[2] In twenty-first century the range of the term has been increased to assimilate other displaced population on account of colonial expansion, slavery or migration in search of livelihood. Indian diaspora comprises of people of Indian birth or ethnicity. Emmanuel S. Nelson defines the Indian diaspora as "the historical and contemporary presence of people of Indian sub continental origin in other areas of the world." [3]Among the diasporic writers many are the expatriates who deem India as their home and find their roots embedded in Indian culture, tradition and values.

Som Datta Mandal categorizes the Indian English diasporic writers living in U.K., U.S. and other countries into three.[4] The first category is of the writers who are completely assimilated in the host country and refuse to call themselves immigrant writers. Bharati Mukherjee does not wish to be called an exile or an expatriate because to her "acculturation is an important process which has the exuberance of acceptance or assimilation and not the pain of difference or exclusion or alienation."[5]

The second category presents a group of diasporic writers who 'drift between different continents.'[6] These writers have a variety of themes in their writings. Some of them write about the experiences of immigration whereas others define "the exoticism of their home country or of characters who go as aliens and try to fit into the western world."[7] The third category presents the writers of Indian origin whose writings are not connected to the country of their origin. Instead, they write about the culture and life-style of the host country.

Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second category of Asian American writers who deal with India as an exotic land, and also with the problems of Indian immigrants adjusting in an alien land. Her short stories are often compared to those of Bharati Mukhrjee. Mukherjee's *The Middleman and Other Stories* won the 1998 National Book Critics award. Her characters also expose immigrant sensibility. Most of them are connected to one another through sexual impulse which is a transient passion; whereas Jhumpa's characters are attached to one another on account of their cultural proximity, a permanent tie among individuals.

Interpreter of Maladies is a collection of nine stories, set in America and India. The nine stories have universal human themes i.e. loneliness, exclusion, search for identity and lack of belonging. Along with these themes Jhumpa Lahiri has also projected the themes of love, fidelity, tradition and alienation that impinge the lives of Indians and non-Indians. Most of the characters in Lahiri's stories are from Bengal, living in the alien land of America. Some of them are real life characters. Lahiri has written in the voices of both masculine and feminine genders. In some stories she has projected a third person omniscient narrator. The narrative voice (a group of women) in *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* is an

experimental strategy as admitted by Jhumpa Lahiri in an interview: "A Faulkner story ['A Rose for Emily'] I admired used that voice and I wanted to try it out. That's why I wrote the story the way I did. It was an experiment for myself."[8]

Culture is the impetus in the lives of Jhumpa's characters. Cultural proximity connects individual to individual. Most of the characters are Bengali. They are connected to one another with strong cultural ties. Whether it is Shukumar and Shoba or Mr. Pirzada and Lilia's parents, they are concomitant to one another only because of the cultural propinquity.

The Temporary Matter presents that how a cultural tradition of Bengal saved a marital bond from split. Shukumar, an Indian American graduate student and his wife Shoba, a second generation Indian American are undergoing the trauma of marital disharmony due to the death of their infant. Their marriage is on the verge of splitting. Shukumar suffers from identity crisis. As a teenager he was apathetic towards the country of his parents. "He preferred sailing camp or scooping ice cream during the summers to going to Calcutta"(p.12) But his father's death aroused in him a curiosity and interest as he started to study its history and "wished now that he had his own childhood story of India".(p.12) This urge for identification with the native land is also conspicuous in Shukumar's mother when she abandons the house, Shukumar grew up in and returned to Calcutta in order to find her roots after the death of Shukumar's father.

Shukumar marries Shoba. Before the birth of the baby, Shukumar loved his work. The trauma of the death of his infant makes him lose the zest for life. The patriarchal notion of man as a breadwinner haunts him as he is still a student

at the age of thirty five while his wife holds a respectable job. The death of the child gives him an inferiority complex. Shoba, too changes as a person.

> She was'nt this way before. She used to put her coat on a hanger, her sneakers in the closet, and she paid bills as soon as they came. But now she treated the house as if it were a hotel. The fact that the yellow chintz armchair in the living room clashed with the blue-and-maroon Turkish carpet no longer bothered her. (p.6)

Stunned with grief, they ignore their routine and even avoid each other. The death of the infant looms large over their marital life. But a cultural tradition of Bengal becomes the saviour of their marriage. They get a notice from the electricity department that the electricity will be cut off for one hour from eight P.M. for five days. Shoba reminisces about a cultural tradition of Bengal in which every body had to say something during the power failures at her grand mother's house. Shoba asks Shukumar to say something that they have never told before each other. Both of them share some secret happenings or facts of their lives every night. The fifth night Shukumar comes to know that this game of revelations, conducted by Shoba is just to reveal a shocking secret that she is moving to a separate apartment. Shukumar is stunned at this revelation. It is now Shukumar's turn to reveal a secret. He reveals the gender of the baby that he had sworn not to disclose before Shoba. Shoba wanted it to be a surprise and forbade the doctor to reveal the gender. At the time of delivery she was not in her senses so she could not be aware of the gender of the still born baby. She assumes that Shukumar is also not aware of the gender of the baby but by then Shukumar returned from Baltimore and held the baby before cremation. Shukumar's revelation is to hurt Shoba but it turns to be a blessing into disguise as both of them share the grief and weep together "for the things they now knew."(p.22)

Jhumpa Lahiri has presented the metaphor of darkness. Darkness symbolizes mysteries. Darkness gives courage to make daring revelations and becomes a metaphor of asylum as both of them avoid each other in the light.

Shoba's endeavours to look for a separate apartment can be construed as her assertion of female individuality. She needed her husband's support to overcome the trauma. Shukumar, instead of understanding her mental condition, tried to avoid her, thus creating marital disharmony. Fortunately the game played by Shoba proves to be a boon. At the end, the warmth of evening is symbolic of the warmth in their relationship. Bradfords' walking arm in arm also signifies the reunion of Shoba and Shukumar.

The second story *When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine*, presents themes of cultural displacement and human relationships. The story is written from the third person point of view. Lahiri presents how geographical and historical occurrences may change one's identity. She also posits that politics can change the identity of a whole society. The narrator is a seven year old girl Lilia. Mr. Pirzada is an Eastern Pakistani immigrant. He is a lecturer of Botany at Dacca University and comes to Boston on a fellowship of the government of Pakistan to study the foliage of New England. The story is written against the backdrop of Indo-Pak war of 1971. During his stay in Boston, political unrest starts in Dacca owing to the struggle for autonomy by Eastern Pakistanis. The narrator Lilia's parents live on the campus of Boston University. Living in an alien culture, cut off from their homeland, Lilia's parents have a yearning to associate with their compatriots. On the basis of cultural proximity, Mr. Pirzada is invited by the narrator's parents.

Lilia as a small child believes Mr. Pirzada to be an Indian, but is soon corrected by her father. Even then, her young mind is incapable of imbibing this distinction.

> It made no sense to me. Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea. Nevertheless my father insisted that I understand the difference, and he led me to a map of the world taped to the wall over his desk. (p.25)

Lilia tries to categorize Mr. Pirzada on the basis of external features (same race and colour of skin) but her father insists that she categorize Mr.Pirzada on the basis of shared culture, tradition and practices.

Tommie Adrienne Sears writes:

> While Lilia sees her parents and Mr. Pirzada as united because of their skin color, her father uses colors on a map to show they are different: 'As you see Lilia, it's a different country, different color' my father said. Pakistan was yellow, not orange.' Here, ironically Lilia's father uses color as a way of both uniting some people and separating others based on the ways in which they identify themselves religiously and nationally. Pakistan is separate from India not because the people are inherently different, as the similarity between Mr. Pirzada and Lilia's parents shows, but because of religion, which is not always outwardly recognizable.[9]

During the pandemonium in Dacca, created by Pakistani army, everything collapsed. Mr. Pirzada could not contact with his wife and seven daughters because of the upheaval. Jhumpa Lahiri has posited two different aspects of culture. It is cultural affinity that creates a bond between Mr. Pirzada and the narrator's family in the country overseas, on the other hand clash of culture and language parted the human beings forever in the same geographical region. Lahiri shuns the fanaticism to gain dominance over other culture and language. It ruptures the social fabric and harmony. She has also indicated ambivalence

among the immigrants. They are obsessed by the distinct life style and eating habits of their host country whereas they have an aversion to their own country because of the communal tension and hectic way of life. For instance, Lilia's parents are obsessed that "The super market did not carry mustard oil, doctors did not make house calls, neighbours never dropped by without an invitation."(p.24) Lilia's father is offended at the fact that Lilia is unaware of the current situation of East Pakistan. Whereas her mother is content that Lilia is spared from the hardships of their native land.

As little Lilia comes to know the distinction between Indians and Pakistanis and between Hindus and Muslims, she starts analyzing the manners of Mr. Pirzada and notices an eccentricity in his behaviour. Lilia establishes an emotional proximity with Mr. Pirzada, though only in her fantasy and never lets it to be disclosed. She prays for the well being of Mr. Pirzada's family by "eating a piece of candy for the sake of his family."(p.34) She notices that Mr. Pirzada's pocket watch is eleven hours ahead of American time and is synchronized with the time of Dacca. Pirzada's watch represents his connection with his seven daughters and wife. Soon through the news broadcasts Lilia comes to know the gravity of the situation in Dacca, Mr. Pirzada becomes more solemn and Lilia's parents invite him to stay with them. The critical situation of East Pakistan not only impinges Mr.Pirzada but also Lilia's parents, as the narrator describes "Most of all I remember the three of them operating during that time as they were a single person, sharing a single meal, a single body, a single silence, and a single fear."(p.41)

The story is written from a child's perspective with an adult hindsight. The story ends with the return of Pirzada to Bangladesh and his subsequent reunion

with his family that is celebrated in America by the narrator's parents. Lilia and her parents have different notions of identity; for Lilia, race is the identity whereas her parents consider culture and religion as the root of one's identity. Interestingly Lilia, as a child suffers from identity crisis as most immigrants do. When she wears a witch costume for Halloween, she is not identified as American by the neighbours. Ignoring her American citizenship, they remark that they have never seen an Indian witch before. Her father's disappointment of lack of her knowledge of Indian history instigates her to read about the country of her parents. But her teacher, Mrs. Kenyon forbids her to do so. Mrs. Kenyon's emphasis is on learning U.S. history. This exemplifies the superior dismissive outlook towards the third world. Her scolding to Lilia can also be interpreted as her desire to delink her from her ancestral roots and bicultural identity. Instead she demands that Lilia internalize American history and culture.

The title story *Interpreter of Maladies* reflects the psychological trauma of Mrs. Das, an Indian –American woman who visits India with her husband and children. The story shows the distancing of second generation Indian-Americans from their ancestral country. The story is narrated in the third person. The Das family considers India as an exotic place. Mr. Kapasi, a tourist guide, escorts the Das family to the Konark Temple. At first glance, Mr. Kapasi classifies the Das family on the basis of race, as Lilia, the narrator of *When Mr. Pirzada Came To Dine* has done. They share Mr. Kapasi's complexion. But soon, he realizes that for Das family, nationality is more important than their race as Mr. Das emphasizes his purely American identity and not the hyphenated one.

> "You left India as a child?" Mr. Kapasi asked when Mr. Das had settled once again into the passenger seat.

> "Oh, Mina and I were born in America," Mr. Das announced with an air of sudden confidence. "Born and raised. Our parents live here now, in Assansol. They retired. We visit them every couple years."(p.45)

Mr. Kapasi's impression of the Das family as Indian comes to an end when he analyses their behavioural pattern. The family is "dressed as foreigners did" (p.44) and Mr. Das shakes hand as Americans do. This shows that the family is not only concerned about their national identity but also has internalized the American way of life. A contrast between the first generation and the second generation immigrants is presented through the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Das and their parents. Their parents return to India and make it their home whereas Mr. and Mrs. Das, alien to the culture and tradition of their ancestral land, visit India as a tourist spot. To Mr. and Mrs. Das the sight of an emaciated "barefoot man,… head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart of grain sacks pulled by a pair of bullocks" (p.49) represents not the poverty but stark reality of India, which he photographs. Jhumpa Lahiri presents an analogy of the barefoot man and monkeys. The monkeys are also being photographed by the family as a collectible. Despite the racial resemblance with the barefoot man, Mr. Das does not identify with him; instead he proudly promotes his American identity.

The same exoticism is present in Mrs. Das' compliments regarding Mr. Kapasi's job as an interpreter of maladies. Like her husband, she idealizes Mr. Kapasi's job for her personal reasons. Mr. Kapasi analyses that Mrs. Das is averse to her husband and children, and notices that she is keenly interested in him. Mr. Kapasi treats Mrs. Das' interest as a romantic advance. He fantasies about a future relationship with her.

> She would write to him, asking about his days interpreting at the doctor's office, and he would respond

> eloquently, choosing only the most entertaining anecdotes, ones that would make her laugh out loud as she read them in her house in New Jersey. In time she would reveal the disappointment of her marriage, and he his. (p.55)

Mr. Kapasi's fantasies come to an end only after he realizes the true nature of his relationship with Mrs. Das. She, like her husband, uses Mr. Kapasi for her own ends, as she has been overburdened by a sense of guilt of being a mother of an illegitimate son for eight years. She confides this to Mr. Kapasi. Soon Mr. Kapasi realizes his status when he asks Mrs. Das that "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs. Das, or is it guilt?" (p.66) Mrs. Das does not reply. Mrs. Das' fascination with Mr. Kapasi's job finishes. The only connection that remains is in the form of a piece of paper in which Mr. Kapasi has written his address. This is also inadvertently thrown away by Mrs. Das and the superficial bond that was created on the basis of racial similarity between Mr. Kapasi and the Das family is disconnected.

Mrs. Das' plight has its origins in a lifetime of neglect, first by her parents, and later on by her husband.

> As a result of spending all her time in college with Raj, she continued, she did not make many close friends. There was no one to confide in about him at the end of a difficult day, or to share a passing thought or a worry. Her parents now live on the other side of the world, but she had never been very close of them, any way. After marrying so young she was overwhelmed by it all, having a child so quickly, and nursing , and warming up bottles of milk and testing their temperature against her wrist while Raj was at work, dressed in sweaters and corduroy pants, teaching his students about rocks and dinosaurs. Raj never looked cross or harried, or plump as she had become after the first baby. (p.63)

In short, Mrs. Das' plight is due to the apathy of the patriarchy. As an unmarried girl, her parents thought only of her marriage. They imagined that after giving her away in marriage they would be exempted from the responsibility of parenthood. That she may need emotional support never crossed their minds. She was a girl and was destined for another family. Hence she was a constant outsider, never fully assimilated in her own family. The same attitude is shown by Raj who neglects her emotionally. The continuous neglect of her emotions, urged her to trespass the boundaries of morality that is laid down by the patriarchy.

The next story *A Real Durwan* depicts the travails of the protagonist Boori Ma. She lost her "economic identity".[10] The story is set in Calcutta. Boori Ma is a Bangladeshi refugee and is provided a shelter at an apartment in return for guarding the apartment. Boori Ma's migration from Bangladesh to India is not for financial motives, instead she is forced to migrate due to the political upheaval of 1947 (partition of India). Boori Ma's loss of identity is due to her forced migration. Through the reminiscences of Boori Ma, Lahiri presents the crisis of humanity born from politics. The story traces how politics devastated human relationships. The Bengali masses, once unified by their common cultural heritage were divided on the basis of politics. Boori Ma's reminiscences of her past life represent her attempts to heal the scars of the painful migration. Throughout the story she does not have any proper name except Boori Ma. Hence she lives a life without any identity. For her, the economic identity of her past life is more important than that of the present one:

> "Yes, there I tasted life, here I eat my dinner from a rice pot." At this point in the recital Boori Ma's ears started to burn; a pain chewed through her swollen knee, "Have I mentioned that I crossed the border with just two bracelets on my wrist? Yet there was a day when my feet touched nothing but marble. Believe me don't believe me, such comforts you cannot dream them," (p.71)

Boori Ma's recital of her previous life in Pakistan is regarded as a bluff by the residents of the building. The inhabitants doubt the veracity of Boori Ma's version of the story and create their own theory:

> The theory eventually circulated that Boori Ma had once worked as hired help for a prosperous *zamindar* back east, and was therefore capable of exaggerating her past at such elaborate lengths and heights. Her throaty impostures hurt no one. All agreed that she was a superb entertainer. (p.73)

Throughout the story she is depicted as an alienated figure. Her description of the past life is treated by the inhabitants as fabricated. Her condition is exacerbated with the progress of events when Mr. Lal installs a wash basin in the balcony. One day, the basin was stolen in the absence of Mr. Lal and Boori Ma was expelled for the dereliction of her duty. Boori Ma's attachment with the skeleton keys is suggestive of her endevour to preserve her previous economic identity. Boori Ma presents an existentialist aspect of the story and behaves as if she is thrown into an incongruous and absurd world full of vicissitudes of life, having no purpose and meaning.

The fifth story of the collection is entitled *'Sexy'* that deals with a brief adulterous relationship between Miranda, a white lady and Devajit Mitra, a Bengali immigrant. The story presents the cultural displacement of the immigrants and the feeling of exoticism of the native Americans towards South Asian immigrants. Except Dev, Miranda has some other South Asian acquaintances, including Laxmi, her co-worker, and the Dixit family. But her perception of India and Indians is as purely exotic. Miranda is identified in the story only through the colour of her skin and physical features.

> She had silver eyes and skin as pale as paper, and the contrast with her hair, as dark and glossy as an espresso bean, caused people to describe her as striking, if not pretty. She had a narrow, egg-shaped head that rose to a prominent point. Her features, too, were narrow, with nostrils so slim that they appeared to have been pinched with a clothespin. Now her face glowed, rosy at the cheeks, smoky below the brow bone. (p.87)

Raj Chetty describes Miranda "conspicuously exoticist"[11]as her perception of South Asian Americans of her acquaintance, including Dev, is based on the colonial notion of "ethnic other". Her first meeting with Dev at a shop clearly demonstrates her race consciousness, as she identifies Dev not as an American but with his hyphenated identity by the colour of his skin. "Miranda noticed a man standing at one of the counters...The man was tanned, with black hair that was visible on his knuckles." (pp.85-86) Miranda's consciousness for her ethnic identity is conspicuous as she wonders "where he was from. She thought he might be Spanish, or Labanese." (p.87)

Miranda's consciousness of her racial identity and cultural differences is based on the colonial notion of cultural stereotype of third world countries. She imbibes this stereotypical notion after her encounter with the neighbouring Dixit family during her childhood. Her childhood experience of a birthday party at Dixits' house was frightening as she minutely observers the cultural differences:

> Miranda remembered a heavy aroma of incense and onions in the house, and a pile of shoes heaped by the front door. But most of all she remembered a piece of fabric, about the size of a pillow case, which hung from a wooden dowel at the bottom of the stairs. It was a painting of a naked woman with a red face shaped like a knight's shield. She had enormous white eyes that tilted toward her temples and mere dots for pupils. Two circles, with the same dots at their centers, indicated her breasts. In one hand she brandished a dagger. With one foot she crushed a struggling man on the ground. [...]

> "It's the goddess Kali" Mrs. Dixit explained brightly, shifting the dowel slightly in order to straighten the image. (pp.95-96)

Kali is a powerful Indian goddess. She is symbolic of female strength, will power and determination. Miranda is greatly overwhelmed. Moreover other white children's remark "The Dixits dig shit" (p.95) demonstrates the white disregard for the 'ethnic other'. She is ashamed of her previous attitude towards the 'other'. Concept of 'other' is an outcome of the western (occidental) notion of stereotyped east (orient). The orient symbolizes a set of representations of its language, culture, literature and geography by the western political forces. Said's critique *Orientalism* (1978) challenged the dichotomy of the world between east and west or orient and occident. This dichotomy, according to Said, is not limited to the geographical boundaries created by the west, but also encompasses an ideology presenting the orientals as "inveterate liars… lethargic and suspicious... irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, different"[10] in contrast to "rational, virtuous, mature, normal"[11] occidentals.

> Her shame now over her childish racism stems from the realization that there is nothing to fear in differences, nothing to make fun of, as her close interaction with "Indian" cultural difference as an adult demonstrates.[12]

But her changed attitude towards India and Indians is also due to her fascination for India. She wants to learn about Indian culture from her Indian lover. When she makes love to Dev, she fancies "deserts, and elephants, and marble pavilions floating on lakes beneath a full moon." (p.96) She visits an Indian restaurant and relishes Indian food. Raj Chetty describes Miranda's relationship with Dev as a blend of her exoticism and quest for love. Tommie Adrienne Sears presents an interesting interpretation to the relationship between

Dev and Miranda: 'Dev thus becomes the personification of the sexually desirable "exotic foreigner" rather than an individual.'[13] But her exoticism proves a boon for her when she goes to watch a Madhuri Dixit film. She becomes conscious of her status as a mistress. Dev's pursuit of Miranda is purely physical. On the other hand, Miranda's pursuit of Dev is her quest for love. Dev's words "You're sexy", uttered in the Mapparium present Dev's erotic feelings, sans love, towards Miranda. Moreover, the same words "You're sexy", innocently repeated by Rohin, the seven year old, highlight the undercurrents. But the meaning of the words "loving someone you don't know."(p.107) spoken by Rohin, whose mother undergoes the trauma of her husband's infidelity, make Miranda realize the immorality of her adulterous relationship. She realizes that Dev's infatuation for her is only to consume her as a sexual object. Moreover she comprehends the adverse effect of a man's infidelity to his wife over the marital life, as she withdraws herself from the relationship. Her withdrawal from the relationship is an attempt to maintain her feminine identity, as being a mistress she will be reduced to a sexual object and hence marginalized.

On the other hand, Dev is presented as a culturally displaced character who in order to assimilate into American culture, sheds his cultural values of fidelity in marital life. His voyeuristic attitude towards Miranda when he "said he liked that her legs were longer than her torso, something he'd observed the first time she walked across a room naked" (p.89) is converse to his Indian notion of morality.

Mrs. Sen, in the next story *Mrs. Sen's,* exemplifies the Indian immigrants facing the problems of assimilation in the alien culture of U.S. The story is told

from the point of view of a third person omniscient narrator. Mrs. Sen, a thirty year old lady, is the baby sitter of a seven year old boy Eliot. She looks after him while Eliot's mother is at work. The narrator gives every minute detail of the problems faced by Mrs. Sen in adjusting with the new atmosphere. The narrator's description is through the eyes of Eliot, that is why "is'nt tainted by exociticist desire".[14] Mrs. Sen's yearning and nostalgia for Bengali traditions is depicted in a vivid manner.

Susan Ram writes:

> In this beautifully observed story East meets West in the shared experience of loneliness and the poignancy of Mrs. Sen's situation is handled with utmost delicacy and control unsullied by any hint of mawkishness.[15]

Through Mrs. Sen's desperate condition in imbibing American life style and her incapability to learn to drive, Lahiri evinces that western culture and life style is not universally applicable, specifically it is incompatible for the immigrants that have strong cultural ties with their native land. Mrs. Sen also debunks the glamourised notion of Indian masses about western life and luxuries:

> '"Send pictures,' they write. 'Send pictures of your new life.' What picture can I send?" She sat exhausted, on the edge of the bed, where there was now barely room for her. "They think I live the life of a queen, Eliot." She looked around the blank walls of the room. "They think I press buttons and the house is clean. They think I live in a palace." (p.125)

Mrs. Sens' life in America is the reflection of the life that she had lived in India. Her description of 'home', confuses Eliot initially, but later he becomes perspicacious to understand the meaning of 'home'. For Mrs. Sen, home always denotes India, not her apartment in America. Mrs. Sen's bold assertion of India as

her home, prompts Eliot to observe the cultural differences between the two countries. Mrs. Sen's question to Eliot whether the people of the neighbourhood would come, if she screams, vividly differentiates the societal proximity in India with that of social aloofness in America. Eliot sympathizes with Mrs. Sen for her isolation from her culture owing to the geographical distances. Eliot does not take the traditions and culture of India as other, rather his innocent perception is different from the adults. Eliot's observations of Mrs. Sen are ambivalent as Eliot's experiences are coloured by the "fear, astonishment, fascination, and awe –toward an Indian living abroad."[16]

The story is based on Jhumpa Lahiri's experiences as she herself admits, "Mrs. Sen is based on my mother who baby sat in our home. I saw her one way but imagined that an American child may see her differently, reacting with curiosity, fascination or fear to things I took for granted."[17] Hogskolan Dalarna interprets that Mrs Sen suffers the loss of her social identity of a Bengali housewife, owing to the migration.[18] Her social interaction with other Bengali women, back home in India is a constant feature that makes her cling to her Indian identity. Physically she is in America, but her heart and soul are in India.

In *This Blessed House*, Lahiri has projected two different aspects of the lives of Indian-Americans through Sanjeev and Twinkle. Sanjeev and Twinkle are a young married couple, settled in U.S.A. Sanjeev is a former M.I.T. student and now runs a successful business, whereas Twinkle is a student at Stanford University, working on Irish poetry for her thesis. The new house, they have moved into, contains Christian paraphernalia left behind by the former Christian

owners. Twinkle shows an obsessive fascination for the Christian objects, which offends Sanjeev. Sanjeev's consciousness of his religious identity problematizes a petty matter into a marital discord. The opening scene, presents their two different approaches regarding their identity. While discovering Christ's statue, Twinkle is ecstatic, whereas Sanjeev's response is contemptuous as he terms it, "idiotic statue."(p.136) Sanjeev represents attitude of 'culturally other'. He views the Christian objects as a menace for his Hindu identity and asserts, "We're not Christian". (p.136) Twinkle responds to Sanjeev in a persuasive manner, "We're not Christian .We are good little Hindus." Sanjeev's perspectives towards the statues evince the cultural conflict, whereas Twinkle's persistence to keep the statues in the house is on the basis of the compatibility of two different religions and cultures:

> Twinkle, then, becomes Lahiri's example of an adult who is able to negotiate cultural intermingling, both in her own body/identity and in her interactions with others, in a way that isn't "othering". In fact, it is Twinkle who most positively negotiates her identity as an American of Indian descent, in contrast to her husband Sanjeev, who struggles with this negotiation. When the reader glimpses into Twinkle's personality, her Indianness is muted but not absent, present but not foregrounded as artificial, exotic, privileged, celebrated. Twinkle does'nt let it be. On the other hand, Sanjeev's Indianness is foregrounded but undermined, privileged but superficial and problematic, present but uncomfortable and irrational, because he lets it be.[19]

Adriana Elena Stoican gives a feminist interpretation to the story and views Sanjeev's standpoint as motivated by the patriarchy.[20] Sanjeev's marriage to Twinkle is based on the "Indian traditional marriage scheme." Sanjeev's marriage to Twinkle evinces that as an immigrant, he wants to preserve his

Bengali identity. In order to accomplish his glorified vision of cultural preservation, he ties the knot with Twinkle, assuming her the embodiment of Indian culture. Sanjeev's vision of Twinkle as a preserver of Indian culture is based on his patriarchal notion of the perfect Indian wife. His arranged marriage is solemnized at the insistence of his mother. Twinkle fulfils the standards to be an ideal wife, as she is pretty, educated, and from a suitably high caste. But Twinkle's behaviour is subversive to the patriarchal notion of an ideal Hindu wife. The sole connection with Indian culture and tradition is her arranged marriage. But this link also seems to be frail as she does not submit herself to Sanjeev as an ideal wife is expected to do in an arranged marriage. Her attitude compels Sanjeev to rethink his assumption that Twinkle loves him. "Though she did not say it herself, he assumed then that she loved him too, but now he was no longer sure." Twinkle's anti normative attitude is reflected in her westernized behaviour as she smokes cigarettes, drinks wine and does not like to cook Indian food. During the housewarming party Sanjeev introduces Twinkle to Douglas, one of his colleagues by her real name Tanima. But Twinkle, instead of accepting her Indian Hindu identity, prefers to be called Twinkle, a name that is westernized. She is attracted to the Christian paraphernalia, as she does not view the statues as sacred and pious. They are merely "beautiful", "spectacular and cute" for her. In the last scene, she along with her Indian and American guests finds a fifteen kilo silver bust of Jesus in the attic. The discovery of the bust is an enjoyable game. The Christian objects for which she has a fascination, present her attitude of "cultural other." In short, Twinkle's behaviour in her marital life unfolds her resistance of the patriarchy. She establishes a female identity free

from the norms of the patriarchy. Simultaneously her exotic vision of Christian objects, curbs her mute acceptance of and assimilation into the American culture. Thus the identity that Twinkle has created is neither governed by the patriarchy, nor has she mingled into American culture.

The Treatment of Bibi Haldar, is set in Calcutta, and Jhumpa Lahiri has projected collective female voices 'we' as omniscient narrators. The story deals with a marginalized woman, suffering from occasional fits of hysteria. Her attempts to overcome her predicament and marginality are dominated by the concept of "normative Hindu womanhood."[21] A normative Hindu womanhood is defined by the community of women who narrate the story. Bibi Haldar is incapable of fulfilling the patriarchal niche of a wife hence she is unfit for marriage. The traditional notion of the patriarchal niche for women is upheld by the neighbourhood women. The neighbourhood women empathize with Bibi Haldar and boycott her cousin for his gross negligence of Bibi. Bibi Haldar also wants to look like other women and she feels that marriage is a remedy for her illness. The doctor also agrees and prescribes that only a "sexual life as a married woman may be the appropriate treatment."[22]

Bibi's abnormality is well known in the community, hence no suitor comes to propose to her despite Bibi's cousin publishing an advertisement in the matrimonial columns. Bibi's condition is exacerbated by her cousin and his wife when Haldar's wife becomes pregnant. Bibi's mental illness is regarded as inauspicious for the unborn child. She is compelled to eat separately and to sleep in the store house to avoid her 'contagious' illness. An irony is presented as the

society defines a normative role of womanhood for Bibi but when she tries to conform to this role, she is deprived of the identity of a perfect woman. In order to cure her illness and assert her feminine identity, she deviates from the normal code of conduct. When her cousin directs her to live in the store room, she asserts, "Now I am free to discover life as I please." (p.170) She enjoys her isolation; her yearning for a husband is pacified. After some time, the neighbours are stunned to know that Bibi is pregnant. The neighbouring women help Bibi to deliver the child, and teach her to rear the child. Bibi refuses to disclose the identity of the child's father. She takes the charge of her cousin's failed business and runs it into a small venture and successfully brings up her child. Bibi Haldar's assertion of feminine identity in a conventional manner is curbed by the society. So she opts for the unconventional way, "of single motherhood as the frame of her female identity."[22]

The last story, *The Third and Final Continent*, shuttles from London to Boston. The story is written in first person narrative voice. The narrator is a Bengali immigrant who initially faces the problems of adjustment in an unfamiliar culture. The narrator hires a room in Mrs. Croft's house. Mrs. Croft, an elderly woman of 103 years, exemplifies American nationalism and old American values. She is proud of the fact that her country has sent men on the moon. She adheres to orthodox values and does not permit her elderly daughter to chat with the narrator. The narrator reminisces about the early days of his arranged marriage. Both he and his wife were as alien to each other as they were to American culture and

atmosphere. Mrs. Croft's compliment promotes the proximity between the newly wed couple.

> I like to think of that moment in Mrs. Croft's parlor as the moment when the distance between Mala and me began to lessen. Although we were not yet fully in love, I like to think of the months that followed as a honeymoon of sorts[...] At night we kissed, shy at first but quickly bold, and discovered pleasure and solace in each other's arms. (p.196)

Jhumpa Lahiri has posited human relationship along with the relationship on the basis of cultural proximity. The narrator is sad at the death of Mrs. Croft, about which he comes to know through an obituary published in a newspaper. Mrs. Croft is the sole character whom the narrator feels an attachment in the unfamiliar atmosphere of America. The narrator's concern that his son should imbibe Indian values and culture embodies the concern of thousands of immigrants who want to preserve their cultural heritage in their future generation. The concluding part of the story expresses the narrator's impulse to adjust in the new environment. The narrator philosophically asserts that once adjustment was simply a figment or the imagination for him, but now he has become accustomed to changes in his life. Jhumpa Lahiri's collection deals with all aspects of womanhood. Indian and western women share a plateform as they deal with the travails of life.

The same trauma of exile and alienation among the Indian diasporas living in alien cultures of USA is presented in *The Namesake* as presented in the *Interpreter of Maladies*. Jhumpa Lahiri beautifully carves out the nostalgia, acculturation, and contra acculturation of Indian immigrants in the novel. She,

herself, belongs to the second generation of Indian immigrants, and presents her subjectivity regarding the experiences of immigrants. Her characters are dislocated in various ways due to either monetary reasons (in search of their sustenance) or due to their urge to create an identity in the alien land and cultures. Jhumpa Lahiri delineates characters in search of identity and deals with their dilemma in opting for the host culture. She exemplifies the dilemma of belongingness. Having multicultural roots, she strives to establish a native Bengali identity and simultaneously attempts to create a new identity in the Indian-American cultural context. Lahiri expounds the eternal trauma of humanity i.e. cultural dislocation and identity crisis. She chooses Bengali migrants, for she is well aware of the cultural traditions of Bengal as well as has inherited them and hence presents these traditions vividly. From the existentialist point of view, Lahiri's characters in *The Namesake*, consolidate Jean-Paul Sartre's and Albert Camus' views regarding the existence of human life. The characters play out an isolated existence of one "who is cast into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value or meaning, and to represent human life –in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning, as it moves from the nothingness whence it came towards the nothingness where it must end—as an existence which is both anguished and absurd."[23] Characters of Ashoke, Ashima, Gogol, and Moushumi exemplify the trauma of mankind. All the characters are entangled in their constant search for identity.

Apart from cultural clash, Lahiri delineates the clash between the two generations regarding the adherence of immigrant cultural values and traditions.

Eventually this generation gap ends, when the second generation of immigrants is disenchanted by the host culture. Being asked regarding the manifestation of her personal experiences as an immigrant in the novel, Jhumpa Lahiri confesses:

> The question of identity is always a difficult one, but especially so for those who are culturally displaced, as an immigrants are, of those who grow up in two worlds simultaneously, as is the case for their children. The older I get, the more I am aware that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am so much more American than they are [...] I never know how to answer the question. "Where are you from?" If I say I am from Rhodes Island, people are seldom satisfied. They want to know more, based on things such as my name, my appearance, etc. alternatively if I say I am from India. A place where I was not born and have never lived, this is also inaccurate. It bothers me less now. But it bothered me growing up, the feeling that there was no single place to which I fully belong.[24]

The novel deals with the second-generation immigrants and their lack of belonging. Moushumi suffers from this lack of belonging and her quest for belonging urges her to find her roots in the third language and culture of France. Gogol suffers from the same dilemma and tries to mingle with the Americans. Despite their continual efforts to imbibe the host culture, they are not identified as fully American because of the colour of their skin. The colour of their skin becomes a major impediment in the course of formation of American identity. They are called A B C D (American born confused Desi) because of their sense of alienation for either culture (American and Indian). Lahiri demonstrates her experiences through the character of Gogol Ganguli. As a child, she did not understand her parents' adherence to Indian culture. As an adult, she admits that she sympathises with her parents' predicament of being immigrants. Gogol as an

adolescent, even as an adult, is averse to his parental adherence to Indian culture. This realization comes to him only after the death of his father.

The experiences of the second-generation immigrants, presented in the novel, are in contrast to the sanctified familial traditions of the first generation. The first generation strongly disapproves of the American life style, in return, the second-generation immigrants discard the cultural values that they inherited, and view them as hindrances in their course of assimilation into the host culture. Thus, the family space is contaminated through cultural hybridization. The homogeneity of Bengali culture, that the first generation is trying to preserve in the family space, concedes to a heterogeneous one. The inevitability of assimilation in the host culture in the second generation gives rise to the divergences and complexities of relationship and opinions. As far as Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli are concerned, they one way or another, manage to preserve the cultural traditions of Bengal. The first blow to the cultural traditions occurs at Gogol's birth. At the time of discharging the baby from the hospital, Ashoke is told to name the child to get the birth certificate. This puts the couple into a dilemma, as they have to wait for the letter from Ashima's grandmother. The letter contains a *bhalonam* (a good name) for their child. As the letter does not arrive, the couple is forced to name the child instantly. Lahiri describes the Bengali custom of giving two names to a child; the *bhalonam* (literally good name or formal name) that is used in the public spaces and *daknam* (meaning pet name) that is used in the family by near and dear ones.

The child is named Gogol Ganguli. The first intrusion of American culture becomes the raison d'être of his predicament. Gogol is a Russian writer whom Ashoke treats as a saviour. The peculiarity of the name, Gogol that it is neither an American name nor an Indian one, increases the child's dilemma. The name becomes a cause of exasperation for him in school. The sense of alienation continues in the following years. One day, on a school trip of some historical intent, he has to visit a cemetery. There, he experiences a delinking from the land where he has born. He realises that being a Hindu, "he himself will be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life." (p.69)

> The cemetery is thus employed as a metaphor, suggesting Gogol's lack of roots in the country. He does not have any ancestral history in the land that would connect him to any tradition in the national space; he is so different that his social and religious rite will be incompatible with those of the new country. This discovery may not be much of a shock to the members of the first generation Indian Americans, but it is certainly a source of anxiety for their children who passionately seek acculturation and integration.[25]

Moreover, a generation gap between father and son is visible on Gogol's fourteenth birthday. After the party is over, Gogol is listening to American music. Ashoke's entrance into Gogol's room is analogous to the first generation's intrusion into the lives of the second-generation immigrants. The music album by John, Paul, George and Ringo of whom Gogol is a devotee is in the sharp contrast to the cassette of classical Indian music that Ashoke has bought for Gogol, "still sealed in its wrapper." (p.78) Gogol's lukewarm response towards Indian classical music, demonstrates the second generation's indifference towards Indian culture and tradition. Gogol's eagerness to return to his lyrics (p.75) during his

confabulation with his father is equivalent to his aversion towards the interference of the older generation. By now, he is old enough to realise the peculiarity of his name that becomes an obstacle in the formation of his identity either as an Indian or as an American.

> He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean any thing "in Indian". […]. He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second. (p.76)

However, Ashoke Ganguli gave him the name that consolidated his Indian roots. Because of the peculiarity of his name, he does not court girls as other boys of his age had already started to. His first encounter with a girl takes place when he hides his name and introduces himself as Nikhil. Ironically, Gogol reverts to the culture of his ancestors to initiate the process of merging into American culture. He kisses a girl during a party for the first time in his life. From now on, he casts off his peculiar name, as well as the cultural values that he has inherited from his parents.

> It's the first time he's kissed anyone, the first time he's felt a girl's face and body and breath so close to his own. "I can't believe you kissed her, Gogol". His friends exclaim as they drive home from the party. He shakes his head in a daze, as astonished as they are, elation still welling inside him. "It wasn't me", he nearly says. But he doesn't tell them that it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim. That Gogol had had nothing to do with it. (p.96)

Jhumpa dichotomises the self of the protagonist Gogol. As Gogol, the son of Indian parents he has grudgingly imbibed cultural values and traditions. His response towards the tradition and culture of his parents is distasteful. As Nikhil,

he is integrated into American society. His angst towards his name Gogol, given by his parents, reflects his indifference towards his Indian roots as he considers his cultural roots an impediment to his acculturation. His parents' adherence to their Indian roots is an instance of contra-acculturation. He changes his name, and apparently, he feels relieved of the burden of bearing a ludicrous name as well as the burden of values and regulations, laid down by his parental culture.

> But now that he's Nikhil it's easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas. […] It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles, with a girl wearing a plaid woollen skirt and combat boots and mustard tights. By the time he wakes up, hung-over, at three in the morning, she has vanished from the room, and he is unable to recall her name. (p.105)

Second generation American-Indians often demonize Indian culture. The parental indication that imbibing American values would not be appreciated by the conservative elders back home result in negative reactions. The more close he gets to American society, the more he is detached from his parents. Their constant endeavours to make him realise his Indianness serve as irritants. His courtship of Ruth, the girl he meets on the train represents another attempt to identify himself with American culture. His parents distrust and discourage his relationship with Ruth for they have witnessed the marital disharmony and consequent divorces in the lives of Bengali men married to American women. The termination of this love affair leaves Gogol depressed. Next, Gogol starts dating Maxine. Eventually he moves to Maxine's home that she shares with her parents. Gogol's affair with Maxine and his subsequent shifting to her parental home is his endeavour to erase the painful memories of his affair with Ruth. He also wants to forget everything

that pertains to his earlier days. He detaches himself totally from his parents. The sense of alienation from Indian culture makes him so disorientated that "He feels no nostalgia for the vacations he's spent with his family, and he realises now that they were never really true vacations at all. Instead they were overwhelming, disorienting expeditions, either going to Calcutta, or sightseeing in places they did not belong to and intended never to see again." (p.155)

In his pursuit of identity, he shuns everything that belongs to his parents. He spends his vacations with Maxine's family. He wants to be as far as possible from the remnant of his life as Gogol. The third person narrator points out that beneath his outward Americanness that he creates during his stay at Maxine's house, there lurks an Indian sensibility. The narrator comments, "…he is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is a betrayal of his own." The narrator proves to be true as the death of Ashoke Ganguli, his father, shakes him and he becomes conscious of his filial duties, incurred by his Indian heritage. He returns to his family in order to mourn his father's death. His attachment to his family serves as a jolt to his affair with Maxine. Gogol realises the cultural distance between himself and Maxine. He is aware that "his father's death does not affect Maxine in the least" (p.182) conversely, he has a wide circle of his father's Bengali acquaintances that are deeply moved by his father's death. Gogol notices Maxine's self-centred attitude even at the mourning of his father's death when she asks about his plan for New Year's Eve. Gogol now has the strength to not to succumb to Maxine's invitation of escape from his roots:

> "I miss you, Nikhil."
> He nods.

> "What about New Year's Eve?" she says.
> "What about it?"
> "Do you still want to try to go up to New Hampshire?" For they had talked of this, going away together, just the two of them, Maxine picking him up after Christmas, staying at the lake house. Maxine was going to teach him how to ski.
> "I don't think so."
> "It might do you good," she says tilting her head to one side. She glances around the room. "To get away from all this."
> "I don't want to get away." (p.182)

Consequently, Gogol faces another split in his affair due to the cultural differences, as Maxine could not understand his adherence to his family and cultural traditions. Eventually Maxine admits her dislike for Gogol's mother and sister that prompts Gogol to step out of Maxine's life forever. Gogol succumbs to his mother's pressure to get married. Ashima arranges his marriage with Moushumi. However, tragically this marriage also is subjected to disharmony and a consequent split owing to Moushumi's wayward attitude. She still dates Dimitri, her first love. This causes another failure in Gogol's life. Gogol tries to establish a relationship with Moushumi, on grounds of cultural similarity, but Moushumi's unruly sexual behaviour proves fatal to Gogol's marital life.

At the end of the novel, Gogol is bewildered and has no objective. The identity, he has created as Nikhil, provides no solace. He lives with a sense of failure and shame. All his endeavours to identify himself with American life end in a fiasco.

> Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all. (p.289)

In short, Gogol epitomises existential traits, searching for his identity, living with a sense of alienation; he exemplifies the predicament of human life. Tejinder Kaur, in her article analyses Gogol's predicament.

> Gogol (Nikhil), though having passed through many emotional setbacks because of his 'bicultural' identity, is shown to be feeling dejected, distressed, displaced and lonely in the end not knowing what to do after thwarting of his dreams, his father's death, his wife's desertion and his mother's impending departure to India, but his desires to settle a home, have a family and a son and rise professionally in other countries hint at his quest for the new "route" which will dawn on him after his reflections in the company of the stories by his namesake, Nikolai Gogol-gifted to him by his father.[26]

The novel represents Gogol's attempts to piece together a fractured identity. He ultimately returns to where he started from. Rather than stop at the patriarchal identity, Jhumpa Lahiri takes him to the works of Gogol, his namesake.

Moushumi is another character who exemplifies existentialism. Gogol gets married to her in order to "enculturate his Bengali identity."[27] Moushumi shares the ethos of the second-generation Bengali immigrants. She is a research scholar, working on French Feminist Theory. Moushumi has a peculiar sense of alienation, as she neither opts for her parental Bengali identity, nor does she fully belong to American culture. Rather she goes to a third language and culture, in order to formulate her identity. She indulges in wayward behaviour and sexual adventures in France. During her stay in France, she had affairs with men of different nationalities. Like Gogol, she also had failed love affairs with Graham and Dimitri. The engagement with Graham breaks up due to the cultural

dissimilarity, for Graham ridicules Bengali cultural traditions that he had witnessed during his visit to Calcutta in order to ask for her grand parents' blessings. After the split, Moushumi gets married to Gogol, retreating from her previous vow "never to marry a Bengali man." (p.213) Her marriage is an attempt to bridge the gap between two cultures, however, it ends as she is disposed to sexual anarchy even after her marriage. Her relations with Dimitri Desjardins devastate her marital life. She establishes relations with Dimitri only to assert her individuality, as she does not want to be controlled by any outward agency. "In retrospect she saw that her sudden lack of inhibitions had intoxicated her more than any of the men had." (p.215) She embodies existential traits. From the beginning she does not belong either to the place of her birth, i.e. America, or to the place of her parents' origin i.e. Bengal. Moushumi's suffering is due to her hedonistic life style. In order to cash every moment of her life, she transcends the Rubicon of morality even in her conjugal life. Her dissoluteness is analogous to the meaning of her name because Moushumi is a season that keeps changing. The relationship between Gogol and Moushumi is void of love and mutual understanding; rather Moushumi is disenchanted and distracted from her marital life:

> They didn't argue, they still had sex, and yet he wondered. Did he still make her happy? She accused him of nothing, but more and more he sensed her distance, her dissatisfaction, her distraction. But there had been no time to dwell on this worry. […] Part of him wants to bring it up with her. "Are you happy you married me?" he would ask. But the fact that he is even thinking of this question makes him afraid. (p.271)

Her urge for fulfilment leads her to establish sexual relations with Dimitri, her first love. The pangs of unfulfilment in the first affair remain afresh in her mind all through the years. Her disenchantment regarding marriage is a result of boredom. She resumes relations with Dimitri. Moushumi's efforts to trace Dimitri are described by the narrator as an act of self-deception.

> She tells herself she's calling an old friend. She tells herself the coincidence of finding his rėsumė, of stumbling upon him in this way, is too great, that any one in her position would pick up the phone and call. She tells herself he could very well be married, as she is. (p.262)

The narrator says that she feels pricks of conscience at the resumption of her relationship with Dimitri, though she suppresses it. In short, she is another character who consolidates Sartre's views that "man is born into a kind of void (le nėant), a mud (le visquex). He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine, acquiescent existence in a "semi conscious" state in which he is scarcely aware of himself."[28] As an existentialist, Moushumi's actions are not governed by any outward agency and she has created her essence according to her existence. Despite her various sexual affairs, she is alienated even at last because Dimitri, for whom she ruined her marital life, is not going to marry her. Hence, her pursuit of self-satisfaction ends in utter failure as eventually she does not find the purpose of her life. As in her other works, Lahiri delineates how the second-generation immigrants blunder in their attempts to frame an identity. Often they are unable to get out of the in-between state.

Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli represent the first-generation Indian immigrants who come to USA in search of their fortunes. Both epitomize a sense

of alienation and strict adherence to native cultural values. Ashoke's dislocation from his native land and culture is due to his desire to pursue higher studies and find better future prospects "with security and respect." (p.108) Ashoke's migration specifies the phenomenon of 'brain drain'. As Ashoke's migration is purely for professional progress, he has a strong sense of acculturation. He easily overcomes all the odds in the course of his adjustment into American culture. Despite his disposition to adjust in the host culture, he has an affinity with his native Bengali cultural values and traditions. His efforts to socialize with other Bengali expatriates and the gatherings of Bengalis at his home to celebrate various Bengali traditions are due to his urge to stick to his ancestral, cultural roots. He wants to instil the values that he has inherited from his parents into his children in order to preserve his Bengali identity. His act of naming his son after Nikolai Gogol can be interpreted as his efforts to revive the memories of his past. Though these reminiscences are painful, they are an essential part of his psyche. The third person narrator does not delve into the depths of Ashoke's mind. The readers, however, encounter a strong sense of attachment to the country of his origin. In spite of his adjustment in America, his lonely death symbolizes the alienation of the diaspora in a foreign land. Ashoke's death raises a question in Gogol's mind regarding the existence of diaspora "…Who had forsaken everything to come to this country, to make a better life, only to die here?" (p.180) The question reveals an existential aspect of diasporic communities. Ashoke Ganguli, notwithstanding his strict adherence to cultural, moral values, dies in his pursuit of being identified as a successful professional but his dreams of leading a contented family life are shattered as at the time of his death he is

alone, converse to Calcutta where he has an extended family. From cultural view point, he is an amalgam of native Bengali and American cultures.

Ashima Ganguli is an archetypal Bengali immigrant woman who strictly observes Bengali cultural values and abhors the Americanized ways. At the outset of the novel, she typifies loneliness, isolation and nostalgia. From the feminist view point, she consolidates the patriarchal niche of women. Her concern and attempts to conserve her native culture presents her as an emblem of Indian culture, as the patriarchy has assigned responsibility of cultural preservation to women. Her concern and adherence to the native traditions can be construed as her attempts to keep her family space culturally unadulterated from the profane activities of the host culture. She represents the traditions and rituals observed strictly by the family and hence she represents the inner domain for women as prescribed by the patriarchy:

> In portraying Ashima's experiences and her diasporic translocation, there is no attempt to visualize a Utopian condition where societal structures would guarantee women their rightful place in society. Ashima does not seem to realize her condition: the inequitable distribution of power within the family structure. A total acceptance of the situation makes Ashima a conformist to the core. The concept of a visionary, futurist thought for women that Einstein had envisaged does not figure in Ashima's thought process. Women's subordination is an accepted 'given' for her.[29]

From the beginning she conforms to the patriarchal norms of a daughter, a wife, and a mother. She sticks to the duties of a widow to her late husband. Through Ashima, Lahiri portrays the status of a widow in Indian culture. She has to abandon all the embellishments. Widowhood in Hindu society has ever been a scourge for women. Widows remain at the margins of society. Kautilya's *Arthshastra* and *Manusmriti* imposed various harsh sanctions on widows. Despite

various social reforms to enhance the status of widows in Hindu society, they are destined to lead a life of social ostracism. A widow is disallowed not only the use of ornaments and embellishments but also the use of honey, meat, salt, perfumes, flowers, and dyed clothes. They are not permitted to re-marry. In order to disfigure their beauty, their heads are forcibly tonsured. Hundreds of widows are ostracized by their families and sent to Vrindavan, a religious place in Uttar Pradesh to spend time in prayer. These widows have only one piece of cloth to cover themselves, and beg outside the temples. Their marginalization is not only economic and social; rather they are subjected to the most degrading marginalization in the form of prostitution by some widow Ashrams.

As a daughter, her acquiescence towards the patriarchal norms is apparent as her marriage is arranged by her parents, without asking her approval. The intensity of marginalization can be gauged by the fact that "It was only after the betrothal that she'd learnt his name" (p.9). As a wife she is left alone to suffer the trauma of exile at her apartment. At the time of delivery, Jhumpa Lahiri delineates her apprehensions for her baby as she has not adjusted yet in the alien land of America.

> But She is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare... (p.6)...As she strokes and suckles and studies her son, she can't help but pity him. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived. (p.25)

Ashima remains in the house (inner domain) representing the patriarchal apprehension that the women are more susceptible towards cultural denigration or cultural contamination. However Lahiri does not present any gender discrimination on financial and educational basis, rather her concern is culture, so she represents the issue of gender only in the cultural context. Despite her long stay in America, she stills wears saris, likes Indian food, observes every Bengali tradition. The acquaintances of Ganguli family are mostly the Bengali

immigrants. This signifies the family's attempts to stick to their roots. Lahiri shows a slow process of adjustment in the character of Ashima. Her desperation and the trauma of exile lead her to persuade Ashoke to leave USA and return 'home':

> "I'm saying hurry up and finish your degree." And then, impulsively, admitting it for the first time: "I'm saying I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It's not right. I want to go back. (p.33)

But as time passes she adjusts. However adjustment to America is slower than her husband's. The birth of Gogol accelerates the process of her adjustment, though initially she is terrified to raise the child in an alien country. Necessities compel her to contact the outside world. As soon as she participates in the outside realm, her nostalgia and sense of exile recedes. Her family connections in Calcutta haunt her time and again in the form of the news of the deaths of near and dear ones. The first trauma of mourning that she undergoes is her father's death. The plight of the diaspora, represented by Ashima is well portrayed by the narrator. Ashima realizes that being a foreigner "is a sort of life long pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding". (pp.49-50) Ashima harbours a strong urge to link with the relatives back 'home' in Calcutta. Her continual visits to Calcutta attach her roots to the soil of her motherland. She eagerly waits for the letters from 'home'. Indira Nityanandam minutely observes the dilemma of immigrants,

> Constantly suspended in a mental voyage between the countries, they seem to be caught in an enigmatic state of in-betweenness. These expatriates keep the channels of communication open between themselves and their families back home.[30]

The family visits to Calcutta open a rift between the first and second generations as Ashok and Ashima come to Calcutta to revive the memories. In contrast, their children have an aversion towards India and treat it as an alien land having no emotional propinquity except the feeling that it is the land of their ancestors.

Despite her long stay in U.S. Ashima is indisposed to internalize the American way of life and does not comprehend her offsprings' fascination towards it. Though she gradually adjusts, adapts and adopts it as she has learnt to do the things on her own. During Ashoke's deputation at a university in Cleveland, she learns to cope with the solitude on her own. Meanwhile, she gets a job to while away the time. Another thing that offends her is "her children's independence, their need to keep distance from her." (P-166) She dislikes this liberty as this is in contrast to the Indian notion of an integrated family. Lahiri delves deep in Ashima's mind for she is the main character who projects cultural displacement and the trauma of exile. Her character posits existential characteristics because she is in constant search for identity and belonging. After the death of Ashoke, she is still in a dilemma. Even at the end, she is portrayed as a lonely character. The narrator exposes the inner workings of her mind: "Ashima feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone, and briefly, turned away from the mirror she sobs for her husband."(p.278) In order to bridge the gap with her

relatives back home, owing to distances, she decides to spend six months in India. Simultaneously to keep alive the memories of her husband, she will spend six months in America. In the last chapter, the narrator depicts the predicament of Ashima: “True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere.” (p.276)

The character of Sonia embodies acculturation. Her character is not portrayed in detail. She is well adjusted in American culture and does not suffer from identity crisis. Her sense of belongingness consolidates her efforts of identity formation, albeit she does not cast off Indian values as unlike Moushumi, Ruth and Maxine, she does not have several love affairs.

Lahiri has projected various themes in the novel. Besides the dilemma of belongingness, sense of exile, feminism and existentialism, she has presented the problems of American insensitivity in the novel. The immigrants are not recognized as American. They are ridiculed for the peculiarity of names by the natives. Gogol realizes this marginalization and humiliation when somebody shortens the spelling of Ganguli into Gang, written on the nameplate of the mailbox. He also realizes that his father’s Indian accent makes him a butt of ridicule and marginalized.

Another issue, Jhumpa Lahiri posits is race. The colour of skin is a bottleneck in the course of their identity formation in the host culture. Notwithstanding their acquiescence to the pressures of the host culture and their consequent assimilation in it, race becomes an impediment in being recognized as American. Gogol’s confabulation with Pamela at a party, unfolds American

psyche towards India and Indians living abroad. Pamela represents the fascination of Americans for Indian culture. In a neo colonial stance, they consider India, only as a country of adverse climate and dirt as well as unusual customs and cultures. Gogol, in order to identify himself with Americans, bolsters Pamela's views. His views on climatic disorders in India are based on the same logic.

> "I mean, you must never get sick."
>
> "Actually, that's not true," he says, slightly annoyed. He looks over at Maxine, trying to catch her eye, but she's speaking intently with her neighbor. "We get sick all the time. We have get shots before we go. My parents devote the better part of a suitcase to medicine."
> "But you're Indian," Pamela says frowning. "I'd think the climate would'nt affect you, given your heritage."
> "Pamela, Nick's American," Lydia says. (p.157)

Graham is another character who embodies the white disregard and contempt for the culture of India. His disrespect and humiliation of Indian culture becomes raison d'être of rift between him and Moushumi. Graham represents an age-old superiority, treating third world countries as uncivilized, orthodox, and circumscribed to the cocoons of their cultures. Lahiri has presented a strange type of consciousness in Moushumi regarding her heritage. Though she is disposed to American way of life, she cannot tolerate the rejection of her background: "For it was one thing for to reject her background, to be critical of her family's heritage, another to hear it from him". (p.217) Moushumi's disgust with Graham evinces that the second generation immigrants, somehow are tied to their ancestral roots and despite their disorientation towards the culture of ancestors, they are ambivalent towards it.

The title story of the collection *Unaccustomed Earth* presents shades of complexity in the relationship of a retired father and his daughter Ruma. Ruma is living in Seattle with her American husband and son Akash. After her mother's death, her father retires. In order to do away with isolation, he travels distant places of Europe, where he had never been. Before his next visit to Prague, Ruma's father visits her in Seattle. The whole story revolves round his visit to Seattle where inner workings of both of the characters are minutely depicted. Ruma and her father are the two central characters who live their lives in their own ways and do not want any interference. The complexity in the relationship between Ruma and her father is depicted through psychological analysis. Ruma's father sells the large house that he shared with his wife and shifts to a condominium. On one European trip, he meets Mrs. Bagchi, a Bengali woman who was widowed at the age of twenty six. He establishes propinquity and hides this new relationship from Ruma.

Ruma's relationship with her father has not been harmonious. It has been a biological relationship between a father and daughter, void of emotional closeness. The only mediator between her and her father was her mother who is dead now. Ruma is deeply moved by the news of the sale of her parental house to which her childhood memories were attached. Ruma, during her pre-marital life was disposed to the western way of life and did not want any meddling from her father while selecting either her subjects of study or her life partner. Notwithstanding persistent disapproval of her parents, she got married to an

American boy Adam. Her father's authoritative attitude filled her with aversion towards him as when he visits her; she conjectures that he wants to live with her:

> Ruma feared that her father would become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in a way she was no longer used to. It would mean an end to the family she'd created on her own: herself and Adam and Akash, and the second child that would come in January, conceived just before the move. (p.7)

Ruma's assumptions about her father are based on her sense of individualism, an essential feature of western life. Though her father is well aware of Ruma's attitude, her independence and individualism, he regards it as retribution of time since he left behind his parents in India. Lahiri presents the predicament of immigrants through Ruma's father, who leave their relatives back in India in the pursuit of better future prospects. But in this pursuit, the next generation delinks from its values and culture, as conspicuous through the attitude of his off springs.

During her father's visit, Ruma perceives changes. He establishes proximity with Ruma's son Akash, cultivates her desolate garden and plants hydrangea in the memory of his late wife. Ruma now offers a permanent home to him but he declines. He wishes to visit when the baby is born. After his departure Ruma comes to know about Mrs. Bagchi through a lost picture post card, addressed to Mrs. Bagchi written by her father. She comes to know "the reason for her father's trips, the reasons for his good spirits, the reason he did not want to live in Seattle."(p.58) Ruma is mortified with grief and astonished and wants to tear the postcard into pieces but eventually she inhibits herself and posts the card to Mrs. Bagchi. Ruma is delineated as an educated and enlightened lady. Her attitude

towards her father's secret love affair is sympathetic as she finally understands the isolation that her father is experiencing after her mother's death.

Notwithstanding Ruma's independent life, free from the diktats of her parents, she somehow, is connected to her Bengali roots through her mother. Her concern over Akash's upbringing reflects her cultural ties to the land of her parents:

> In spite of her efforts he was turning into the sort of American child she was always careful not to be, the sort that horrified and intimidated her mother: imperious, afraid of eating things. (p.23)

Akash's refusal of Indian food symbolizes his growing refusal of imbibing Indian culture. Ruma's decision to rear her own children is also in defiance of bearing the double reponsibilities of household and job simultaneously. Hence Ruma's decision inverts a stereotype of housewife.

Ruma's mother is presented as a conformist to the patriarchal niche of a wife. She marries Ruma's father and migrates to USA mutely. Her mother is a quintessence of Bengali culture as she sticks to traditional clothes, speaks Bengali and wants to instill cultural values in Ruma.

The second story *Hell–Heaven* is narrated by a small girl Usha with adult hindsight. The narrator dscribes her mother's migration to U.S. and her mother's crush on Pranab Kaku, a fellow immigrant. The narrator lives with her mother Aparna and her father. Aparna's marriage to Shyamal is arranged and void of emotions, and understanding. Aparna's romance with Pranab is ensued by her

husband's indifference and lukewarm response to Aparna's emotions. The narrator subtly comments upon her father's peculiar attitude towards his mother:

> He had married my mother to placate his parents; they were 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. Conversation was a chore for him; it required an effort he preferred to expand at the lab. (p.65)

Pranab Kaku comes as an oasis in the arid life of Aparna. Despite her adherence to cultural norms, Aparna is compelled to defy the norms of society by committing "sexual deviance". Her non-conformist act of romance with Pranab is due to her patriarchal oppression and is attributed as her assertion of female sexuality. Her desolate marital life shatters the false euphoria of marriage, presented by the society. But her romance with Pranab ends with the advent of Deborah in the life of Pranab. Aparna is upset and hopes that sooner or later, Deborah will leave Pranab. But Deborah gets married to Pranab. With the passage of time Pranab becomes secluded and rarely visits the parties among his Bengali acquaintance. People assume that Deborah is the root cause of Pranab's seclusion from his acquaintance. But after twenty three years of marriage, Pranab and Deborah divorce due to Pranab's love affair with a married Bengali woman. Deborah shares her grief with Aparna on phone and reveals that it was Pranab himself who cut off all the ties with his Bengali acquaintances. Deborah was falsely accused of doing so. Through the portrayal of two broken hearted women Aparna and Deborah, Lahiri poses that women, be they Indian or American, are susceptible to the patriarchal oppression. She also projects that women bond easily and stand by each other. Irrespective of their different cultural background,

both Aparna and Deborah unite, due to the shared experiences of the oppressive patriarchy. Apart from feminism, Lahiri has also presented cultural clash in the story. Aparna wants to instill Bengali culture and tradition in the narrator whereas the narrator's aversion to the restrictions laid down upon her, initiates cultural clash. Being an emblem of Bengali culture, initially Aparna wants to keep her family space uncontaminated from the western culture. Her exhortations to the narrator to remain aloof from the boys of her age, is a conspicuous example of Aparna's endeavours to keep intact her cultural heritage. Conversely, the narrator's propinquity with Deborah in her childhood foreshadows the narrator's impulse to imbibe the host culture in her youth. Aparna's restraints on the narrator, in her youth, made Aparna more secluded owing to her adherence of Bengali culture. Her adherence opens a rift between her and the narrator. Aparna already was aloof from her husband, due to his devotion to work. The only companion in the family was the narrator, who began to evade her, in order to enjoy her life on her own.

> I began to pity my mother; the older I got, the more I saw what a desolate life she led. She had never worked; enduring the day she watched soap operas to pass the time. Her only job, everyday, was to clean and cook for my father and me. We rarely went to restaurant, my father always pointing out, even in cheap ones, how expensive they were compared with eating at home. When my mother complained to him about how much she hated life in the suburbs and how lonely she felt, he said nothing to placate her. (p.76)

Eventually Aparna realizes that the narrator is not only her daughter "but a child of America as well" (p.82) and hence the process of acculturation is inevitable it cannot be curbed by her restraints and her effort to check the

acculturation of the narrator makes herself secluded and aloof. By this time, she and her husband grow old and establish a proximity that had been absent throughout their lives.

A Choice of Accomodation deals with the staleness in the marital life of Amit, a Bengali migrant and his American wife Megan. Amit is an editor of a medical journal who comes to his alma mater Langford, accompanying his wife, in order to attend Pam Borden's wedding. Amit's visit to Langford, as described by the narrator, is not to revive his memories of Langford where he had studied at the age of fifteen but to do away with rust that is pervading their relationship owing to their routined lives. Amit's reaction is lukewarm towards the invitation of Langford alumni reunion. Amit's life exemplifies generational conflict. He is bewildered by his father's decision to return to India and leave him at Langford. His parents' decision left him unsupervised, and uncared for among the strangers.

> He was crippled with homesickness, missing his parents to the point where tears often filled his eyes, in those first months, without warning. [...] He learned to live without his mother and father, as every else did, shedding his daily dependence on them even though he was still a boy, and even to enjoy it. Still, he refused to forgive them. (p.97)

During his stay at Langford, Amit suffers a sense of alienation because of the colour of his skin as other students do not recognize him as an American. Amit's decision to drop out of medical school and his subsequent marriage with Megan, are in defiance of his parents' wishes and signify generational conflict. But his racial alienation that he suffered from at Langford still haunts him after his marriage as both of his daughters inherit the complexion of their white

mother. The mustiness in the conjugal life is attributed to job commitments and familial responsibilities of both Megan and Amit. His decision to attend Pam's wedding arouses Megan's suspicion regarding his feelings for Pam. In order to get away from the staleness and familial responsibilities, he attends the marriage of Pam with his wife. Disabled by alcohol, he blatantly shares his ideas regarding the predicament of marital life, with a stranger Felicia. He ends the party in between, leaving Megan behind. This makes his relations with Megan tense. But their love-making at Langford makes them realize the essence of accommodation and adjustment in conjugal life. They make love in a dorm in an unusual manner, peculiar to married people of their age as both of them have crossed forty. Through this love making, they revive passion for each other.

Only Goodness deals with the relationship between Sudha and her alcoholic brother Rahul. Through the story Lahiri sheds light on the expectations of first generation immigrants from their American born offsprings, as well as cultural susceptibility of the second generation immigrants. The story highlights the twist in the relationship between the siblings. The story starts with Sudha's imminent acculturation. Sudha is an educated character like the other women of *Unaccustomed Earth*, with an irrepressible urge to imbibe western ideas and ways of life. It was her errant attitude during her student life that led Rahul astray. Lahiri discusses the different aspects of the great American dream. The first generation maintained a great loyalty to their motherland. The second generation in their attempts to define an identity created a third space. The predicament of Rahul is central to the story as it signifies the generation gap. Cultural denigration

of the second generation immigrants is a much discussed phenomenon in Lahiri's works. Both Sudha and Rahul are entangled in conflict with their parents regarding the cultural norms of their ancestral land that are too exotic and far-fetched to be practiced in the west. Sudha's refusal to be encumbered by the cultural norms of her parents leads Rahul to opt for the same distancing from the parental culture. But Sudha's imbibing of host culture is positive in a way as she establishes herself and does not tussle with her parents. On the other hand Rahul's acculturation is negative for he is irresponsible towards his career and rebels against his parents:

> Sudha had waited until college to disobey her parents. Before then she had lived according to their expectations, her persona scholarly, her social life limited to other demure girls in her class, if only to ensure that one day she would be set free. [...] But she learned what her limits were. The idea of excess, of being out of control, did not appeal to Sudha. Competence: this was the trait that fundamentally defined her. (p.129)

Her parents' approval of her marriage with Roger, evinces the capitulation of the first generation immigrants to the pressures of host culture. But in Rahul's case, her parents are adamant not to accept Elena as Rahul's wife and hence their dreams for Rahul are devastated when he leaves the house. Her parents' departure to Calcutta, presents the disenchantment of the first generation immigrants from the alien land and culture of the west. The concluding part of the story, presents Rahul's resolve to improve himself but eventually he fails to give up his alcoholism and in an alcoholic stupor he leaves his small nephew Neel unsupervised in a bathtub. The gross negligence and his incapability to improve

offend Roger and Sudha and finally in a state of resentment and despair, Sudha ousts him from her house.

The story explains the cultural disorientation of Sudha and Rahul as well as cultural displacement of their parents ensued by migration in search of a happy and luxurious life. The alienation of the first generation immigrants is exacerbated by their offsprings as the second generation distances itself from the first generation in order to evade the cultural pressures and demand of excellent academic performance. The offsprings for whom the first generation migrates do not provide any emotional solace as Rahul blatantly calls his parents' migration purely for material gain. But Sudha's attitude, being a woman is sympathetic and humane for her parents as she comprehends their alienation, and isolation in a far away country.

> While Sudha regarded her parents' separation from India as an ailment that ebbed and flowed like a cancer, Rahul was impermeable to that aspect of their life as well. " 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." That was Rahul, always aware of the family's weaknesses, never sparing Sudha from the things she least wanted to face. (p.138)

Apart from cultural disorientation and displacement, the narrator points out the stigma of racism that the immigrants undergo. Sudha's parents experience marginalization in the form of racism besides much hyped notion of equality in the western countries. Racism, an abominable marginalization is a notable feature of migration. From feminist view point, Lahiri has posited the characters of Sudha and Rahul with contrary features. Sudha, as a feminine figure, despite her acculturation creates her identity as a liberated, educated woman, responsible for

her familial as well as filial duties, whereas Rahul, a masculine figure, is portrayed with negative traits; truant and negligent to his academic career as well as filial duties. Even his resolve to overcome his alcoholic addiction proves to be as frail as himself in the end.

Nobody's Business delineates acculturation of a Bengali immigrant Sangeeta alias Sang and her failed love affair with Farouk, an Egyptian historian, teaching at Harvard. Sang, a Harvard dropout lives with two house mates, Paul and Heather. The story is narrated by a third person narrator. Sang is offended by the continuous phone calls of her suitors from distant places expressing convoluted assumptions about her. Sangeeta's persistence to call herself Sang, reflects her disorientation from her cultural roots as by adopting this name, she wants to create an identity that is neither Indian nor American. She does not like any interference in her life and wants to live it her own way. She views these proposals as invasions on her privacy and believes that these suitors are pursuing her out of the desire to have an educated, beautiful and economically independent wife in order to maintain their social status:

> These men weren't really interested in her. They were interested in a mythical creature created by a chain of gossip, a web of wishful Indian-community thinking in which she was an aging, overlooked poster child for years of bharat natyam classes, perfect SATs. (p.176)

Sang refutes these proposals because she yearns for love, but eventually is betrayed by her Egyptian boyfriend who consumes her as a sexual object. At the end of the story, Sang stands alone. Lahiri portrays her as a modern woman who

no longer chases dreams and has the ability to survive by herself in the public sphere.

The last three stories are sequential and deal with the complications of Hema's and Kaushik's lives. *Once in a Lifetime* presents the teenage infatuation of Hema for Kaushik, and the displacement of Kaushik and subsequent problems of adjustment ensued by his parents' oscillation between U.S. and India. However the return of Kaushik's family to U.S. is not for financial motives, rather his mother's fatal breast cancer and her will to die in America, in an isolated place, leads the family to undergo a second migration. Kaushik stays with his parents at Hema's house until his father buys a house. The information regarding the quotidian life of Kaushik and his parents are very secretive and deal with the predicament of the family. Kaushik's sullen attitude towards his parents is attributed to the vacillation of his family between the countries. Born in U.S., he was disposed to American culture and tradition at the time of his departure from U.S. to India. Even in India, he stays in Bombay, a distant place from Calcutta, where he does not find the culture of his ancestors; hence, he does not belong to India. Moreover his mother's fatal disease fills in him a sense of isolation and alienation. Nevertheless he wants to belong to America. As far as Kaushik's mother is concerned, her fatal illness fills in her hedonism, she wants to grab some pleasure out of the cruel hands of death. But her pursuit of pleasure is criticized by Hema's parents. Hema's mother, unaware of the predicament of the family, considers the self indulgence of Kaushik's mother as 'stylish'. She, in contrast to Kaushik's mother, has a strong adherence to Bengali culture and tradition and acts obsequiously according to the niche of preserver of indigenous Bengali culture that the Indian patriarchy has incurred upon her. Her efforts to

keep her family space uncontaminated from the western culture are apparent in her disapproval of American attire and idea of a child sleeping alone in a separate room. Hema, the narrator, also reveals her emblematic attitude of second generation immigrants towards the land and culture of their ancestors. Her negligence of Indian geography and aversion towards India as a land of geckos, and cockroaches, presents a nasty outlook of second generation immigrants, as well as presents their attitude towards third world countries, as a land of filth, dirt and insects:

> I did not betray my opinion that I found trips to India dull, that I didn't like the geckos that clung to the walls in the evenings, poking in and out of the fluorescent light fixtures, or the giant cockroaches that sometimes watched me as I bathed. (p.241)

Year's End presents the devastation of Kaushik after his mother's death. Kaushik returns to his home from Swarthmore after his father calls him to meet Chitra, his step mother. Chitra, a young widow half the age of Kaushik's father, migrates to U.S. with her two young daughters Usha and Piu. Kaushik accentuates the differences in living standards between Chitra and his mother by elaborately explaining his visit home:

> I was unused, stepping into the house, to the heavy smell of cooking that was in the air…My mother had insisted on furnishing the house with pieces true to its Modernist architecture…She had never allowed a cloth to cover the table, but one was there now, something with an Indian print that could just as easily have been a bedspread and did'nt fully reach either end. In the centre, instead of the generous cluster of fresh fruit or flowers my mother would have arranged, there was a stainless-steel plate… jars of pickles, hot mango and sweet lime, their lids missing, their labels stained, spoons stuck into their oils. (pp.258-259)

Lahiri has adroitly presented an age old patriarchal prejudice of step motherhood with which Kaushik is occupied, albeit his western outlook towards life. Chitra and her daughters undergo the stigma of stephood as Kaushik does not want to let them touch the belongings of his mother. His emotions at the news of his father's marriage are not outrageous, yet he never welcomes his father's decision:

> But no turbulent emotion passed through me as he spoke, only a diluted version of the nauseating sensation that had taken hold the day in Bombay that I learned my mother was dying, a sensation that had dropped anchor in me and never fully left.(p.254)

Despite differences, Kaushik identifies himself with the girls on the basis of similar experiences of migration and loss of their father and his mother respectively. However, Chitra's and her daughter's efforts to provide Kaushik some emotional solace, are shunned by him. He rejects Chitra, as "a cheap replacement for his exclusive mother."[31] In order to revive his memory alienated from the access of Chitra and her daughter, he wishes to eliminate every trace of his mother from his house. His pent up revulsion is expressed at the time of his quarrel with Piu and Usha, when the duo look at the photographs of his mother. Eventually, he abandons home, and like an escapist, drifts from place to place in search of peace. Chitra and her daughters are presented as passive sufferers of the patriarchy, but the silence of Usha and Piu in the concluding part, makes Kaushik realize his guilt hence their refusal is construed as their refusal "to collaborate with the oppressor and thus weaken the process of victimization."[32]

Going Ashore, presents denouement of the previous two stories. It consists of a huge component of tragedy and is told in a calm manner, but the unhighlighted component lingers long and disturbs the readers. Hema exemplifies the same sense of unbelongingness and search for identity that Kaushik has undergone. Breaking up her affair with Julian, Hema succumbs to the pressures of life and desires to get married. Hema's drift signifies her escapist attitude as she wants to avoid memories of her love-affair with Julian as well as the thoughts of her future married life with Navin. At first she is hopeful that Julian's divorce is a matter of time and sooner or later she would settle with Julian. But she realizes that her love affair with Julian would only diminish her status as a mistress. Her visit to Rome is her effort to create her own identity, free from the traces of her past and future. She does not have any emotional attachment to Navin except that he is her fiancé. Her decision of marriage does not reflect any enthusiasm:

> Like the young smiling couple sitting affectionately on top of a shared casket, there was something dead about the marriage she was about to enter into. And though she knew it had every chance, over the years, of coming to life, on her way home, in the yellow light of evening, she was conscious only of its deadness. (p.301)

During her visit to Rome she meets Kaushik after a long gap. Her childhood infatuation for Kaushik flares up again, consequently despite her betrothal; she establishes sexual relations with Kaushik who works as a freelance photographer. Kaushik proposes to Hema to follow him to Hong Kong, breaking her engagement to Navin. But Hema shuns his offer, realizing that her pursuit of Kaushik, has no guarantee of better future prospects. Instead she prefers married

life, albeit she has no love for Navin. Hema's rejection of Kaushik's proposal can be construed as her blow to the patriarchy as;

> Patriarchy dictates that women follow behind men in the exterior, open-ended world. Hema's refusal to follow Kaushik questions the idea of 'women's space' and disrupts conservative societal norms. By retaining her job, Hema negotiates her position in society. Hema redefines woman as a being who rather than succumbing to oppressive forces writes her own destiny. Thus Lahiri explores the space within the literary text as vehicle for organizing and understanding women's lives.[33]

Both Hema and Kaushik are emblematic of existential traits; they behave as isolated existence, searching for their identities in an alien universe. Both are rootless owing to their disporic existence, and vicissitudes of life instill in them a sense of alienation. Eventually Kaushik dies in Tsunami, leaving no trace of his existence behind. Hema also drifts into marriage that is meaningless and void of love as well as mutual understanding. She wields marriage as a tool to counter the patriarchal onslaught on an unmarried woman.

In short, Jhumpa Lahiri subtly presents the universal saga of a section of humanity that is loss of identity, the sense of belonging and cultural displacement. Her characters are expatriates from South Asia, who want to connect either to their host country or to the country of their origin. But in doing so, they suffer from a sense of alienation from both countries. Feminine identity is affected more than masculine identity by cultural displacement because of women's strong cultural ties to the land of their ancestors in the comparison to their male counterparts. Women are a part of private sphere, whereas men are a part of public sphere. Jhumpa Lahiri's women tend to maintain a philosophical attitude

towards life. The prominent feature of Jhumpa's oeuvre is generational conflict between immigrants. The first generation's urge to stick to their roots is in contrast to the second generation's eagerness to merge with the host culture. The second generation carves out a different identity which has to be understood on the basis of their psychological assessment. Firstly, second generation immigrants do not deem India as their 'home'; secondly, their vision of America, is contrary to the first generation as second generation immigrants regard America as their 'home'; thirdly, since they feel 'at home' in America, they identify themselves with American norms and attitudes. Fourthly, their vision of life is individualistic and conforms to the American ways of life. Lahiri poses culture as an impetus in the lives of her characters. Whether it is Shoba and Shukumar, Mr. Pirzada and Lilia's parents, they are concomitant only on the basis of shared cultural experiences. It is the same cultural background that saves Shoba's and Shukumar's marriage from splitting. Though the characters are fictional, their predicament and experiences are universal. As far as identity is concerned, characters have different notions of identity; it is not circumscribed to culture. For instance, Mr. Pirzada's identity is attached to his family, whereas Boori Ma's notion of identity is associated with her lost financial status, Sanjeev's endeavours to create his identity are governed by his religion, Twinkle's attempt to create her identity is free from any obsession, rather it is her own impulse to create her identity free from the diktats of any outward reason. Similarly Bibi Haldar at first tries to create her identity according to the norms of the patriarchy but having failed to do so, she creates her identity according to her own parameters, though the course she takes is deviant from prescribed norms. The narrator of *The Third*

and Final Continent has a strong sense of belonging to the land of his ancestors; simultaneously he wants his son to maintain Bengali cultural identity in his course of assimilation into host culture. Mrs. Sen exemplifies cultural displacement and the inability to cope with the changed atmosphere and life patterns of the host country. She debunks the notion that western culture is universally acceptable and applicable.

Similar predicament of the first generation and second generation immigrants is presented in *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. Lahiri has presented gender issues in cultural context. Feminine characters undergo this trauma of exile more than masculine characters. Women characters are more concerned regarding cultural preservation in comparison to their male counterparts. The patriarchal stereotype of women as preserver of indigenous culture is minutely depicted through the attempts of female characters to maintain their cultural heritage. Ashima, in *The Namesake* presents fear of loss of identity in the host country. The process of her acculturation is slower than her husband Ashoke.

Apart from cultural displacement, and identity crisis, Lahiri presents existential traits in her characters. Moushumi, Gogol in *The Namesake*, and Kaushik in *Unaccustomed Earth*, embody perfect existential characteristics. They search for their identity in a Godless universe, and their actions and lives are not governed by any outward agency. The characters behave as if they are thrown into an incongruous universe, and they are bewildered by the pulls and pressures of their lives. The predicament of the first generation immigrants is intensified by

their second generation as the second generation is rebellious and at odds with their parents and do not succumb to the demands of the first generation to adhere to their ancestral culture. A sharp contrast between the first and second generation immigrants is apparent in their search for life partners. Ruma, in *Unaccustomed Earth* marries an American, showing her predilection for American culture; on the other hand, her father turns to a Bengali widow in his last days. Similarly Kaushik's father marries a Bengali widow rather than an American. On the other hand, some of Lahiri's second generation immigrant women like Sang and Hema look for or are engaged to Indian grooms but in the meantime they continue their American affairs. Kaushik's parents are the exceptional first generation immigrants as they are very much American in their ways of life. The attitude of Kaushik's father towards Kaushik is insensitive; he does not comprehend the predicament of Kaushik after his mother's death. In a neo-colonial stance Lahiri, presents marginalization of immigrants. Despite their strong sense of acculturation, the immigrants are not recognized as Americans because of the colour of their skin. The immigrants are subjected to marginalization owing to the notion of 'cultural other' or 'ethnic other'. Jhumpa Lahiri, as a post-modern writer simply presents the maladies or problems of human existence due to migration, not remedies or solutions to these problems.

Lahiri has presented children as minute observers in her stories. Their vision is untainted from the adult's prejudices of 'cultural other' or exoticism. Asha Chaubay[34] comments on Jhumpa's projection of the food metaphor in her works. Food plays a vital role in preserving immigrants' national and cultural

identity. In short, Jhumpa beautifully carves out the dilemma of immigrants and presents their dilemma as their maladies. The characters suffer this dilemma, their predicaments are different. As mentioned earlier, the characters have different parameters of identity crises. Apart from culture, Lahiri successfully presents human psyche and various themes related to it, like themes of marriage, love, fidelity and feminist issues. As far as feminist identity is concerned Mrs. Das' infidelity is an assertion as her physical needs were neglected. Similarly, Moushumi's wayward attitude and sexual exploits are the outcome of her ultra feminist consciousness; Bibi Haldar's deviational sexual relations assert her feminist identity and non-conformist attitude. Twinkle's fascination for Christian paraphernalia is non conformist and in contrast to Sanjeev's normative attitude and consciousness of his Hindu identity. Hema's denial of Kaushik's proposal to follow him, enunciates her subversion of patriarchal norms.

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