

## Chapter 1

### Jhumpa Lahiri and Her *Unaccustomed Earth*

#### Issues and Context

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*, paints a powerful picture focusing on the lives of the first and second generation of immigrants who have settled in USA. The characters in the stories are the offspring of parents who have migrated from Bengal, India after 1965. The characters are depicted as children of well-off parents, with access of good schools expected by their parents to hold on to Indian traditions while succeeding professionally in the new society. The characters face the opportunities and challenges of belonging to two different cultures, and must continuously negotiate an intermediate position within and between two cultures. They try to occupy a middle ground which could easily turn into a battle ground between Indian and the American parts of their identities, but the characters in strive to maintain ties to both cultures, identifying themselves as Indian Americans. Identity is a common theme in most of the stories, but it takes on a special charge in the stories in *Unaccustomed Earth*, because in each story a character or family is caught between cultures and often between generations.

The collections of eight stories prominently emphasize the lives and diasporic sensibility of second-generation immigrants who repent the problem of alienation, loneliness, self-realization, marginalization, displacement and discontinuity in the cultural discourse. It explores the trauma of the characters who are suffering from the loss of traditional culture, death of family member, the sense of rootlessness and the generation conflicts. Lahiri tries to describe almost exclusively of Bengali characters. *Unaccustomed Earth* consists of eight stories, in all the stories the characters are second generation Indian Americans. These stories show the obstacles that Indian

Americans must overcome in order to pursue the lifestyle of their choice; they also show some of the advantages that come with the territory.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born to Indian parents in London in 1967, and moved to the United States at the age of two. Her parents were first generation Bengali immigrants from Calcutta. She was originally named Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri. Lahiri's family maintained close connections to relatives and friends in India, and she grew up in an atmosphere of well-educated, middle-class immigrants. Jhumpa Lahiri received B.A in English Literature from Barnard College and continued her studies at Boston University. She has completed M.A in Comparative Literature, and Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. She has won several literary awards, mostly notably the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for best American work of fiction. Lahiri's collection of stories, *Unaccustomed Earth*, was released in 2008. Central themes in this book are identity, belonging, and the intermediate position that second generation immigrants occupy between the ethnic background of their parents, and the American society they grow up in.

*Unaccustomed Earth* consists of eight short stories almost all are written from the perspective of second generation immigrant characters. Temporal shifts are common trope in Lahiri's writing, and are used extensively in this collection of short stories. This way the book is a portrayal of two generations of Indians in the United States. The first story entitled 'Unaccustomed Earth' spans the visit of Ruma's recently retired and widowed father to Ruma's new home in Seattle, where she lives with her American husband and three years old son Akash. She has given up her legal career to stay at home with Akash and is expecting another baby. The story dives into old family issues and explores both father and daughter's culture-related sense of duty; Ruma feels obliged to ask her father to move in with her family, and her father

feels pressured to accept, against his better judgment. Akash has a chance to bond with his grandfather properly for the first time during the visit, and Ruma, who still mourns her mother, discovers at the end of the story that her father not only continues to wish living on his own, but also has a new partner.

‘Hell-Heaven’ explores the universal themes of love and jealousy, and the difficult relationship between a mother and a daughter. As the story opens, Pranab Chakraborty, a graduate student at MIT, feels homesick and considers returning to Calcutta. On the streets of Boston he meets and befriends Usha and her mother Arpana. Pranab becomes a regular visitor at Usha’s house, and Arpana neglected by her own husband, falls in love with Pranab. Pranab, however meets and eventually marries an American woman, Deborah. Arpana disapproves the marriage, her jealousy affecting her impression of Americans in general, as well as her relationship with Usha. Deborah and Pranab divorce after 20 years of marriage when Pranab falls in love with a married, Bengali woman. Arpana and Usha’s relationship improves over time, as Arpana begins to accept her situation, gradually settles in and grows more tolerant of American culture. She eventually reveals to Usha how she nearly committed suicide because of her unrequited love for Pranab.

‘Choice of Accommodation’ is another story which deals with displacement in the marital life on the backdrop of the diasporic milieu. It indicates Amit’s experience of displacement having been estranged from his parents and confronting his marital life in fear and nervousness. It is a story about an interracial couple. Amit and Megan attend the wedding of Amit’s college crush Pam Borden at his old prep Blurt school, Langford Academy. The rising stress in their marriage is witnessed as Amit, in a drunken condition discloses to a stranger at a wedding party that his marriage had collapsed after the birth of his two daughters. Amit is the son of rich Bengali parents,

and he had a privileged education in the high class boarding school, Langford Academy in America. His anguish is revealed in the lines; “He could not imagine sending his daughters to Langford- couldn’t imagine letting go of them as his parents had let go of them” (Lahiri 86). Despite such fortunate background, he does not have any self-confidence and is anxious and extremely nervous about himself. He feels a profound sense of rejection by his parents for putting him in a residential school. He feels no memories towards his alma mater and does not keep any contact with any of his old classmates.

In all anticipated situations, he would obviously do something foolish and rash or thoughtless which would result in the girls’ perishing under his supervision. He would be the only survivor and his scenarios always concluded with Megan divorcing him as she accuses him of what happened to their girls. In the end, he would lose it all, his wife and family. This is a very disturbing thing that Amit involves in. It reveals that he is an alienated soul suffering from an identity crisis. He lacks confidence, does not appreciate his own worth and therefore feels that he is not good enough for being loved. Despite his affectionate family, he seems to be always on the periphery, almost as if he is making ready himself for them to discard him one day. This may have to do with the sense of desertion he experienced through his parents act of putting him in a residential school without his approval during his early youth.

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

of loneliness and nostalgia is representative of the feelings of alienation which a diaspora experience in a foreign land. In the end, he learns to survive without his parents and slowly becomes accustomed to new life in Langford. As individuals suffer between who they feel they are and how they feel they should act, their individual struggles often act their relationships with others. In Lahiri's works, these very individualized struggles are presented in ability of characters to enter into productive dialogue with other characters. It tries to prove that, "there are no words with meanings shared by all, no words belonging to no one" (Lahiri 401). Through the characters' inability to communicate in a language that effectively crosses cultural and personal barriers.

'Only Goodness' is a beautiful example of cultural assimilation. The American culture seems to be so attractive and full of glamour that the younger generation of India replicate and accept it almost blindly. Sudha, the elder sister, first launched her brother, Rahul to alcoholism, later on she attempts to free him from his habit. She wants to give an American upbringing to her younger brother, which she did not get in her own childhood, by purchasing toys, making separate room for him, providing a swing in the yard etc. However, as he enters into college life, she introduces him to alcohol, a habit he acquires devastatingly. Meanwhile, Rahul's drinking habit proves to be a great barrier in his career. He could not clear his examinations and was finally thrown out of college. Along with drinking, he had developed a new habit of dating with girls. During the event of dating, he came across a woman named Elena who was thirty-eight years older than Rahul. Once Rahul invited Elena in his house and disclosed his intention before everyone that he wanted to marry Elena. This stunned and upset his parents. They opposed their marriage but did not prevent it.

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

In 'Nobody's Business', Sangita, a second generation Bengali-Indian immigrant, is the principal character of this story. Though her name is Sangita Biswas, she loves to be name as Sang. Sang is of marriageable age. Therefore, every so often men phoned for her with the desire to marry her. She studied Philosophy and completed her graduation from New York University. Paul and Heather are Sang's roommates who always update her whenever there was a probable groom on the phone. One day Paul noticed her boyfriend who wore entirely discolored jeans, a white shirt, a navy blue blazer and brown leather shoes. His name was Farouk as Sang introduced him to Paul, but he went to Freddy. Paul observed that Sang was never home, and when she was she resided in her room, often on the phone having the closed entrance. It was something of a shock to locate Farouk in the house. Whenever she was not with Farouk, she did things for him. She used to read through proofs of the articles he'd written, examining it for typographical errors. She also planned his doctor's appointment etc.

During one winter break when she went away to London to visit her sister and

her baby boy, a woman called at their house a number of times to know about Sang. She asked Paul whether Sang and Freddy are cousins. Furthermore, she began crying and when she stopped crying she said that she loved him. She informed him that she was Freddy's girlfriend. When Deirdre asked once more about whether Sang and Farouk are cousins? Paul told her the truth that they are boyfriend and girlfriend. When sang returned, she asked Paul about Deirdre, he told her everything. Now she began to avoid him; she criticized Paul for making all these stories about what he told her about Deirdre. Paul did not say anything to Sang. One day he searches out Deirdre's number and phoned her and left a message on the answering machine, asked her to call him back. When she picked up the phone, she said she will call him later the same night at ten. Then the thought came him immediately; he brought a phone and an adaptor with two jacks.

When Sang came home Paul told her that he called Deirdre and she will call him at ten o' clock and if she wishes to listen she can listen without her knowing as he has hooked up another phone to their line, and she agreed. Exactly one minute past ten, both the phone rang. They slowly picked up the both phones. Deirdre told that she made Paul into an impostor because it was Freddy's idea, he was furious because she called Paul. He refused to see her and talk to her. She said that Paul should inform everything about Freddy to Sang because she has the right to know that she is not the only girl in Freddy's life. Next morning Paul woke up with the sound of a car, Sang was going to London. She left a note on the kitchen table that gave him thanks for yesterday. Farouk called many times to know about Sang and Paul told him that she left the country. In the end, we come to know that Paul has cleared his exams, and two of his professors took him to the Four Season Bar for the drink and celebrated. After the party when he moved out he saw Farouk and a woman. Through the story, Lahiri

portrays the life of Indian migrant to America, encapsulating the diasporic views of her characters tangled in manifold emotional twists.

### **Review of Literature**

Different critics try to explain differently for the book *Unaccustomed Earth* from different perspectives. There are diverse critical opinions regarding the representation of cultural complexities. As diasporic predicaments it clearly shows the ripples of cultural shock in the land of others. Almost all the critics have analyzed it from their own perspectives. Following are some views about the cultural clash in the book. Regarding the second generation diaspora living in western countries, it portrayed the diasporic sensibility of second generation struggling to cope up with family and society. In this regard Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz says, “This identity formation process proves especially challenging and often torturous for second generation immigrants because, while they can rarely achieve a complete assimilation into their host society, they cannot easily identify fully with their ethnic root or seek the support of their co-ethnics, as their progenitors did” (44). In this case, the second generations have to suffer because of the identity crisis and no whereness in the new land of settlement as they entangle between the identity of the origin and the new identity of the new society.

Stating about the diaspora Robin Cohen explains the ways which the term diaspora has required a greater cultural significance. As he states, “All the features will not be visible in diaspora and it will vary according to the nature. Diaspora been classified variously according to ethnicities, nationalities, culture and lifestyle etc. and due to that various categories the space of diaspora and its theme has become wider and larger” (45). So the nature of diaspora can differ according to the variation in cultures, yet the struggle exists for the people under diaspora. Talking about the



cultural loss, the position and adaption is very struggling in the new world, and this book deserves a mention for raising the question of cultural authenticity. In this regard, A.F.M. Maswood Akhter acknowledges that “Lahiri’s theme include displacement, the process of integration and the accompanying loss of one’s original culture, as well as the search for one’s own identity” (99). He proposes that Lahiri’s characters have a distinct feature that distinguishes them from other Diasporas. Bengal has existed as a "distinct cultural formation within the Indian subcontinent, embracing and synthesizing various religious, spiritual and philosophical communities in the sub-continental social milieu” (101). Because of their position, Bengalis have a special kind of adaptability and ability to accept external elements without having to renounce their own individuality. In this regard Bengali people have their own type of distinct culture which reveals their identity and individuality in their own way.

Critics agree that there are migrations periods that create different diasporic communities, which can be divided according to the reasons for leaving one's motherland. Sudesh Mishra In his article “From Sugar to Masala” makes a clear distinction between the old and the new Indian diasporas. The former one includes people whose reasons for leaving their home were not totally voluntary, such as indenture laborers from the colonial period, whom he calls “the sugar diaspora” (294). The new diasporas, on the other hand, are the so-called technocrats along with other intellectuals and workers who are looking for a better future in the land of opportunities which in the case of *Unaccustomed Earth* is supposed to be the USA. Often, this idea of a better life in a new country is smashed by harsh reality and turns out to be a simple illusion. These new migrants he calls “masala diaspora” (294).

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, the story of Ruma illustrates this idea. It becomes

very difficult for her to cope up with her daily routines after her mother's sudden death and her move to Seattle. When her father announces that he is coming for a week, she believes it will become even more difficult because she regarded her mother to be the helping hand. "as the irretrievable loss of a culture-specific universe" (Lahiri 2), Thus, it comes as a surprise when her father starts to look after Akash, even teaching him some Bengali during his stay. This way, Lahiri reflects on the passing away of a parent figure as having a great impact on second generation diasporas which is that of the diasporic community.

Lavina Dhingra and Floyds Cheung talk the majority of Indian Americans as living "on the coasts, mostly in select cities considered international centers" (247). The characters who make up first generation in *Unaccustomed Earth* certainly correspond to this pattern, all living in some proximity to Boston. There the men have high-paying jobs within scientific educational institutions or major industrial companies, the wives lead secluded suburban lives, and the children attend local schools and go on to be accepted at prestigious colleges. However, Lahiri's second generation characters often find themselves spread across the United States and outside too. This corresponds with their findings of how Indian Americans move to developing regions such as Texas, which did not see much Indian immigration so far. Interviewees in Dallas noticed "how much they stood out....relative to more cosmopolitan cities" (248). A similar sense otherness is experienced by several of the second generation protagonists in *Unaccustomed Earth*, showing that geographical setting is important to how comfortable they are in being and presenting themselves as Indian Americans. Because Indian Americans are expected to be such high achievers, it is all the more disappointing to themselves and particularly to their families if they should fail. It is interesting that failure to live up to financial

expectations is interpreted to be a failure not only in economic terms, but also in terms of mortality. Economic failure thus becomes moral failure and, in short the failure of one family member becomes the failure of the entire family. Failure to live up to expectations, whether in terms of career, family or home, can create strong dividing lines between characters, and will be devoted much attention in different chapters.

According to Martein A. Halvorson- Taylor, distinctions could be made within Diaspora and exile to further define the Diaspora literature. He suggests that the distinction could be found in the attitude of the written piece towards homeland and to migration. As he says, “Exile emphasizes the forced nature of the migration and the freshness of the experience of leaving the homeland; exile is not neutral and exiled peoples usually a single-minded desire to return to their homeland” (21). So, with reference to the concept of exile, diaspora is caused by migration and is settled in the new land living the homeland.

## Chapter 2

### Diaspora and Hybridity

#### Concept of Diaspora

The term diaspora is derived from the Greek verb *diaspiero* in which *Speiro* means “I scatter” or “I spread about” and *dia* means “between, through, across”. *Diaspiero* means “I scatter between or across”. Diasporic consciousness means awareness of being scattered. The verb *diaspora* became more widely used in the fifth century BCE. Classical philosophers and Hellenist writers used it in the contemporary period but it had a negative connotation. Epicurus, as reported by Plutarch, used ‘diaspora’ in the context of his philosophical treatises to refer to processes of dispersion and decomposition, dissolution into various parts without any further relation to each other. ‘Diaspora’ had an adverse, devastating meaning and was not used to imply a geographical place or sociological group at that time. After the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, the term diaspora began to develop from its original sense. The first mention of a diaspora created as a result of exile in the Septuagint; a Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures redacted in the third and second centuries B.C. by Jewish scholars and adopted by Greek-speaking Christians.

The term diaspora is reviewed with its development in detail by the scholar Stephane Dufoix states that, after the translation of the Bible into Greek, the word diaspora would have been used to refer to the northern kingdom exiled between 740-722 BC from Israel by the Assyrians, as well as Jews, Benjaminites, and Levites exiled from the southern kingdom in 587 BCE by the Babylonians and from Roman Judea in 70 CE by the Roman Empire. After that it was used to refer to the historical movements of the dispersed ethnic population of Israel. Stephane Dufoix focuses that, “the modern use of the term diaspora stems from its appearance and as a neologism in

the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek by the legendary seventy scholars in Alexandria in the third century BC” (4). The word diaspora is explained in Greek as, “Citizens of a dominant city state who immigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire” (1-2). So, diaspora can be understood as both migrated and forced exile.

The word ‘Diaspora’ has a religious meaning in the context of the Hebrew Bible. It means to threaten the Hebrews if they fail to obey God’s will. In the discourses of religion historians like Willem Cornelius, Johannes Tromp and Martin Baumann, it is pointed out that the meaning of the term later changed in the Jewish tradition and it designates scattered people of forceful dispersion. This reference about Jewish dispersion is included in the Old Testament. However, in the Christian tradition, New Testament explains church as a dispersed community (5).

Safran.W. defines basic characteristics in his definition of diaspora. According to him, for something to be called as diaspora there should be a dispersal from homeland to two or more foreign regions; those people who are away from their homeland have a collective memory about their homeland; they have a belief that they will always be outrageous in their host state; they idealize their putative ancestral home; there is a belief that all members of that society should be committed to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland and a strong ethnic group consciousness with a belief in a common fate (2-3).

The term was coined theologically to form an integral part of a pattern constituted by the fourfold course of sin and disobedience, scattering and diaspora, repentance, and finally return and gathering. Whatever may be the case, the term diaspora carries a sense of ‘displacement’. In diaspora, there is a sense of being separated from its national territory, for whatever may be the reason. The people who

live abroad away from their homeland have an aspiration to return to their ancestral homeland. Some critics have pointed out that diaspora may result in a loss of nostalgia for a single home as people re-root in a series of meaningful displacement. Some people may have multiple homes to maintain their attachment to other individuals in the group. Such groups have signs of their culture in their maintenance of traditional religious practices and their resistance to language change.

Robin Cohen proposes nine features to explain the essence of diaspora instead of six. He explores the categorical definition by suggesting an amendment in the list of slightly changing the features. He states that the diaspora comes into existence by “dispersal from an original homeland often traumatically” (161). Cohen has emphasized the traumatic event which is responsible for dispersal or migration. Secondly he has argued that the migration may be voluntary in nature because diaspora is formed by migrants due to “alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambition” (161). Third category of Cohen is universal in nature as it explains that diasporic community has “a collective memory of myth about the homeland” (162). The fourth category is an extension of earlier category. Diasporic people in exile are always fascinated: an idealization of the supposed ancestral home because they are under illusion of collective memory of homeland and this constant feeling compels them to glorify the dignity of homeland. In this fifth category, Cohen talks about the possibility of the desire for “return movement or at least a continuing connection . . .” (162). In this way, he has presented the essence of diaspora who feels a memory of the homeland when there are the difficulties of adaptation.

Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, a memoir and a work of creative non-fiction, is a blending of autobiography with old Chinese folktales based

on complex portrayal of the 20th century experiences of Chinese American living in the United States of America especially in the shadow of the Chinese revolution. In her novel *The Woman Warrior*, she focuses on racism, identity crises, self-realization, acculturation and biculturation. Maxine does not have satisfaction with her life in America. This is expressed when she says, “My American life has been such a disappointment” (54). Women and cultural minorities often do not have the privilege of viewing themselves as individuals isolated from their gender or racial groups. He illustrates this condition through her use of Chinese talk story, her mother’s traditional Chinese perspective and her own personal view as an immigrant. This is expressed in her novel when she writes, “She cannot gather the courage to speak up against her racist boss, let alone save her people in China” (63). This clearly shows that the Americans’ view towards the Chinese immigrants was never spacious and they did not have courage to abuse them on face. So they spoke with contempt at their backs. “Silence, both gendered and racially constituted necessity for speech; the discovery of voice, the construction of identity and the search of self-realization; mother-daughter relationship and the conflicts that it engenders; memory, acculturation and biculturation and cultural alienation, these themes are treated here (101). Thus it tries to show the conflict between the parents because of identity crisis in the new homeland.

The migrants voluntarily living in the foreign country suffer from isolation and estrangement of exile. In this regard, Edward Said tries to focus that however, some are benefited by their ambiguous status while others, surrounded by the perpetual feeling of vagrancy, try to mimic in the foreign land the ideologies that channeled their lives in their homeland. As Edward states:

Ruma, a combination of American modernism and Indian

traditionalism, has succeeded in benefiting out of her ambiguous identities. She married an American against her parents' wish. She prefers wearing pants and skirts but keeps with her a few saris of her mother. In her solitude, she always thinks of the abandoned old acquaintances and the connections she built all those years. She speaks Bengali over the phone to her relatives, cooks Indian food and at times eats with her fingers. Like Ruma, her father, who has already started living the American life, looks more American than Indian in Western clothes. Akash, as he grows by, overcomes all the ambiguous identities of her mother, hates Indian food though initially he ate Indian food prepared by his mother and grandmother. Ruma's mother, a traditional Indian mother seen always in sari, lives throughout as a dependent soul with a unique identity of an Indian and with a lamentation that there would be no one to whom to pass on her things. (17)

So, the diasporas, especially of the second generation, tend to be entangled between the old and the new. Of course some of them can flourish easily, but the mixed culture and identity somehow compels them to feel dislocated and isolated.

Some scholars even present diasporas as an example of transnational communities that must also navigate the ever present tension between "Living here" and simultaneously "remembering there", and fields both certainly move beyond a focus on assimilation and how migrants "fit in" to the host country. C. Nagel said that an idealized conception of what "home" is, and the possibility of return is likewise a salient feature in both areas of study. Also, both camps utilize the concept 'imagined community' in asserting that the migrants engage in the long distance nationalism, as they remain involved and engaged in the politics of the home country in same form



.Another connection is that whether in a transnational migrant community or diasporas, members form a community within which they often never engage in frequent face to face interactions with each other. He views that one of the things that makes the current eras is that “modern technology has intensified the rate and extent of circulation between homeland and migratory destination” (20). It shows the tension between the people living in one place but remember the place where they born and focus on assimilation how to fit in others country.

Often quoted definition of diasporas which are “the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” Khachig Tololian marks the shift from a national paradigm towards a transnational. That the definition changes and adapts to new contexts is a natural course of events in the global history of migrations. Diasporas change due to different geo-historical conditions that shape them. Tololian explains this phenomenon: Diaspora discourse is being widely appropriated. “It is loose in the world, for reasons having to do with decolonization, increased immigration, global communications, and transport – a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling, and travelling within and across nations” (306). It tries to focus on the list of diasporic features, no society can be expected to qualify on all counts, throughout its history. And the discourse of diaspora will necessarily be modified as it is translated and adopted.

It is difficult to homogenize the experiences of diaspora. Diaspora is by no means a stable formation, and the term is constantly redefined by various diasporic communities in the world. Stuart Hall describes cultural identity as a production that “is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, no outside, representation” (222). It focuses on the diaspora experience as the recognition of the necessary heterogeneity and diversity, a conception of identity which lives with and

through, not despite, difference by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves a new, through transformation and difference.

### **Hybridity**

Hybridity emerged in the 18th century in the context of interracial contact resulting from overseas conquest and population displacement in Britain, France, and the United States. Hybrid cultures are phenomena of essential connections in the present. They emerge from diverse and complex influences. Hybrid cultures are mergers that combine past and present, local and Trans-local, space and place and techno cape. Hybridity is expressed in various cultural contexts and in the in-between spaces of arts, media, science and technology. Under the sign of the digital and the global, hybridity connotes a cultural manifestation of multiple appearances, as in cyberspace and multiple selves.

Hale C. states that hybridity took on new meaning in the wake of the decolonization movements that emerged in the non-west beginning in the 19th century, and saw their heyday in the post-World War II decades. In Latin America, for instance, after protracted struggles over nationhood in which some elites attempted to impose a white European national identity, nation-states adopted mestizaje as their official ideology in their bids to forge national identities distinct from mere provincial status in the Spanish Empire. The ideology of mestizaje was an attempt to mitigate tensions between the indigenous populations and the descendants of Spanish colonists, by positing the new nations as hybrids of both. However, mestizaje, as formulated in the Latin American context, is a deeply racialized concept, which concealed residual imperial relations to the same extent as it celebrated the racial diversity of the new nation's hybrid (112).

Consequently, the concept of hybridity questions ideas of purity and homogeneity and thus opposes essentialist notions of culture or identity; it is, as Rosaldo R. states, “A key term in that wherever it emerges it suggests the impossibility of essentialism” (27). He argues along similar lines and points out that hybridity can be understood as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contain no zones of purity because they undergo continuous processes of trans-acculturation. Ultimately, he radically concludes that “Instead of hybridity versus purity, this view suggests that it is hybridity all the way down. From this perspective, one must explain how ideological zones of cultural purity, whether of national culture or ethnic resistance, have been constructed” (15). So, hybridity exists even in the so called pure culture and cultural spheres. It exists as there have always been the cultural exchanges between or among different cultural groups throughout the process of civilization.

It is this “active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power,” then, which Homi K. Bhabha conceptualizes as, “Hybridity thus becomes a ‘third space’ between colonizer and colonized that effects the hybridization of both parties rather than embracing both in however explosive a mixture. In doing so, this ‘third space’ “enables other positions to emerge and displaces the histories that constitute it” (126). So, hybridity is not imposed by the colonizers. Even the colonizers have to adapt the culture of the colonized. In this case, hybrid is both colonizer and colonized. He traces the word hybridity and its meaning to 19th century’s attitudes towards race and thinking and obsession with miscegenation as well as to the emergence of pidgin languages in the colonies, in his magisterial study of early colonial interactions and the roots to contemporary images of racial and cultural differences. He shows that the defining feature of culture is difference that

"culture never stands alone but always participates in conflictual economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference" (53). He talks that culture was a mixture of two species, whether animals or human beings, as different races were conceptualized as different species, and the state of hybridity was strongly associated with degeneration, infertility and sterility.

### **Second Generation**

In immigrant, the word first generation means the people who have actually immigrated to a host country. On the other hand, the second generation diaspora usually means the children who are born in a host country to immigrant parents. Alba Richard and Mary C. Waters, contend that, "The term second generation is often taken in a broad sense to encompass the children who grow up in immigrant homes, whether they are born in the receiving society or enter it at a young age" (1). Going by the above definition of the second generation diaspora, we can surmise that, those children who are born outside the receiving society, America, but come to America owing to immigration at a very young age, usually twelve years or earlier, receive their education and grow up in America can also be termed as the second generation.

The second generation diaspora's lives are embedded in a number of issues which exercise a profound effect not only on their lives but also on the lives of their parents. The second generation diaspora's relationship with their parents is an important and significant facet of their lives. For many Indians living in India, they are the fortunate young generation. Pravin Sheth states that "For their parents, they are the source of joy and hope as well as a difficult generation to raise and handle" (54). It is amply clear from this observation, that, though the children of the immigrant generation are source of "joy" and "hope" for their parents yet, it appears that, the parents find it extremely difficult to deal with the children who are born and

raised in America. This, it is important to bear in mind, is primarily because the second generation children are exposed to the American way of a liberal life all the time outside their home and hence they find it very difficult to accept and abide by the strict and conservative views of their immigrant parents. In such a situation, friction and conflict with their parents is inevitable.

The second generation diaspora, also grow up hearing the numerous anecdotes of their parents which help them not only to identify with and relate to, but also to have a secondary interaction with the land of their parents. However, it is interesting to bear in mind the fact that though the second generation diaspora considers India to be their country of origin, they do not feel the same sense of belonging towards India as their parents. The second generation's relationship with its homeland, i.e., America, is of great significance in their lives. Portes Alejandro and Rumbaut Ruben elucidate the fact that, "Immigrants always have a point of reference in the countries they left behind, and if they are unsuccessful, they can go back. Many actually return home on their own after accumulating sufficient resources. In contrast, the U.S.-born second generation grows up American, and the vast majority are here to stay" (17). However, at this point it is important to bear in mind that, though the second generation subjects are born or raised in America, at times they harbor ambivalent feelings towards America.

The relationship of the second generation with the first generation by Padma Rangaswamy points that "Indian "values" were constantly cited as the sacred mantra, they were asked to accept them unquestioningly, and to defer to parental authority. They wanted to decide things for themselves ... The youth could not identify with India or feel the same sense of belonging and closeness to the old country as their parents did" (190). Such differences in views and opinions at times, lead to strained

relations between the two generations. However, the second generation also realizes that their parents are hardworking and willing to make sacrifices for their children.

Relationship of the second generation diaspora with their parents or the first generation immigrants forms a central part of their lives. The younger generation, we note, often appears to be in loggerheads with their parents. According to Madhulika Khandelwal, “Marriage continued to be pivotal for Indian immigrants in the United States. Indeed, in an alien culture and society, arranged marriage for the first generation was an efficacious way to maintain continuity and stability” (151). However, for the younger generation, marriage concerns their own lives and hence they want it to be their own personal choice and desire that “They found themselves caught between American values, which stereotyped and derided arranged marriage as a restrictive social practice, and the values of their own parents, for whom arranged marriage, including in most cases their own, was the central mechanism for maintaining stable family life” (152). This state of mixed cultural sphere compels the second generation diasporas to feel being nowhere. Neither they can adapt completely new culture nor can they follow the old culture properly.

### Chapter 3

#### Indian American Identity in *Unaccustomed Earth*

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* mainly focuses on the lives of the first and second generation Indian immigrants who have settled in America. The characters of these stories face the challenges of belonging to two different cultures and strive to maintain ties to both cultures. The second generation Indian immigrants find themselves caught between the culture and traditional values of their immigrant parents and the mainstream culture of the American society they live in. In most of these stories home and family has a crucial role in the formation and the development of Indian American identity. Migrant families maintain their ethnicity through preservation of the native language, religions and cultural traditions. Family, being a visible social institution, its choice and representation allows the immigrants to embrace or reject one of their confusing identities, either Indian or American.

This topic tries to focus that the characters are identified as how they suffer from the loss of a traditional culture, death of a family member, the sense of rootlessness, double consciousness and generation conflicts. In order to survive in a American society, they begin to internalize the prejudice and values against the minorities and see themselves as inferior. Their mind begins to shape by the stereotypes from the main society. In the title story *Unaccustomed Earth*, Ruma a thirty eight year old Indian American woman has just moved to Seattle with her husband. She has a three year old son Akash. The sudden death of her mother makes Ruma feel traumatic. Ruma and her mother have very close relationship with each other so she is often nostalgic and recalls her childhood. She remembers the identity of her mother what she had done in Indian culture. After her mother's death she feels that she has no way to return to traditional culture. She also feels very worried as her

father offers to visit her because she is afraid that her father will move 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” (Lahiri 7). It means she created her family in her own way but when there is the presence of her father she thinks that he will try to bring his traditional ideas in her family. Ruma is torn between the claims of the two cultures, the Bangali culture that she inherited, and the mainstream American culture that she willfully accepted. She was forced neither by her father nor Adam to make any choice. So the existence between Indian and American culture is a continuous reconciliation between them.

According to Bengali culture, people enjoy an extended family where parents and children live together to care for each other. Children should take then responsibility to take care of their parents when they grow up. But many years of independent life in America has deprived her of the traditional Bengali culture. She feels that she has lost her Indian culture. She has married a white man against her parent’s decision. She chooses to wear western clothes instead of Indian clothes given by her mother. She forgets to use Bengali language because of using foreign English language which becomes a stranger to her own culture. Ruma, both marrying a white guy and loss of her identity originate from a sense of self-hate, an inferiority complex a suffering. Hema and Kaushik both of them suffer from trauma because of their rootlessness. But for Hema the suffering is only mourning because she can have a negotiation with her past, but for Kaushik he can’t work through his loss in the past so he becomes a person who always lives in the melancholy situation and dies at last. The story recounts their initiation from young children to mature people, the association between two families and the tragic love story between them. The two families of Hema and Kaushik get to know each other when they are living as



Bengali-Americans community in Boston. The conversation between Kaushik and his neighbor depict the rootlessness Kaushik suffers from. Kaushik try to find out to wander place and countries but fails to settles down. His state of mind could not make peace with any place when he can call home. From his childhood he is living temporary everywhere the only reason is he never settled down. His mother dies of breast cancer when he was died. His father marries again and started new life. He seems to be lacking the emotion of the human being and finally he died in Thailand.

### **Diasporic Study of *Unaccustomed Earth***

The diasporic experience of the central characters in the story is multiple as the sense of exile, alienation, uprooted, continues to overwhelm them. The traditional family relationship in the Ruma's Bengali household is getting diluted with her mother's death, Ruma's absence and her father's solitary life. It is the garden metaphor in the story that brings Ruma and her father deeply ponders over their intricate life-concerns and predicaments. Gardening is an excellent way to bring families together to build their emotional ties, giving an opportunity to share and learn together. Ruma's father lived alone. She was not familiar with her surroundings and had only a peripheral knowledge of her life in America. It is a clear indication of lack of intimacy in relationship, which is a diasporic experience in transition. The selling of old house thereby wiping out her mother's memory had been painful to Ruma.

*Unaccustomed Earth* portrays the problems and traumas that the second and third generation Indian immigrants face. They are the products of a hybrid culture and goes through alienation and miscommunication. The characters Lahiri created seems to have failed relationships, broken family ties, rootlessness, double identity problem, conflicts between two generations. *Unaccustomed Earth* examines the difficulties that the central characters have in incorporating and relocating their identities to a place

which is more privileged than their origins. These characters have dual identities but they are not able to enjoy this status. Most of them are deeply troubled by the complicated and unresolved issues connected to their hybrid state. Here the marriages are mixed or inter cultural marriage. By marriage and relationships these two different types of people from diverse socio cultural backgrounds are getting united.

Eventually, issues like miscommunication and detachment recurring into their lives.

Ruma, the protagonist in the story *Unaccustomed Earth*, suffers from double displacement after moving to Seattle. Her feelings correspond to the loss experienced by migrants; not only has she been “eternally banished” from her homeland India, being a second-generation immigrant, but now she has also given up everything familiar to her in America. In spite of not experiencing migrancy herself, Ruma’s personality has been shaped by migration history. Ruma’s Bengali is halting and she wears Western clothes, but, like her father, she carries loss and regret with her that cannot be shaken. Ruma was close with her mother, and has defined her own cultural identity in juxtaposition to her mother’s. She appears to have taken her mother’s circumstances as a warning against what not to do, and always aimed for the opposite: to have a career, to be self-reliant, to choose love over obligation.

As Ruma puts it: “Growing up, her mother’s example – moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household – had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Ruma’s life now” (Lahiri 11). Ruma is at a loss. Ruma has associated many of the aspects of her mother’s life – staying at home to raise children, never cutting corners with Bengali traditions, always attending to her husband’s needs first – as cultural traits rather than individual choices. Ruma is shocked to find herself in a similar situation now, in spite of having lead a life of more opportunities and equality as a woman. In addition, the

displacement she feels in Seattle after spending most of her life on the East Coast is probably not unlike what her mother felt during her first years in the United States.

Ruma is depressed and suffered from an identity crisis, resulting from the confusion of being in a similar situation as her mother, and at the same time, unable to fully identify with her mother. “She was struck by the degree to which her father resembled an American in his old age. With his grey hair and fair skin he could have been practically from anywhere. It was her mother who would have stuck out in this wet Northern landscape, in her brightly colored saris, her dime-sized maroon bindi, her jewels” (Lahiri 11). Ruma’s father is still alive and well, yet her main link to Bengali culture has been her mother. Ruma even points out how American her father new looks”. Everything Ruma knows about Indian culture has been passed on to her by her mother; Ruma feels disadvantaged that she cannot do the same for her son – Ruma’s cultural heritage has been diluted from one generation to the next, and she feels guilty and sad for her involvement in this dilution: “When Akash was younger she had followed her mother’s advice to get him used to the taste of Indian food and made the effort to poach chicken and vegetables with cinnamon and cardamom and clove. Now he ate from boxes” (Lahiri 23). Ruma’s language skills are a good measure of the extent of her Indian identity, or lack thereof: “Bengali had never been a language in which she felt like an adult” (Lahiri 12). So, the enforcement from the parents compels the second generation diasporas to adopt the mixed culture.

Her mother had been very strict regarding the use of Bengali at home, but her father had not minded her speaking English. This, again, is an illustration of how the burden of cultural transmission appears to be the duty of the mother, also according to Lahiri’s experience. In addition to mourning her mother and losing the link to Bengali culture, Ruma is burdened by guilt of not having asked her father to move in with her

family, and not really wanting to: She knew that her father did not need taking care of, and yet this very fact caused her to feel guilty; in India, there would have been no question of his not moving in with her. 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. Ruma's relationship with her parents has been loving but complicated. She had always felt "unfairly cast, by both her parents, into roles that weren't accurate: as her father's oldest son, her mother's secondary spouse" (Lahiri 36). Ruma's feelings reflect the different expectations for boys and girls in Indian culture – traditionally, oldest sons carry a lot of pressure to succeed financially, and it is also their responsibility to look after the parents in their old age. Ruma's parents' marriage was happy enough, but it had been arranged by their families, and the couple had never been in love with each other. Ruma's mother had relied on Ruma to be her ally, and to provide her with the emotional support she had not received from her husband.

"Only Goodness" highlights how the ultimate embarrassment or cause of worry for model migrant parents is not their son's addiction, but the more superficial issues: his dropping out of college, working at a Laundromat, being arrested for drunk driving, and dating a white American divorcee. Rahul's parents fail to admit his alcoholism, because it is a phenomenon they cannot grasp. What could there possibly be to be unhappy about? Her parents would have thought. "Depression" was a foreign word to them, an American thing. In their opinion their children were immune from the hardships and injustices they had left behind in India, as if the inoculations the pediatrician had given Sudha and Rahul when they were babies guaranteed them an existence free of suffering (Lahiri 144). Rahul attempts to deny his ethnicity; Sudha envies him for his non-Bengali looks, and for people being able to call him Raoul.

Unlike Sudha, he does not feel he has a debt to pay or a dream to fulfill – he does not feel any obligation towards his parents. He feels entitled to what he has, and exerts his right to choose for himself. He turns to alcohol first to rebel, then to escape parental demands and expectations, and eventually finds himself trapped in addiction.

### **Nostalgia, Alienation and Cultural Conflicts in *Unaccustomed Earth***

In the title story *Unaccustomed Earth*, Ruma, Indian American woman, has just moved to Seattle with her husband. She has a three-year-old son Akash to take care of, meanwhile waiting for the birth of her second child. The sudden death of her mother makes Ruma feel traumatic. Ruma and her mother have very close relationship with each other so she is often nostalgic and recalls her childhood. With her mother's death, she feels that she has no way to return to traditional culture. She also feels very worried as her father offers to visit her because she is afraid that her father will move in to live with her. Ruma, Usha and Hema are all illustrations of hybrid cultural identities; they are code-switchers who can alternate between Indian and American identities according to situational requirements. The stories demonstrate that this alternation is not always simple or easy, and not necessarily based on a conscious decision. However, in all of the examples studied here, the protagonist, who is usually also the focalize at least for the majority of the story, meets with a crisis that affects her cultural identity.

Supporting existing theory on the role of mothers as cultural transmitters, the mothers of these three characters play a significant role in the formation of their daughters' cultural identities. Ruma experiences a crisis after her mother's death, Usha bonds with her mother and finds peace with herself after her mother shares an experience from her past, and Hema struggles with feelings of inferiority that stem from her childhood. Ruma, the protagonist in the story "Unaccustomed Earth", suffers

from double displacement after moving to Seattle. Her feelings correspond to the loss experienced by migrants; not only has she been “eternally banished” from her homeland India, being a second-generation immigrant, but now she has also given up everything familiar to her in America. In spite of not experiencing migrancy herself, Ruma’s personality has been shaped by migration history.

Ruma’s father is still alive and well, yet her main link to Bengali culture has been her mother; Ruma even points out how American her father now looks. Everything Ruma knows about Indian culture has been passed on to her by her mother; Ruma feels disadvantaged that she cannot do the same for her son – Ruma’s cultural heritage has been diluted from one generation to the next, and she feels guilty and sad for her involvement in this dilution: “When Akash was younger she had followed her mother’s advice to get him used to the taste of Indian food and made the effort to poach chicken and vegetables with cinnamon and cardamom and clove. Now he ate from boxes” (Lahiri 23). In addition to mourning her mother and losing the link to Bengali culture, Ruma is burdened by guilt of not having asked her father to move in with her family, and not really wanting to. “She knew that her father did not need taking care of, and yet this very fact caused her to feel guilty; in India, there would have been no question of his not moving in with her. 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” (Lahiri 6 -7). Ruma’s relationship with her parents has been loving but complicated.

She had always felt “unfairly cast, by both her parents, into roles that weren’t accurate: as her father’s oldest son, her mother’s secondary spouse” (Lahiri 36). Ruma’s feelings reflect the different expectations for boys and girls in Indian culture – traditionally, oldest sons carry a lot of pressure to succeed financially, and it is also

their responsibility to look after the parents in their old age. Ruma's parents' marriage was happy enough, but it had been arranged by their families, and the couple had never been in love with each other. Ruma's mother had relied on Ruma to be her ally, and to provide her with the emotional support she had not received from her husband. Ruma now lacks the identity she "performed" with her mother – the role of the good Indian daughter and reliable friend to her mother. However, in his celebration of performative, hybrid identities, In Ruma's case, her feelings of displacement have clearly worsened, and she has sunk into depression. Ruma's crisis culminates when she discovers a postcard left behind by her father and addressed to his new travel partner, Mrs. Bagchi.

"They were sentences her mother would have absorbed in instant, sentences that proved, with more force than the funeral, more force than all the days since then that her mother no longer existed. Where had her mother gone, when life persisted, when Ruma still needed her to explain so many things?" (Lahiri 59). When Ruma decides, against her first instinct, to post her father's card to Mrs. Bagchi, she is finally able to move on emotionally. By letting go of her mother, she is letting go of her identity as a daughter, and her Bengali identity. However, with this act, Ruma will be able to "arrive", to strike down her own roots in Seattle, and embrace her Bengali-American identity. The choice to move on is a conscious one, made concrete by the posting of the card.

In "Hell-Heaven", the narrator, Usha, looks back on her childhood and her relationship with her mother. Usha feels estranged from Indian culture, and as a child, could not accept how her mother Aparna attempted to raise her. Having been born in the United States, Usha is able to "home in" on American culture; it is Indian culture that feels foreign to her. Usha's feelings correspond to the second-generation migrant

identity. Deborah is strikingly different from Usha's mother; Usha explains how she "fell in love with Deborah, the way young girls often fell in love with women who are not their mothers" (Lahiri 69). In addition, since Usha's cultural identity is more American than Indian, it was easier for her to identify and connect with Deborah rather than her mother, She gave me the sorts of gifts my parents had neither the money nor the inspiration to buy. "Deborah and I spoke freely in English, a language in which, by that age, I expressed myself more easily than Bengali, which I was required to speak at home" (Lahiri 69). It is painfully clear that Usha considers herself to be American; her Bengali roots are a hindrance and an embarrassment.

Like Ruma, Usha too is no longer fluent in her mother tongue, and prefers to speak English. She identifies with the Americans around her, and feels she has very little in common with other Bengalis. Usha describes thanksgiving dinner at Deborah and Pranab's house. "As soon as I saw Deborah's siblings joking with one another as they chopped and stirred things in the kitchen, I was furious with my mother for making a scene before we left the house and forcing me to wear a shalwar kameez. I knew they assumed, from my clothing, that I had more in common with the other Bengalis than with them" (Lahiri 78). Usha's story demonstrates how her relationship with her mother affects her cultural identity in its entirety – She represents all that is Indian to Usha. Due to the difficult relationship between mother and daughter, Usha rejects not only her mother, but also her ethnicity.

When Aparna eventually begins to feel more at home in the United States, her relationship with Usha improves that; My mother and I had also made peace; she had accepted the fact that I was not only her daughter but a child of America as well. Slowly, she accepted that "I dated one American man, and then another, and then yet another, that I slept with them, and even that I lived with one though we were not



married. She welcomed my boyfriends into our home and when things didn't work out she told me I would find someone better. After years of being idle, she decided, when she turned fifty, to get a degree in library science at a nearby university" (Lahiri 82). The narrator Usha was deeply attracted by the American lifestyle. Se she grew up, she copied the American traits. Even she also drinks alcohol and kept boyfriends also. There is no clash in her mind and heart. In the end, her mother has to adjust to the fact that her daughter is not only a child of India but a child of America as well. They have not shown the traditional Indian morals and values as such there are no conflicts in their minds between East and West.

Sudha, the protagonist in "Only Goodness", has been assigned the role of cultural translator by her parents, and has voluntarily assumed the part of surrogate mother for her younger brother Rahul. Sudha feels that as a child of immigrants, she had slipped through the cracks of nationality and suffered for it, and now wanted to ensure that her brother would "leave his mark as a child in America" (Lahiri 136). She made sure he received "all the right toys", and books she had been read by her first teachers. Wanting to spare her brother from a sense of displacement, Sudha attempts to pave the way for Rahul into an unbroken, American cultural identity. Most of Sudha's life, her focus has been on the well-being of others – of her parents and her brother. This focus begins to shift once Sudha is accepted to do a second master's degree at the London School of Economics. London was where her parents had first moved to from India; Sudha had been born in England. Photos from those years illustrated that at one time her parents had appeared to be fond of each other instead of the indifference they expressed now, and had still been intrigued and pleased by their surroundings. Weariness towards their life sentence of feeling foreign had set in once they had moved to Wayland.

They relied on their children, on Sudha especially. “It was she who had to explain to her father that had to gather up the leaves in bags, not just drag them with his rake to the woods opposite the house. She, with her perfect English, who called the repair department at Lechmere to have their appliances serviced. Rahul never considered it his duty help their parents this way” (Lahiri 138). Sudha acts as a translator between her parents and America, explaining norms and customs, and ensuring that their family home is not an eyesore in the neighborhood. However, Sudha has inherited her parents’ displacement, and in spite of being culturally fluent in the United States, she never feels entirely at home.

The years that her family spent in London before Rahul was born represent a happier time for her. Moving back to London offers Sudha the opportunity to experience familiarity and freedom simultaneously. She was excited to be in London, curious to know the land of her birth. Before leaving she had applied for her British passport, a document her parents had not obtained for her when she was born, and when she presented it at Heathrow the immigration officer welcomed her home. Perhaps because it was her birthplace, she felt an instinctive connection to London, a sense of belonging though she barely knew her way around. In spite of the ocean that now separated her from her parents, she felt closer to them, but she also felt free, for the first time in her life, of her family’s weight.

As her actual place of birth, London offers Sudha the possibility to truly belong somewhere. Her readiness to accept London as home illustrates her need to have roots, to originate somewhere. As a child of immigrants in America, she is stuck in the in-between; “feeling neither here nor there, unable to indulge in sentiments of belonging to either place devoid of the rightful claims to belong” (Lahiri 214). In seeking refuge in a third location, Sudha’s dilemma of displacement is at least partly

solved, and her exiled existence ends with her ability to return “home”. London connects her with her parents in a special way, since they had lived there as a family before Rahul, the favorite, was born.

Being in London also offers Sudha the opportunity to focus on her own needs, and to put herself first. For her, however, moving does not merely provide an escape from family, or from displacement felt in the United States, but it signifies a return to the original homeland. Amit is the protagonist in the only story of the collection that is written entirely from a male perspective, “A Choice of Accommodations”. He is the son of Indian, cosmopolitan parents, who sent him to boarding school at the age of fifteen, and he has felt estranged from them since. This traumatic experience has left him with a fear of abandonment, now targeted towards his wife and children. “In each of these scenarios, he saw himself surviving, the girls perishing under his supervision. Megan would blame him, naturally, and then she would divorce him, and all of it, his life with her and the girls, would end. A brief glance in the wrong direction, he knew, would toss his existence over a cliff” (Lahiri 91). Amit is a classic representative of Lahiri’s second-generation characters in his ambivalence towards routine; he is easily bored and dissatisfied, yet craves security and stability. His main source of security is his marriage to Megan; yet at the same time, Megan’s success as a doctor, absences due to her profession, and ability to be more at ease with their daughters causes Amit to feel inferior and even resent her. He admits to occasionally feeling as lonely as he did in boarding school.

There was no escape at the end of the day, and though he admitted it to no one, especially not his parents when they called from Delhi every weekend, 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 everyone else did, shedding his daily dependence on them though he was still a boy, and even to enjoy it. Still, he refused to forgive them (Lahiri 97).

Traditional male and female roles are reversed in Megan and Amit's marriage; he is the one who works regular hours, and spends more time at home with their little girls. The role reversal highlights spousal loneliness, as Amit confesses to feelings more often heard from wives whose husbands have demanding jobs. Amit's attitude also shows that he has not inherited a Bengali cultural identity, but has the mind-set of a modern American man.

"Only Goodness" is a story of alcoholism in the family. As the only son to Bengali parents, Rahul is under a lot of pressure to succeed. At the same time, every effort has been made by his parents and his sister Sudha to ease his life. Sudha, especially having stood out as a child of immigrants among her classmates, wanted to make sure that Rahul got the perfect American childhood. 'She told her parents to set up sprinklers on the lawn for him to run through in the summer, and she convinced her father to put up a swing set in the yard. She thought up elaborate Halloween costumes, turning him into an elephant or a refrigerator, while hers had come from boxes, a flimsy apron and a weightless mask' (Lahiri 136). The American culture seems to be so attractive and full of glamour for the younger generation of India replicate and accept it almost blindly. Rahul to alcoholism, later on she attempts to free him from his habit. She wants to give an American culture to her younger brother, which she did not get in her childhood, by purchasing toys, making separate room for him, providing a swing set in the yard etc.

### **Generation Gap and Transnational Identity in *Unaccustomed Earth***

The collection spotlights on the second generation children of the immigrants have been nurtured in two cultures and have often married non-Indians. As they have

started of their own, they have to fight both with tense filial relationships and the burden of parenthood. The clash of two cultures has been added to the gap between the two generations. Almost each story deals with children who struggle to fulfill their parent's traditional expectations as well as the cultural demands of their American peers. In "Unaccustomed Earth" Ruma's mother lived throughout her life in America in her brightly colored saris, along with marooned bindi and jewels. She displeased and fumed over Ruma's wearing jeans. However, Ruma feels at ease in paints and skirts. "The more they grow, the less they seem to resemble either parent as the text remarks; they spoke differently, dressed differently, seemed foreign in every way, from the texture of their hair to the shapes of their feet and hands" (54). In the case of Ruma's father, a widower, at seventy falls in love with a Bengali lady. He manages to look like an American, who was often wearing a baseball cap that POMPEII, brown cotton pants with a sky blue polo shirt, and a pair of white leather sneakers.

However, Ruma's mother had vigorously pursued Indian clothes and jewelry. For the next generation, the adaptation was easier, for being born in their parents' host land they were far removed from any emotional attachment to their supposed homeland India. After her mother's death Ruma circulated the saris among her mother's friends keeping only three for her. As the text narrates; "And she remembered the many times her mother had predicted this very moment, lamenting the fact that her daughter preferred pants and skirts to the clothing she wore, that there would be no one to whom to pass on her things" (Lahiri 17). These lines actually speaking of material things signify more. The first generation found no takers among their children, of neither material nor cultural inheritance. The chain process of heritage through generations ended at this point. The emotional outcome was pain and nervousness for the first generation and irrelevant and indifferent for the second

generation. For the next generation, the alienation is severe and strange. Unlike their parents who share through community activities, they are introverts, having no common grounds and they cannot open up to their parents.

‘Only Goodness’ the host land is a ‘conceptual outside’. However, do Ruma, Sudha or Rahul feels themselves ‘inside’? For the diaspora, the stay may be multigenerational, but they remain outsiders in the eye of indigenous. For the ‘insiders’, even if they are attracted towards the members of the Indian diaspora, it is only because they carry an impression of a strange, mysterious land. “The generational gap on the issue of language and dress code also been dealt in the story. Usha a second generation expatriate feels at home in English as she informs; ‘Deborah and I spoke freely in English, a language in which, by that age, I expressed myself more easily than Bengali, which I was required to speak at home’ (Lahiri 69). It shows that certain facts behind the lives of Indian immigrants in America in quest of identity and happiness. Usha is so deep in the language relationship that she forget her own identity of Bengali language and feel free to talk in English rather than Bengali.

The first generation never concerns to master the master the grammar of the language of their adopted land despite their stay there for a quite long time. In the matter of dress, Usha is too enraged with her mother for making a scene before they left the house for Pranab-Deborah’s home on the occasion of thanksgiving party as she forced to wear shalwar kameez. “I was furious with my mother for making a scene before we left the house and forcing me to wear a shalwar kameez” (Lahiri 78). She was reluctant to do for an outing with her peer group in Indian dress as she felt at ease in the jeans. As far as socializing is concerned we see that in contrast to Mrs. Bagchi, Usha’s mother discouraged her daughter from freely mixing with American

peers. She did not permit her to spend more time in dancing and singing songs at Deborah's marriage celebration. She was disguised and dejected at the thought of her child being Americans.

Ruma is struggling between the sense of self and filial responsibility, American civilization and inherited Bengali roots. She enjoys the bliss of American individualism concerning the important decisions of education, marriage, job and finally her way of life. However, there is a pull of innate culture and value system of her parents' homeland in her consciousness, creates stress within her and puts her in an identity crisis. It is because of this pull; she favored to imitate her mother's lifestyle of a homemaker. "Growing up, her mother's example moving to foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household- had served as a warning, a path to avoid. This was Ruma's life now" (Lahiri 11). Ruma was exhausted by her household work with the lack of mother's helpful guidance. Her social alienation and her isolation lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. The death of mother proved a great shock to her and brought a great effect on her married life and feels the sense of emptiness in her life.

### **Intergenerational and Marital Problems**

In the title story of *Unaccustomed Earth*, Ruma realizes that she has never had any real communication with her widowed father, who now spends his time making the best of his freedom from any family responsibilities and traveling around Europe, which he had never been to before. But when Ruma invites him to visit her family in their new place in the eastern suburbs of Seattle, a potentially explosive situation is generated. On the one hand, she is afraid that because she and Adam, her husband, have now spare rooms in the house, her father might decide to accept her offer to stay to live with them:

Ruma feared that her father would become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in a way she was no longer used to. It would mean an end to the family she'd created on her own: herself and Adam and Akash, and the second child that would come in January, conceived just before the move. She couldn't imagine tending to her father as her mother had, serving the meals her mother used to prepare.

(Lahiri 7)

On the other hand, because of the aforementioned communication problem between the two, Ruma is not sure she will be able to cope with his criticism of the new direction that her life is taking: She had never been able to confront her father freely, the way she used to fight with her mother.

Somehow, she feared that any difference of opinion would chip away at the already frail bond that existed between them" (Lahiri 37). It shows the father-daughter relationship increases in tension during the visit, particularly when Ruma is forced to recognize that her marriage is also stilted or when she discovers that her father is having a secret affair with another Indian woman during his journeys around Europe. Still, the brief sojourn is not without some tender moments of mutual understanding, that allow both characters to come to terms with some feelings that had been tormenting them, especially in connection with their deceased mother and wife, respectively.

Helped mainly by three-year-old Akash and the old man's fondness of gardening, the two find ways to come out with some truths that they had foolishly kept for too long from each other: "These days with Akash have been the greatest gift," he added, his voice softening. "If you like, I can come for a while after you have the baby. I won't be as useful as your mother would have been." "That's not true."



“But please understand, I prefer to stay on my own. I am too old now to make such a shift” (Lahiri 56). Indeed, it is clear that the relationship between Ruma and her father would have been completely different if, after her mother’s unexpected demise, either of them had reached out for the other in search of emotional support and understanding. Yet neither of them takes that first step to speak about the late mother or the brother in the family, or Ruma’s difficult marriage and her second pregnancy, or, for that matter, her father’s new life as a widower.

Very much the same could be argued about the narrator’s mother in “Hell-Heaven”. Usha conjures up images of the loveless marriage and socio-cultural isolation that her mother must have experienced in Boston when she was a child. “He brought to my mother the first and, I suspect, the only pure happiness she ever felt. I don’t think even my birth made her as happy. I was evidence of her marriage to my father, an assumed consequence of the life she had been raised to lead. But Pranab Kaku was different. He was the one totally unanticipated pleasure in her life” (Lahiri 67). Here silent is only partly relieved by the appearance of a young Bengali immigrant, Pranab Chakraborty, who is accepted as part of the family out of co-ethnic sympathy.

Of course, when Pranab meets an American student at Radcliffe and begins to bring her over to their place, it does not take long for Usha’s mother to show clear signs of resentment. At first, the narrator is unable to understand why her mother should prove so critical and mean toward Deborah, who was polite, well-educated, and much more fun than any of their other friends. When she gets to middle school, though, the reality of her mother’s life starts to dawn upon Usha: “I began to pity my mother; the older I got, the more I saw what a desolate life she led. She had never worked, and during the day she watched soap operas to pass the time. Her only job,

every day, was to clean and cook for my father and me” (Lahiri 76). Usha’s mother keeps to herself her own suffering and that fact dooms her to a wasted existence. She only gathers enough courage to reveal the whole truth to her daughter –a suicidal attempt included– when the latter comes to her recounting how her own heart has been broken by a man she had hoped to marry. All things considered, the reader is not so sure that Usha’s mother real problem is related to the fact that she was born in a distant country, since her experiences replicate those of many US-born women.

It is important to explain, though, that there were a number of earlier connections between Usha’s mother and Pranab Kaku which obviously predisposed them to spend time together: “They had in common all the things that she and my father did not: a love of music, film, leftist politics, poetry. They were from the same neighborhood in North Calcutta, their family homes within walking distance, the facades familiar to them once the exacts locations were described. They knew the same shops, the same bus and tram routes, the same holes-in-the-wall for the best jelahis and moghlai parathas” (Lahiri 64). This tries to show the dilemma of individuals attempting to establish their identity in the diaspora, looking for the emotional fulfillment. Pranab and Deborah, both are from India have a good relationship even if Deborah had already married. Most of the immigrated for economic reasons, they required to live in between culture of their homeland and adopted home.

“A Choice of Accommodations” also tells the story of a flawed marriage, but in this case it is mixed and it has not been arranged by others. Amit and Megan have been married for eight years and they jump on the opportunity of having been invited to a wedding to drop their two daughters with Megan’s parents and to enjoy a “carefree” weekend. It soon transpires, however, that the couple come to the

celebration with too many resentments and insecurities for their exciting prospects to come to their fruition. In the case of Amit, there are several chapters of his earlier life that will come alive again when he and his wife reach the grounds of Langford Academy, a boarding school he had attended as a teenager and that now is going to be the setting of an old friend's wedding.

We learn, for example, that he was severely traumatized when his parents dropped him at the school and went to Delhi, where his father had been given a good position in a hospital. "He learned to live without his mother and father, as everyone 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" (Lahiri 97). It is unclear whether his parents' untimely abandonment, his unfulfilling professional life, his fondness of solitude or his wife's successful career should be blamed for the growing distance between the couple, but it is evident that Amit is finding it increasingly difficult to go on with the masquerade.

"Megan had not been part of it. She lived in the apartment, she slept in his bed, her heart belonged to no one but him and the girls, and yet there were times Amit felt as alone as he had first been at Langford. And there were times when he hated Megan, simply for this" (Lahiri 114). It seems propitious to having mutual feelings unburdened, particularly after Amit leaves the party in search of a payphone to call their daughters never to return. Megan took a step toward him, looking at the shirt that clung coldly to his body, then directly into his eyes. "What, then? Something passed between you two, it's obvious." "It was nothing, Megan. We were friends and for a while I had a crush on her. But nothing happened. Is that so terrible? "The information fell between them, valuable for the years he'd kept it from her, negligible now that he'd told. Through the window he saw the workmen in the rain, folding up

the chairs and stacking them onto a cart” (Lahiri 125). Amit and Megan are a mixed couple seems of limited relevance to the outcome of their story, since there are other factors related to their jobs, family responsibilities, and past experiences that condition much more decisively their attitudes and behavior. It shows that the place to which they feel the strongest attachment isn’t necessarily the country they’re tied to by blood or birth.

## Chapter 4

### **Lost Identity in *Unaccustomed Earth***

*Unaccustomed Earth* is a clear picture of multiculturalism and hybridity, or a model migrant story. It is a collection of short stories rich in dysfunctional families, disappointments, unrealistic expectations, losses, unrequited love and missed opportunities. Lahiri's themes may be universal, but her perspective belongs to that of diaspora individuals. Her characters' displacement is the result of migration, and their problems often the result of symptomatic behavior as they attempt to come to terms with their dislocation. It is related to the experiences of Indian diaspora communities have created a very popular and huge body of literature. Their experiences of moving out of the borders of the homeland are necessarily similar in that they are displaced from a homeland that is connected to language, religion and a sense of cultural belonging.

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, the first-generation characters still view India as their home. Bengali customs are maintained at home, and they visit India regularly, and raise their children according to Indian norms. This is not to say that all first-generation characters would be plagued with a constant longing for India or inability to settle down in the United States. Primary immigrants, the instigators of family migrancy, and in Lahiri's stories usually the husbands, are consoled by the satisfaction they take in their work, as well as their upward economic mobility. However, as illustrated by Ruma's father in the story, path of a migrant has not been an easy one, and is instead filled with guilt and regret. The title story illustrates the epigraph in a very concrete manner: Ruma's father plants a flower garden in his daughter's backyard, including, symbolically, a hydrangea to honor his dead wife that would bloom pink or blue depending on the soil. His young grandson plants a garden

of his own, burying legos, wooden building blocks, a rubber ball and a pencil into the ground. Increased affluence and a higher social status have come at a high cost to secondary immigrants, wives and children. The position of wives in Lahiri's stories is perhaps the hardest. Violently yanked from their natal families and everything they know, they often lack basic skills that would enable them to feel more at home in the United States. Not having any personal motivation for migration (apart from accompanying their husbands), they are slow to build networks and put down roots in their new environment. Their social network mainly consists of other Bengali wives, which helps them in learning daily routines, but keeps them apart from the culture of the host land. They still refer to India as home, and live for visits to their old home country.

In the last few decades, issues related to the experiences of Indian diaspora communities have created a very popular and huge body of literature. However, each case is somewhat particular because every diaspora identity, regardless their generation, copes with the situation in different ways. In her short stories, Lahiri shows the struggles and problems Bengali migrants face in America not only when they interact with the host land but also the issues within the family and the inner turmoil. As shown in the dissertation, the issues of origin and identity are never completely defined in these diasporic identities because their location, sense of belonging, and cultural affiliations are not always congruent. She rather focuses on the family relationships and the different ways of coping with displacement. Therefore, throughout the analysis of the two short stories by the Indian American, it has been demonstrated how the individuals who have left the mother country are affected by such a move, struggling to adapt and interact.

The protagonists of the short stories fight against their feeling of loss by

forging a new identity which merges features of the mother culture and the new culture, creating this way a hybrid identity. The act of physically migrating may be a decision many people regret, but everybody takes decisions at some point in life which have an impact on future generations. Once decision is made, they cannot be reversed. It depends on oneself to make the best of the situation and change the fixed views of the world. The hybridity of the characters from the stories directs attention to the idea of multiculturalism- celebration of cultural diversity and preservation of one's ethnic roots.

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