

Chapter 1

Introduction

Hyphenated Identity

Identity usually refers to a person's relation to a set of characteristics related to culture, religion, geography, language, occupation, gender etc. within a community. In other words, it is the answer to the question like, "who is?", and therefore generally a frame of reference in which a person's belonging is said to be determined. But the question of identity has always been a conflicting one especially for the immigrants who are culturally, geographically, and linguistically displaced or those who live in two worlds. Similarly, their strong ties to their country of origin remain repatriation to their native land or an attempt to re-establish an imagined homeland on the psychological demarcation between their past and present. The problem of identity for them is that they feel culturally uprooted. Moreover, they are afflicted with double consciousness as they live in hyphenated status.

Hyphenated identity is a post colonial issue, conceptualized as a problematic self in diaspora. It is a traumatic experience of immigrants who live in "in-betweenness." This research work focuses on Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories from her debut collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). It tries to see how the traumatic experience of diaspora, hyphenated identity and search for roots are revealed through her writing. Thus, it tries to understand the influence of hyphenated consciousness of the immigrants in their lives that result from cultural displacement, emotional exile or sense of loss. The research work primarily and necessarily brings to the light the expression of hyphenated identity in diaspora and search for roots by Lahiri herself and her characters in her short fictions "A Temporary Matter," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," "Interpreter of Maladies," "Mrs. Sen's," and "The Third

and Final Continent” with its formative sources namely alienation, double consciousness, diasporic imaginings, and exilic predicament.

The present research work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents a short introduction to the author, a brief outline of her short stories and an introductory outline of the present research study itself. It gives a panoramic view of the entire work. The second chapter provides introduction to the post colonial cultural study and discusses the terms sandwich culture, diaspora, identity and its varieties with a focus on hyphenated one, hybridity, dislocation, which have been frequently used in the present study. On the basis of theoretical modality discussed in the second chapter, the third chapter will analyze the texts at a considerable length. It will sort out some extracts from the work as evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study - hyphenated identity in Lahiri’s short fictions. This part serves as the core of this research. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the entire study. On the basis of the textual analysis done in chapter three, it concludes the explanation and arguments put in the preceding chapter. It shows how the diasporic predicament of Indian-American or treatment of issues like exile, identity crisis and search for root is expressed in her short stories in a nutshell.

Lahiri as an Interpreter of Maladies

Born in London of Indian parents and raised in America, Jhumpa Lahiri tries to search an answer to the question about her roots and origin through her writings. Mitra and Pais say, “Where are you from? Jhumpa Lahiri has never known to answer this question satisfactorily” (73). The question of identity, as she feels, is always a difficult one for immigrants who are culturally displaced or those who grow up in two worlds. Lahiri hits on the idea after being confused by the hyphenated identity she is living with in diaspora. She writes: “like many immigrant offspring I felt tense

pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of hyphen” (“My Two Lives” 28). Such is the experience of almost every Indian-American who lives simultaneously in two worlds: the world of American reality and the world of Indian tradition. She says, “At home I followed the customs of my parents, speaking Bengali and eating rice and dal with my fingers. These ordinary facts seem part of a secret, utterly alien way of life, and I took pains to hide them from my American friends” (28). Thus, Lahiri accepts her double consciousness, diasporic trauma, as a part of her life that she hides from her American friends. She further interprets the maladies of belonging:

For my parents, home was not our house in Rhode Island but Calcutta, where they raised. I was aware that the things they lived for - the Nazrul songs they listened to on the reel to reel, the family they missed, the clothes my mother wore that were not available in any store in any mall- were at once as precious and as worthless as an outmoded currency. (28)

Lahiri collects the experience not only of those immigrants who migrated to America but also of their descendents who inherited their parents’ preoccupations. The malady she has is her conflicting selves as she says, “America is home to me but I feel an outsider too. I have observed a sense of exile in my parents that can never go” (qtd. in Mitra and Pais 74). Many Indian-Americans, like her, are trying to re/make and re/establish their own cultural values as they are confused by the culture imposed upon them by the West.

This is the trauma Lahiri expresses in her words, “In spite of the first lesson of arithmetic one plus one did not equal two but zero, my conflicting selves always canceling each other out” (“My Two Lives” 28). Immigrants’ nostalgia and their loss

of root, which always haunts them, are expressed through a variety of ways and writing is one of them to reflect the problem of being in the world of migration. Interestingly, an attempt to restore the childhood home, distant in both time and space, to their present motivate their writings. In this relation, Salman Rushdie asserts the position of migrant writers:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into the pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge - which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of the mind. (10)

So, Lahiri, living in a western society, away from her origin, tries to make her identity of her own root by writing. In an interview with Vibhuti Patel she argues:

I like to write about people who think in a way they can't fully express. Growing up in two countries, I see things in a way that not everyone around me can. I'd would talk to my cousins about what life's like in America and still know that they'll never get it because they haven't been here. Talking to Americans about India is the same- it's always partial. As a story teller, I am aware that there are limitations in communication. (60)

As an interpreter of maladies, Lahiri closely examines the predicament of hyphenated identity in diaspora, tangled with double consciousness. Her navigation

between two cultures and her role as an interpreter between two worlds occupies an intermediate terrain on the cusp between two cultures. Lahiri writes about those who migrated to America, or those who born in America to migrant parents. It is her diasporic imagining that is shaped by fictionalized homeland by revisiting and interpreting her ancestral homeland and Indian tradition.

Maladies of Belonging

This research work has primarily focused on the short fictions “A Temporary Matter,” “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” “Interpreter of Maladies,” “Mrs. Sen’s” and “The Third and Final Continent” from Lahiri’s the Pulitzer Prize winning volume of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* published in 1999. In the same year, under the title “Jhumpa Lahiri: Calcutta Pilgrim,” *India Today* reviews the book, “She navigates between Indian traditions, which many of her characters have inherited and the intriguing new world they live in” (57). Lahiri’s stories portray through emotional exile, cultural crisis and double consciousness of immigrants in a new country a hopeless search for identity which ends in family disintegration or frustration.

After the book gets the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for short story collection in 2000, it receives a wide variety of reviews. In an article, *Competition Success Review* writes “. . . the book depicts the cross-currents, rootlessness and belonging of Indians transplanted in America grappling with the terms of reference of the world they must inhabit and the ethos of society they have left behind” (“Jhumpa Lahiri Wins Pulitzer Prize”).

Once again *India Today* gives space to other reviews on her stories. Sumit Mitra with Arthur J. Pais write, “It is this immigrant identity that forms the core of Lahiri’s stories. Her perspective is never un-American though. It comes off

powerfully in her sensuous prose, economical with metaphors and rich with descriptions that articulate the alienness of her characters on American soil” (74).

Lahiri’s stories focus on the immigrants’ cultural identity of their origin and how it affects their psychology and lives at large. In “The Third and Final Continent,” for instance, portrays an Indian immigrant’s assimilation into American culture. The central character leaves his country, India, with a certificate in commerce and the equivalent of ten dollars to reach England, the second continent, in search of a better future. In North London, he lives in a house occupied by a dozen of penniless Bengali bachelors, all struggling to educate and establish them abroad, and attends lectures at London School of Economics. After finding a job of Librarian with the MIT in Boston, he returns to India to attend his marriage, arranged by his family, at the age of thirty-six and a week later reaches to begin his new job in America, the third and final continent. Like other immigrants, he goes through an intense self-transforming process on American soil. In the course of time he moves on and adjusts through an incessant struggle with the advanced society of Boston; however, his second generation’s assimilation into American culture leaves no space for his own cultural orientation.

Lahiri’s notice for the maladies of immigrants, who often exist simultaneously in two cultures and are afflicted with a sense of exile, is expressed in her “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”:

Before eating Mr. Pirzada always did a curious thing. He took out a plain silver watch without a band, which he kept in his breast pocket, held it briefly to one of his tufted ears, and wound it with three swift flicks of his thumb and forefinger. Unlike the watch on his wrist, the

pocket watch, he had explained to me, was set to the local time in
Dacca, Eleven hours ahead. (30)

It is an experience of a Pakistani who is living away from his family in United States during a civil war in his homeland, the East Pakistan. Mr. Pirzada, who is awarded a grant from the government of Pakistan to study the foliage of New England, visits Lilia's parents every night to have dinner with them and watch the news. Though Lilia's parents are from India, they invite Mr. Pirzada who is familiar to their part of world. The geographical boundaries of Lilia's parents and Mr. Pirzada is erased to coincide with the cultural ones because of their common history, language and culture yet the questions Who are we? Where do we belong? Who are not us? determines their identity. At first, Lilia thinks that Mr. Pirzada is an Indian like them but her father tells that he is no longer considered Indian after the partition of their country in 1947.

It is an interesting subject for Lilia, who narrates the story, to study the difference between Mr. Pirzada and them; however, she develops an emotional relationship with him. After the completion of study, Mr. Pirzada returns to his homeland, now Bangladesh, and reunites with his family who were lost during the civil war. Although Mr. Pirzada reunites with his family after the independence of his country Lahiri ends up the story with a sense of missing that Lilia feels for Mr. Pirzada. The human relationship what we can feel through Lilia's eyes is concerned with a sense of loss, migrant experience.

A reading of Lahiri's stories shows that her perspective ranges from an emotional isolation to the hopeless search for identity of newly arrived immigrants in America. In "Mrs. Sen's," Mrs. Sen has a sort of identity crisis when she comes to live with her husband in Boston, an American city, from Calcutta. Bidisha Banerjee

feels a compassion for Mrs. Sen, being trapped between two worlds, tries to recreate her India in foreign space:

I see Mrs. Sen as being trapped between two notions of home alluded to by Avtar Brah: home as the place of origin and home as the experience of locality in a foreign country. Mrs. Sen's perception of both these homes is in such stark contrast with one another that she is unable to reconcile the opposition. Through much of the story she tries to recreate the first home, India, by resurrecting idealize memories of her earlier life and by transposing elements that life into her new one in America. (171)

Mrs. Sen who feels up her lonely afternoons reading letters from India or chopping vegetables for the meals she prepares for herself and her husband while her husband teaches all day. She is an after-school babysitter of an eleven-year-old boy Eliot who is her companion and confidante in her isolation. Mrs. Sen is afflicted with sense of exile and sentimental longing for her home. In this unfamiliar world she is homesick for the kind of community that she had in India. Lahiri examines through Eliot's perspective how Mrs. Sen maintains an unhappy distance from her home.

Home for Mrs. Sen is India, not the apartment where she lives with her husband in Boston. She struggles to maintain her Indian identity at the same time she adapts to American culture. Her double consciousness is inextricably bound up with her identity crisis that results from her emotional exile and sense of solitude. Ultimately, the relation between Mrs. Sen and Eliot is disconnected, after a car accident, as she unfortunately fails to balance two diametrically opposite cultures and societies.

Lahiri's stories deal not only with the emotional exile and assimilation of the first generation immigrants in American culture but also with the hopelessness of the second generation Indian-American in two cultures. The second generation Indian immigrants that Lahiri portrays in her stories are displaced from the culture of their origin. The sense of belonging, which they belong to nowhere, persists through out their lives. Never before in America were there so many Indian-Americans thinking that life was so utterly meaningless. Lahiri, as a figure of modern intellectual exile observes why this has happened to the second generation Indian immigrants who are culturally uprooted in diaspora.

Her "A Temporary Matter" shows a loss of relationship of a young married Indian-American couple Shoba and Shukumar. Their common yet isolated experience of grief for their lost child results in a breakdown of communication and ultimately a tragic loss of relationship. Their systematic avoidance to their friends and self-fulfillment in their unshared privacy are bound up with the mechanical routine of metropolitan culture where they find nothing but editing:

For months now they'd served themselves from the stove, and he'd taken his plate into his study, letting the meal grow cold on his desk before shoving it into his mouth without pause, while Shoba took her plate to the living room and watched game shows, or proofread files with her arsenal of colored pencils at hand. (8)

Shoba is an editor who avoids her husband, who is still a student at the age of thirty-five, as much as possible watching game shows or proofreading files. Lahiri closely reads how they effectively and ineffectively edit elements in their own lives. Their happy conjugal relationship is almost finished after Shoba delivers a dead baby, however they keep on pretending behind which a deep boredom accumulates. Their

marriage, in sub nuclear status, loses its cultural values in the absence of emotional support. But they are deprived of their usual distractions as the electric company turns off the electricity for five consecutive nights to repair after a recent snowstorm. During this temporary matter, Shukumar seems to cover up the unhappy distance with his wife but it is linked by a hidden tragedy that Shova is preparing a life without him.

Lahiri's finely tuned ears for hyphenated consciousness are apparent throughout her stories. Her ability to fuse the double consciousness with compassion for her characters is adept in "Interpreter of Maladies," the title story for her debut collection. Mrs. Das, in the story, is subtly depicted as a modern mother of American culture who wants to be free from the responsibility of children and marriage. On the other hand, she is haunted by a sense of guilt for her unfaithful role as a wife:

About my secret, and about how terrible it makes me feel. I feel terrible looking at my children, and at Raj, always terrible. I have terrible urges, Mr. Kapasi, to throw things away. One day I had the urge to throw everything I own out the window, the television, the children, everything. (8)

Lahiri deeply analyzes her malaise, the split in her consciousness that stops her entering into relationships. Mr. Kapasi, a tour guide who takes the ride of the family through the countryside of India, notices Mrs. Das's attitude that complains of her frustration in her hopeless marriage. But he fantasizes a romantic relationship with Mrs. Das at her sudden interest in his another job as an interpreter of maladies for a doctor who does not understand the Gujarati speaking patients. His fantasy and her search for remedy waver when Mrs. Das talks of her malady; he has no cure for what ails Mrs. Das or him.

Before we move on to a discussion of the chosen text at a considerable length so as to study hyphenated identity in Lahiri's short fictions, the following chapter presents a detailed discussion on the issues related to diaspora and identity, particularly the issues ranging from the sandwich culture, diaspora, identity and its varieties with a focus on hyphenated one, to hybridity, dislocation and alienation. The following chapter is thus set to begin with identity with particular reference to the culture of hybridity and diaspora.

Chapter 2

Cultural Identity and Migration

Human migration or dispersion from their original habitat has been a continual process since the time immemorial. It has marked several turns in human history. N. Jayaram argues, “Migration and dispersion are natural phenomena, widely familiar both in the worlds of plants and in the animal kingdom. Human beings have been no exception” (15). Migration is a process of shifting from one location to another location underscored by a search for better place and opportunity in new milieu.

Migration and settlement have been key phenomena in the Indian-American experience. Most Indian-Americans are immigrants who have come to America in search of better opportunity or future since the liberalization of immigration policies in the 1960s. Crispin Bates writes, “Migrants from South Asia first began to arrive in the USA in considerable numbers in the 1960s following a liberalization of immigration policies” (34). However the new territory for migrant community has always been a crucial space as they are culturally displaced. In this context, Wilbur Zelinsky says, “. . . they experience “cultural shock” as they and their offspring attempted to absorb a culture often much at odds with that which they brought with them” (qtd. in Huntington 40).

This sense of cultural displacement as a result of their changing identity from home culture to the host culture remains a new version of their identity. Sanjukta Dasgupta comments on the condition of the Indian immigrants whose imaginary presence is in the motherland at the same time they are struggling and redefining their roots and cultural identity in Indian diaspora:

The post-1965 Indian immigrants who settled in the USA experienced a shock on arrival to the land of opportunities. From the status of a

full-fledged citizen in his own newly independent country, the immigrant had to redefine himself as a resident alien , a green card holder, an ethnic minority affiliate and a model silent minority in social conduct. This caused extreme stress for the Indian male outside his home: at work as well as in public spaces. As a result, the Indian home became a refuge of cultural security, validating the fact though one was physically present in a foreign land . . . the heart was in the motherland. (77)

Thus, they are the exemplar of lost generation, confused by an alien environment and culture. Their sense of loss that grows out of sense of shock becomes part of being uprooted and re-rooted. So, their home culture resists against the sense of feeling ‘alien’ or the trials and trauma of adjustment to a different culture. S.L. Sharma argues, “. . . they find in their culture a defense mechanism against a sense of insecurity in alien settings” (49). Home culture has been a source of identity as well as a matter of deep sentiment for the Indian immigrants to negotiate their cultural identity in diaspora. “Indians are known for jealously preserving their cultural identity. They continue to cling to their norms of endogamy, marital stability and family solidarity, kin orientation, religion and mother tongue. They are always nostalgic about Indian food and their woman tend to stick to their lovely saris” (Sharma 48). But, in the case of children born to Indian parents, they do not seem to stick to their cultural norms and values as much as their parents. The second generations are culturally uprooted and confused generation however they also explore the possibilities of cultural negotiation that can establish a relationship between two worlds by interpreting and re-rooting.

After being uprooted culturally, how people interpret their experience of border crossing, life within an alienating diaspora with a hybrid identity is the main concern of this study. Today, living in a multicultural society, the postcolonial people have been required to negotiate the problem of ethnicity. Thus, Elleke Boehmer argues that “It was essential that they reconstitute their identity on their own terms, that they Indianize, Africanize or Caribbeanize themselves. They effectively needed to give birth to a new identity, to speak in a language that was chosen, not imposed” (345). However, their cultural identity is not an innate human property but a socio-cultural phenomenon of common historical experience with one shared cultural identities that have certain materiality and are produced in specific social context. Thus, Erkki Sevanen remarks, “. . . people’s personal and cultural identities are not innate human properties, but they take shape in some socially, culturally and historically specific context. To a great extent, they are products of various social, cultural and historical factors or determinants” (46).

Personal and cultural identities are constituted, made rather than existed there with universal qualities. The notion of cultural identity is shaped by some interlocking concepts as “common historical experience”, “cultural codes” or “one people” (Hall 111) which provides us some questions like “Who are we?” and “Where do we belong?” in relation to being or becoming. Thus, Stuart Hall explains this notion of cultural identity as:

It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant changes. Far

from being externally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture . . . (112)

Today, globalization process has not only prompted the growth of migration rate but also blended the cultural values of the west and the east in the melting pot of cross-cultural society. This intercultural contact is a common experience to all migrants. And the immigrants at another home in foreign are most significantly the mixes of host and parent cultures. Their individuality carries two tags: one represents the country of origin and the other represents the country of migration. Atal posits this phenomenon as a "sandwich culture":

Pressed between the twin forces of the parent and the host cultures, these communities have assumed double identities through shedding off of some elements of their parent culture and adoption of the host cultural elements with a view to assimilation. This dual process of pulls from two opposite directions - of orientations toward two cultures - leads to accretions and attrition and develops a new pattern of interrelationship between different elements. Such an intercalation gives rise to sandwich cultures. (211)

In the hybrid urban space, the transformation from not being at home to reconstructing a new home in new location is a meaningful episode in the life course of immigrants. As Ahponen accepts, "After losing a home in their country of origin it is not easy to become familiar with the new life-conditions or to establish a new identity. This may be a question of alienation or it can be interpreted as a problem deeply embedded in the idea of becoming culturally rooted" (287). The sense of exile that they belong to nowhere is a diasporic imagining that lies behind their transnational imagination or their imaginary trip back to their origin. They are, as

Rajini Srikanth concludes, “. . . thus deeply interested to their ancestral histories and heritage; some even make the trip back to ancestral homelands. . . ” (96).

Although they are dislocated from the homeland of their origin, they constantly seek to relocate their diasporic selves through the memories of homeland. In Jopi Nyman’s view, “Memories of homelands and home places may provide minority cultures with opportunities to resist dominant discourses and to negotiate cultural identity” (411).

Diasporic Imaginings

One of the most widely employed terms in the postcolonial studies, diaspora refers to any or ethnic population who are forced to leave their traditional homelands, the dispersal of such people and the ensuing developments in their culture. As used in the Ancient Greek, the very term referred to “scattering or sowing seeds.” In the beginning, the term “diaspora” was used by the ancient Greek to refer to the citizens of a grand city who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization to assimilate the territory into the empire. However the original meaning was cut off from the present meaning when the Old Testament was translated into Greek. In this regard, Jayaram makes clear:

Etymologically the term diaspora is derived from the Greek composite verb *dia-* and *speirein* (infinitive), literally meaning ‘to scatter,’ ‘to spread’ or ‘to disperse.’ It was originally used to refer to the dispersion of Jews after the Babylonian exile in 586 BC and to the aggregate of Jews of Jewish communities scattered in exile outside Palestine. (16)

In cultural studies, the term “diaspora” is used interchangeably to refer to the historical movements of the dispersed ethnic population itself. Huntington defines diaspora as a cultural community “. . . cutting across the boundaries of two or more

states, one of which is viewed as the homeland country of that community” (258). Diaspora suggests the idea of dispersal and fragmentation and in much of the literature there is a presumed relationship between the diasporic community and the land which they left and to which the possibility always subsists, what we apt to term ‘homeland.’ Thus, Mridula Nath Chakraborty says, “. . . being a diasporic involves a process of transference from a somewhat acknowledged and accepted identity, to one that exists only in the realm of the future, perhaps to be equally acceptable one day” (119).

Diaspora is not only the product of exile, refuge or fleeing from the fanatical rhetoric of ethnic cleansing but also the product of exploitation of poverty of ex-colonies. It, as a matter of choice, can be analyzed as cheap labor migration. During the post war period of economic expansion, Britain faced labor shortage whereas its ex-colonies experienced severe poverty, as Brah points out:

Migration of labor from the ex-colonies to the metropolis during the 1950s was thus largely a direct result of the history of colonization and imperialism of the previous centuries. If once the colonies had been a source of cheap raw materials, now they became a source of cheap labor. (36)

When the first generation of immigrants come to a new land, they possess a strong sense of social distance that accounts for the wide variation of feeling, language, culture or national background between group and group. According to Cohen, they establish tightly knit social networks based on relations of kinship and fellowship with others from the same country of origin and constitute an isolated population (263). The “new immigrants” bringing with them habituations and valuations from civilization and culture, create their own semi community which

gives them a sense of security and identification with their fellows in contrast to the new conditions in a new land. Maciver and Page argue:

. . . the retention of many features of the traditional way of life and the development of semiautonomous community meet the immigrant's need for identification with his fellow man and a consequent sense of security. Thus those members of ethnically distinct groups living in the "Ghettos," the Chinatowns, the "Little Italys," and so on, do not experience the drastic "cultural shock" of the isolated stranger in a new land. In this way the semi-community of the immigrant serves to ease his readjustment to new conditions. (130)

Diasporic imaginings have largely been examined in relation to homelessness and displacement. It functions through the sentiments of permanent departure with the mother country and of ". . . a given-up past clinging somewhere in memory" (Lal and Kumar ix). So diasporic experience is a traumatic experience of exile, migration, displacement and rootlessness.

To live in diaspora is to experience the life in minority group haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back. Rushdie writes, "I've been in minority group all my life - a member of an Indian Muslim family in Bombay, then of a 'mohajir'- migrant family in Pakistan and now as a British Asian" (4), creating an "Imaginary homeland" that belongs to. As a displaced person, Rushdie tries to reconstruct his past for himself to make sense of his diasporic subjectivity: "The diasporic writer is a person displaced, a person relocated, trying to reconstruct the past in order to make sense of the present" (qtd. in Chakraborty 120). So, Rushdie's is the predicament of diasporic people ensued from sense of belonging or homelessness.

Pradyumna S. Chauhan closely examines some works of diasporic writers who are haunted by a sense of belonging or memory of home. He writes:

Whether it is V.S.Naipal's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verse* (1989), or Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and Vijaya Laxmi's *Pomegranate Dreams and Other Stories* (2002), the new fictions of writers from the old colonies living now in Britain or the United State is, among other things, heavily haunted by memories of home. (209)

This attachment to the primeval bond with homeland and community is an integral attribute of the people who cross oceans or cultural divides. According to Chauhan, the memories of the migrant writers who dwell in a psychological borderland mainly focus "personal nostalgia" and the "existential ambiguity of a disposed humanity" (210). He conclusively calls, "whatever the reason for their homeward orientation, these works cannot be dismissed as but modified versions of "home thought from abroad," as a national paean wrapped up in some personal nostalgia" (210).

The word home represents not only a psychic space but also evokes "emotion, sentiments, memory" (Lal and Kumar viii). The homes of diasporic people lie on the margins and are unable to strike root anywhere; for them homes ironically stand for "not being home" or homelessness. Lal and Kumar cite Chandra Talpade Mohanty's formulation in which ". . . being 'at home' refers to the 'familial safe, protected boundaries' whereas 'not being home' is a matter of realizing that home was an 'illusion' of coherence" (viii-ix). Moreover, this idea of 'home' is an important one for diasporic women who create a feeling of belonging for themselves. Diasporic women like Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee have links with native (Bengali

and Indian) culture and lost origin; they, as Lal and Kumar say, “. . . display definite traits of Bengali heritage . . .” (xii). So, through the expression of Indian diasporic fiction, reproduced by imaginary border crossings, they attempt to recover their cultural displacement. Dasgupta locates their space, “. . . not out of place but definitely in a space-in-between. . .” (83).

At their loss of literal and metaphorical home, they struggle to create imaginary homes in the cartography in mind and negotiate identity juxtaposing their ‘being at home’ and ‘not being home.’ Thus, Bidisha Banerjee comes to a conclusion that diasporic has an unusual compromise:

The diasporic woman of today must negotiate her identity and her sense of ‘belonging’ between home as the place of origin (towards which the hegemonic power in the host country - always push the immigrant) and home as the experience of locality in a foreign country. Thus, the question of home becomes intrinsically linked for her with the way in which process of inclusion and exclusion work and are experienced by her uncertain circumstances. (168)

So, diaspora is the result of colonial dictates, wars, globalization and the labor migration of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Diasporics are haunted by homelessness and cultural displacement, as they are uprooted from ancestral homeland and heritage. So, their imagined homeland evokes personal nostalgia linking their diasporic selves to native culture and lost origin.

Predicament of Exiles

Exile is a terrible experience of diaspora, the forced movement of colonization, retaining a sense of belonging to/for a real or imagined homeland. “It is unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and

its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (Said 173). Exile invokes images of individual political dissidents sent overseas or large group of people banished to distant lands. “Thus, a large section of Russian/ Soviet, South African, Chilean, and Cuban migrants during the twentieth century was considered to be in exile” (Chandramohan 145).

The exilic condition is decidedly a huge step, a search for better homeland or for the sake of greater opportunities. And yet it is tough for exiles because they have left so much behind them, which is often recalled. Place is, for them, attached with their past which is often remembered as a major demarcation between their past and present reflecting a sense of uprooting and dislocation. A closer look to Said’s “Cairo Recalled: Growing up in the cultural crosscurrents of 1940s Egypt” reveals the memorial reflection of both place and past which have been left behind. He feels: “‘Since Cairo’ I have often said to my mother, ‘since Cairo’ being for both of us the major demarcation in my life and, I believe, in hers” (268).

Home is for the exiles to be located in the place of birth or in the displaced cultural community into which they are born. They often make a connection with their past through an attachment to specific place, and music is often used to remember such places. In this regard, Cohen focuses her essay on the link between music and place that reshape the social relationship of exiled Jews.

In her essay “Sounding Out the City: Music and the Sensuous Production of Place,” she speaks about Jack’s family who came to Britain from Eastern Europe in the late 19th century and lived what is generally referred to as a Jewish “quarter” around a street called Brownhill in Liverpool. Cohen finds a strong touch of their exilic phenomenon across space and time. “One of Jack’s strongest memories,” she interprets, “. . . is of his mother and aunts sitting together, singing Yiddish song and

weeping to the mournful sounds that reminded them of Poland, their homeland (“*der heim*”)” (265). The Yiddish song, Jack’s mother and aunts sing together, reveals not only remembering their nostalgic homeland but also re-remembering with their displaced community.

In exilic writings, “remembering” is often linked to the loss of kinship ties, ancestral homeland and on the other hand, it is marked by their repatriation through an imaginary journey back to their origin. Leela Gandhi, in her article “Postcolonial re-remembering,” quotes Homi Bhabha who writes that remembering is “. . . never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (9). The sense of loss, dismembered past that is cut off completely from their present, is behind their recollection. Thus the very nature of remembering, as David Punter describes, “. . . is based on one side to memory and on the other to mourning . . .” (128).

The central argument on exile is alienation, which has become one of the determining realities in the lives of exiles, and *émigrés* in the contemporary age. As Ahponen says, “Living in exile is an alienated life” (298), this feeling of not belonging can be physical, mental, religious, spiritual, psychological, political, social or economic and often their alienation tends to be a combination of more than one of these types. Nisbet argues that alienation is “. . . the state of mind that can find a social order remote, incomprehensible, or fraudulent; beyond real hope or desire; inviting apathy, boredom, or even hostility. The individual not only does not feel a part of the social order; he has lost interest in being a part of it” (ix). Exiles are the victim of intensified feelings of loss, rootlessness and intolerable aloneness. Thus, they are the traumatized souls who are living under the sense of not belonging, one of

the exilic predicaments. In other words, the situation of the exilic trauma is deeply rooted in our culture of migration and diaspora.

Identity

All issues of culture are inextricably bound up with the notion of identity. People express their identity; they question it if they find the difficulty of belonging; they even seek their relation to the source culture; and thereby try to establish their identity. Identity as such has been a topical issue in the study of culture, and the scholars like Kobena Mercer says that the concept of identity is in crisis (109). Almost everywhere people say that this crisis is caused by globalization, a concept responsible for the experience of migration, altering relations between Western and other cultures and the sense of identity of the individuals whose lives have taken them across the borders between so-called the first worlds, the second worlds, and the third worlds, or across in effect, pre-modern and postmodern societies. Globalization in its long run has caused the interfusing of identities which can be termed as “the hybridity of cultural identities.” This notion of hybridity suggests that it has the relation to “racial” and “ethnic” identities. Moreover, these identities are not pure but are the product of mixing, fusion, and creolization, following the mixing and movements of cultures. Specifically from the slave trade to mass media, there lies the great shape of modern identities. The result is the fusion or hybridity of identities which cannot be taken as the product of ‘assimilation’ of one culture or cultural tradition by another, but the production of something new.

This new notion of identity is equated with the studies of the hybridity of cultural identity that are closely allied to accounts of diaspora identities. Diaspora is a term that was initially used to refer to the dispersal of Jewish people across the globe, but is now regularly used to describe black and other diasporas. These identities are

shaped by this sense of having been, in Salman Rushdie's phrase "borne across the world" (17), of being in but not entirely of the West. Many modern and contemporary writers, therefore, seek their belonging and write about their lives in such fluid situation.

Identities are fluid, and are both consciously and unconsciously delimited. Any number of factors are likely to be under negotiation in either case; whether of religion, nation, language, political ideology or cultural expression. One example can be Islam; a religious faith that shapes the social, economic and political character of entire regimes and can reach into the detailed social and sexual lives of its adherents.

Identity is a crucial issue in the study of postcolonial culture. The emphasis of much of this new work is decidedly cultural, but its effects have reached into a wide range of disciplinary fields. In talking about identity, we have to begin to discuss from the primary phase of socialization, an intersubjective process of learning and impression in society, of an infant to its synthesized individuality, as Fornas defines the process of socialization:

Its primary phase appears in the close interaction between the child and its parents, within the family, while secondary socialization includes a wide range of other institution, like the educational system. The process never ends - it continues through all phases of life and engages all possible area of activity. On one hand, it gradually introduces the individual into various sets of intersubjective and societal relations through successive patterns of interaction and identification. On the other hand, it also leads to a stepwise separation from the mother and the parental family and to an individuation where a unique,

synthesizing individuality and continuous self-autonomy is attained.

(234)

So an individual, as a subject, is intrinsically interwoven with social norms and practices that shape his or her individuation through the process of socialization.

Identity is a term that goes back to a Latin term “idem” for being the same, a sense of mutual recognition of belonging together. According to Huntington, “People identify with those who are most like themselves and with whom they share a perceived common ethnicity, religion, traditions, and myth of common descent and common history” (13). However this concept of belonging together is a partial identity. He further argues, “Identity requires differentiation. Differentiation necessitates comparison, the identification of the ways in which ‘our’ group differs from ‘their’ group” (26).

Identity is a subject position in relation to both “likeness” and “difference”; it is some sort of similarity and distancing that is crucial to being a subject with certain collective unities. In this regard Huntington’s idea is relevant as he argues , “so long as people interact with others, they have no choice but to define themselves in relation to those others and identify their similarities with differences from those others” (22).

A cultural study is inevitable to understand the identity to understand the identity position constituted through the intersubjective process in society. “Identity . . . is constituted in and through culture. Indeed culture and identity are inextricably linked concepts” (Brah 35). Cultural study explores the “Who are we?” or the interlocking concepts of both psychic as well as social aspects. The question of identity is closely knit to the whole social dimension however it is not a concrete

thing which exists in the domain of cultural study. It is always in the process which is never complete. Kumar writes:

Identities are analytically complex to study because they are constructed and shifting, not fixed, entities, which can be negotiated, contested and reformulated as categories of representation.

Furthermore, the categories caste, tribes and gender especially, are also product of imposition and dominance which at the same time have practical realities. In this sense, a study of identity becomes, above all, a study of the process and politics of social relations. (5)

Identities are discursive constructions that can always be reinterpreted in new ways; they change their meaning in relation to time, place, and context for it is an unfinished project of human life. According to Fornas nothing is exactly the same as something else. He justifies:

As for individual or subjective identity, I am never totally identical with the one I was a year ago, but we might be pretty similar, or there are some important aspect of me that remain fairly constant over time and between the various spheres and contexts in which I live . As for collective and social identity, two persons are never totally identical, but they may have sufficiently much in common in some aspects to be found to share an identity. (232)

Identity introduces an individual into various sets of societal relations. It is a subject position determined by religion, culture, geography, language and gender. Thus, it is perceived within the domain of cultural studies. Identity is an unfinished process, which continues through all phase of life; it leads to a stepwise separation from one position to the other and thus the synthesized individuality is attained.

Hyphenated Identity

The question of identity has always been a confusing term for immigrants and their descendants who are haunted by emotional exile and urge to reclaim their past. Moreover, they build for themselves a new pattern of life out of their conflicting selves. A child of an immigrant, as Brah argues, “. . . is exposed to two cultures, one at home and the other at school, and as a result, the young person experiences stress and identity conflicts” (53). At first, linguistically his /her self is confused as their pendulous dynamic between mother tongue and language of diaspora reflects double consciousness. Thus, deprivation of the first language and exposure to a new linguistic environment lets him/ her an echo of hybrid language as we read Said’s experience in diaspora: “Arabic, my native language, and English, my school language, were inextricably mixed: I have never known which was my first language, and have felt fully at home in neither, although I dream in both. Every time I speak on English sentence, I find myself echoing it in Arabic and vice versa” (557).

This identity conflict is a traumatic experience of ethnically and culturally distinct semi communities of diaspora. Alternatively, the settler communities create their own space on the borderline between the culture of new place and culture of their origin. However such an intercultural contact, according to Yogesh Atal, is total loss of identity:

. . . it has at least double apertures - one linking it to the parent culture and the other to the host culture. Through these apertures, among others, it receives the influences and responds to them. Closing of its apertures to the parent culture leads to its alienation; if it is associated with wide opening of the apertures towards the host society then it

accelerates the process of absorption and assimilation with the total loss of independent identity. (214)

So their hyphenated identity, one of the tropes in cultural study, is fundamental to the minority experience in diaspora.

Hyphenated identity is conceptualized as a problem of selfhood in the fusion of two diametrically opposite cultures and societies. Sayyid points up that “. . . it is not fusion but is confusion . . .” (7). In defining hyphenated identity, which affects the mind and lives of settler communities, the cultural displacement also marks the relation of dislocation, diaspora and exile. Thus, their sense of displacement, as they experience multilayered cultural frameworks from time to time, functions as the loss of selfhood in diaspora. N. Jayaram writes:

. . . the migrants are not inevitably irrevocably cut off completely from the land of their breed. They themselves may retain physical and /or mental contact with their homeland, often characterized by what is called ‘the myth of return.’ Their significant others, their folk back in the homeland as well as sections of the population in their land of adoption, may identify them as originating from and / or belonging to their homeland. (16)

They negotiate their diasporic subjectivity, as they revitalize links with native lands through the metaphor of hyphenated identity, for legitimizing their identity and existence. Identity is much debated when it is in crisis. Thus in the quest of community, Nisbet writes, “The disenchanting , lonely figures , searching for ethnical significance in the smallest of things, struggling for identification with race or class or group, incessantly striving to answer the question , ‘Who am I’, ‘What am I’” (12).

Subsequently, they try to redefine their own identity after being denigrated in this confusion of cultural fusion.

Their hyphenated identity is a conjoined space “between two cultures”; on the other hand it is linked to repatriating the diasporic people to their homeland. In this regard, Sayyid closely comments: “Such an arrangement maintains the distinction and distance of the West and non-West. This split produces cultural representations which describe . . . settlers as ‘frozen’ in time, or belonging to a culture regarded as static, patriarchal and authoritarian, in contrast to . . . western culture...” (7).

Chapter 3

Interpretation of Diaspora: Semi-real Exilic Predicament

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* matters temporary life changing, relationships in flux and unshakeable, unexpected blessings and sudden calamities, and the powers of survival, which are among the themes of Jhumpa Lahiri's extraordinary Pulitzer Prize-winning debut collection of stories. Traveling from India to New England and back again, Lahiri charts the emotional voyages of characters seeking love beyond the barriers of nations, cultures, religions, and generations. Imbued with the sensual details of both Indian and American cultures, they also speak with universal eloquence and compassion to everyone who has ever felt like an outsider. Like the interpreter of the title story—which was selected for both the O. Henry Award and *The Best American Short Stories*—Lahiri translates between the ancient traditions of her ancestors and the sometimes baffling prospects of the New World.

Lahiri writes about the Indian American experience ranging from the exilic predicament of the immigrants to the trauma of hyphenated identity of those who born to Indian parents in America. Her characters are “semi-real” (60) as she says in an interview with Vibhupati Patel. In “Mrs. Sen’s,” she narrates the sense of exile and trauma of adjustment to a different culture based on true immigrant experience of her mother. In this regard, Sanjukta Dasgupta writes:

Her story “Mrs. Sen’s” (1999) is a sensitive semi-autobiographical narrative about Mrs. Sen’s babysitting experiences and the response of the young American boy Eliot whom she babysits. The story bears the identifiable resemblances to Lahiri’s mother’s personal experiences in the USA. So, the fascination and attraction that young Eliot feels

towards Mrs. Sen, who is so different from his American working mother, is traced out with sensitivity and insight by the author. (91)

One of the major themes of Lahiri's art is the issue of migrant identity. Many of her characters are migrants in search of identity, and obviously she identifies her migrant personae in this regard. In an interview with Vibhuti Patel, she admits:

I have inherited my parents' preoccupations. It is hard to have parents, who consider another place "home" - even after living abroad for 30 years, India is home for them. We were always looking back so I never felt fully at home here. There's nobody in this whole country that we're related to... (60)

Thus, this notion of home for migrant community is decidedly India where they were born and lived in their past.

Interestingly, Lahiri's "When Mr Pirzada Came to Dine" is also dominated by autobiographical element. It is based on real life experience of a Pakistani who was living away from his family in America. Talking about this story Lahiri says:

This story is based on a gentleman from Bangladesh who used to come to my parents' house in 1971. I heard from my parents what his predicament was. And when I learned about his situation, which was that he was in the United States during the Pakistani civil war and his family was back in Dacca, I was so overwhelmed by this information that I wrote this story. (qtd. in Rao)

Imagining home in the land of migration leads exiles to retain ties with their ancestral homeland. In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," the position of Mr. Pirzada reveals an exilic experience of those who still lies in their homeland and they are uncomfortable in diaspora. The nostalgia about Mr. Pirzada's home and his family

existed solely in his memory as he carried two watches; the wrist watch was set to the time in America and the pocket watch was set to the time in Dacca. Interestingly, his exilic predicament is a common experience to Andrew Lam who tries to bring an imagining of Vietnam into the American context of exile:

Sometimes I go to a Vietnamese restaurant in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. I sit and stare at two wooden clocks hanging on the wall. The left one is carved in the shape of voluptuous S: the map of Vietnam. The one on the right is hewed in the shape of the deformed tooth: the map of America. Ticktock, ticktock. They run at different times. Ticktock, ticktock. I was born a Vietnamese. Ticktock, ticktock I am reborn an American. Ticktock, ticktock I am of one soul. Ticktock, ticktock. Two hearts. (qtd. in Christopher 212)

Lahiri's personal life has been no less a migrant, drifting from shore to shore for an endless search of self. Her "The Third and Final Continent" reveals a drifting course of her parents from India to England, and finally to America. In an interview with Gaiutra Bahadur, Lahiri accepts that the story is difficult to write from the point of view of a man which is based on the real experience of a migrant. She says, "There was the added challenge of writing something based in real life. It was based on my father's past. There was the challenge of working with real facts and preserving truth, yet having to disguise them to make it fiction." This story evokes not only an experience of an expatriate but also the universal experience of all those who abandoned their family, home and place in search of a better home. Jaya Lakshmi Rao, Reader in English in A.V.N. college of Visakhapatnam, writes about the narrator, "The Calcutta boy, who made it as a jobholder in a Library at MIT Boston, reminds us many Indians who by trial and tribulation settle abroad for a better life."

Lahiri is also conscious of her role in this regard in 'interpreting' the world, and thus creating new link between past and present. Of course the themes of 'hyphenated identity' 'double consciousnesses' and 'conflicting selves' persist in her writings, as well as confusion and ambiguity of the migrant existence.

Alienation: Longing for Semi-community

Alienation is one of the major themes Jhumpa Lahiri deals in her short stories. In "The Third and Final Continent," the suffering of an expatriate in an alienated stage is revealed through the waves rumbled in narrator's psychology. His experience of "Flashing sirens heralded endless emergencies and a fleet of buses rumbled past, their doors opening and closing with a powerful hiss" (175) on a night during his first weeks in America reminded him the same kind of suffocation ". . . noise was constantly distracting at times suffocating. I felt it deep in my ribs just as I had felt furious drome of the engine on the SS Roma" (175) on a three weeks voyage to England, his second continent. As an outsider from different culture and territory, he was not accustomed to the new milieu; he was afflicted with a sense of loneliness ". . . no glittering ocean to thrill my soul, no breeze to cool my face, no one to talk to . . ." (175).

His was the same sense of exile that the title character of "Mrs. Sen's" experienced in an unfamiliar world. "Mrs. Sen's" is a story that defines what emotional exile is. As she found herself cut off from her milieu, she experienced of being foreign when she came to live with her husband in an American city from Calcutta. Lahiri's portrayal of an alienated soul is worth noticing in Mrs. Sen who was always longing for an expression in her utter frustration:

She flung open the drawers of the bureau and the door of the closet, filled with saris of every imaginable texture and shade, brocaded with

gold and silver threads. Some were transparent, tissue thin, others as thick as drapes with tassels knotted along the edges. In the closet they were on hangers; in the drawers they were folded flat, or wound tightly like thick scrolls. She sifted through the drawers, letting saris spill over the edges. “When have I ever worn this one? And this? And this?” She tossed the sari one by one from the drawers, then pried several from their hangers. They landed like a pile of tangled sheets on the bed. The room was filled with an intense smell of mothballs. (125)

Mrs. Sen is depicted as a typical Indian housewife who suffered silently in her isolation. Her loneliness is so structured that can be compared with Shukumar’s, who was also a victim of intensified feeling of loneliness in “A Temporary Matter.” He had been “. . . working at home, trying to complete the final chapters of his dissertation on agrarian revolts in India.” (2), while his wife Shoba stayed out. Interestingly, Lahiri foregrounds the circumstances of his alienation as he, “. . . would lie in their bed until he grew bored, gazing at his side of the closet which Shoba always left partly open, at the row of the tweed jackets and corduroy trousers he would not have to choose from to teach his classes that semester”(4).

The happy conjugal relationship between Shoba and Shukumar was almost finished when she delivered a stillborn baby; then they went on pretending behind which a deep boredom accumulated. Out of frustration, “. . . all the friends and the friends of friends they now systematically avoided” (9). Like them Mrs. Das, in “Interpreter of Maladies,” also “. . . declined invitations from her one or two college friends, to have lunch or shop in Manhattan. Eventually the friends stopped calling her, so that she was left at home all day with the baby surrounded by toys” (63). Although Shoba and Shukumar fully lived in nuclear setups, they are portrayed as the

confused couple to shape their lives and relationships. However their estrangement between them was lessened as the electric company turned off the electricity for one hour each night for five consecutive nights. “Something happened when the house was dark. They were able to talk to each other again” (9). The nights seemed to be more comfortable than days for Shukumar who attempted to retain his own family but the event was followed by a hidden tragedy what Shoba “. . . had spent these past evenings preparing for a life without him” (21). Lahiri’s characters both male and female are doomed to live alone in home as her Mrs. Sen’s and Mrs. Das’s loneliness parallels to Shukumar’s.

The first –generation immigrants in America were not used to this kind of isolation as the narrator in “The Third and Final Continent” wondered how Mrs. Croft lived alone in the final days of her life: “I was mortified. I had assumed Mrs. Croft was in her eighties, perhaps as old as ninety. I had never known a person who had lived for over a century. That this person was a widow who lived alone mortified me further” (187). The absence of social relationship, a common phenomenon of American life, which took Mrs. Croft to a state of loneliness, may be a ground reality for the narrator in his new world. But the relationship was a confusion as well as burden for the second-generation Indian immigrants in America who were accustomed to this kind of nuclear family as Mrs. Croft had been living. Thus they seemed to live in a self imposed nuclear setups. Shoba “. . . needed some time alone” (21) in her life and work. Perhaps it was a safe and incredibly helpful way in her life what she might have been led to believe by the western life style.

Both Shoba and Mrs. Das opted to be free from family responsibility however Mrs. Das could not reach to make decision like that of Shoba. Mrs. Das’s loneliness was a common experience that most of the housewives feel for their husbands when

they were busy during working hours. Loneliness was an uncomfortable stage of their lives, linked to the feeling of insecurity that might result in anxiety. Rajeev Gupta, a senior consultant in Psychiatry of Dayananda Medical College in Punjab, writes, “The very idea that they have to live alone makes many females depressed” (32). But in Mrs. Sen’s case, her resistance against loneliness weakened the feeling of social protection she had had in her home. “At home that is all you have to do. Not everybody has a telephone. But raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements” (116). Mrs. Sen’s sense of nostalgia was expressed with her disturbing emotion in her isolation that underscores a sense of her community which she had left in her home, Calcutta.

In Lahiri’s stories, the “community sentiment” is more clearly brought out as her characters lacked social relationship. So far as we find in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” it was the same kind of social touch that Lilia’s parents wanted in American society but their “. . . neighbors never dropped by without an invitation”(24). In their intolerable aloneness, they explored a semi community to maintain home culture including those who were familiar to their part of culture and geography. While noting this loss, their search for a little Indian community is perhaps the one recurring theme in Lahiri’s fiction. So, their sense of exile functioned like a magnet because it feels more comfortable with the crowd than to be alone. In this context, Gupta explains, “Socializing with our friends and relatives help us to feel better and relaxed” (26).

A sense of insecurity is constant presence in Lahiri’s fictions which is concerned with the alienation in the isolated sphere of diaspora. Her characters, being

surrounded by strangers in new milieu, are highly sensitive of the intensified feeling of helplessness. In “The Third and Final Continent,” the narrator was terribly bewildered of the burden of fear how an Indian woman had become helpless on the street of Massachusetts.

A few days after receiving the letter, as I was walking to work in the morning, I saw an Indian woman on the other side of Massachusetts Avenues, wearing a sari with its free end nearly dragging on the footpath, and pushing a child in a stroller. An American woman with a small black dog on a leash was walking to one side of her. Suddenly the dog began barking. From the other side of the street I watched as the Indian woman, startled, stopped in her path, at which point the dog leapt up and seized the end of sari between its teeth . . . leaving the Indian woman to fix her sari in the middle of the foot path , and quiet her crying child. (190)

It was because of the helpless surrounding for the Indian woman that he saw on the road of Massachusetts or it was because of the same sense of insecurity that Mrs. Sen felt at her loneliness in America, Mala’s husband linked himself with the responsibility of a husband towards his wife in a new milieu. His realization to provide protection to Mala from such a mishap was necessarily a primary concern of a husband for his wife.

Such a mishap, I realized that morning would soon be my concern. It was my duty to take care of Mala, to welcome her and protect her. I would have to buy her her first pair of snow boots, her first winter coat. I would have to tell her which streets to avoid, which way the traffic

came, tell her to wear her sari so that the free end did not drag on the footpath. (190)

Lahiri's focus on the restlessness of Indian immigrants who are haunted by a sense of displacement is decidedly a diasporic predicament. "When one is surrounded by unknown people, one becomes anxious and insecure. It adds to one's fear and restlessness" (Gupta 33). Mr. Pirzada's concern for Lilia's security, for instance in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," reflects a father's worries towards his daughter. Interestingly, he developed an emotional link with Lilia during his visit to her house, or because he got the image of his own daughters, to whom he was missing, in Lilia. Although Lilia was born in America and she was accustomed to the ways and traditions of that society, Mr. Pirzada, who was from the East Pakistan and haunted by a sense of exile, seemed to take worry over the matter of her protection in the conditional circumstances like, "But if it rains? If they lose their way?" (38). Lilia found a sense of insecurity in his voice and observed panic in his eyes for her as he wanted to accompany her and her friend Dora in a dark night of Halloween. She narrated, "'Perhaps I should accompany them?' Mr. Pirzada suggested. He looked suddenly tired and small, standing there in his splayed, stockinged feet, and his eyes contained a panic I had never seen before" (38). Similarly in "Mrs. Sen's," Mrs. Sen's sense of insecurity and lingering sense of nostalgia are highlighted by her isolation. So, she wanted to assure, "If I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs would someone come?" (116).

What parallels are drawn among Lahiri's characters in their isolated worlds are utter frustration and sense of insecurity. She takes pity on her characters who were longing for semi community in diaspora. Against the backdrop of their alienation,

Lilia's parents "... used to trail their fingers, at the start of each new semester, through the column of the university directory, circling surnames familiar to their part of world" (24). Mala and her husband had the same inner craving for emotional connection to other Bengali who were also familiar to their part of world. He said, together they "... explored the city and met other Bengali, some of whom are still friends today" (196). Lahiri's characters who were longing for a semi- community in diaspora is an attempt to reestablishing their imagined homeland that was distant in time and space.

Confusion and Trauma at the Loss of Home and Relationship

Family was the only world, in Lahiri's stories, where the female characters of the first generation immigrant lived after their marriage. Mrs. Sen, Lilia's mother and Mala are depicted as the typical Indian housewives whose primary duties concerned serving their husbands and setting up their homes. As Mala's husband remembered: "The first morning when I came into the kitchen she had heated up the leftovers and set a plate with a spoonful of salt on its edge on the table, assuming I would eat rice for breakfasts, as most Bengali husbands did" (192). It was all up to these Bengali women how they served their guests with Indian recipes, rarely obtainable outside local markets. Lilia remembered her mother "... appeared from the kitchen with a plate of mince mint kababs with coriander chutney" (28) as soon as Mr. Pirzada and her father seated. These Bengali women of the first generation in diaspora represent the housewives of traditional modes of family who came later than their husband. At the loss of kinship ties, the non- working wives like them seem to lack a real motivation to change at new cultural setting and expose themselves completely to

western values on migrating to America. In this respect, Chaudhary M. Siddique writes:

This is most true of non-working wives who generally lacked motivation to participate in the process of familial decision-making, but on the other hand, showed a greater interest in household chores. Interestingly, in a large number of families, the wives' low integration in the new cultural setting has given rise to the following two paradoxical consequences: value-conflict with the husband, and emotional dependency upon them. Obviously, the situation of value-conflict has arisen because of wives' lesser experience of living abroad and an incomplete exposure to western values [. . .]. On the other hand, their greater perception of the loss of kinship ties, which they have not overcome as yet due to the recency of their separation from kinfolks, had led to their increasing reliance upon the husband for emotional solace and satisfaction. (97-98)

But for the women of second-generation Indian immigrants, who were born, reared and educated in the liberal society of America, their family and home seemed to be less important. Ray E. Baber found: "The democratization of the home that has come about with the rise of women to a new status has brought overt conflict under the old patriarchal system. Women are refusing to be bossed as they once were and are inclined to make their own decisions on important matters" (242). Lahiri examines how her characters maintain an unhappy distance from their cultural values of marriage. In old Patriarchal system a wife is supposed to be more responsible than her husband to take care of her children, but the bickering between a husband and a wife

upon taking their daughter to toilet in “The Interpreter of Maladies” symptomizes the faltering marriage of the second generation. “Mr. and Mrs. Das bickered about who should take Tina to toilet. Eventually Mrs. Das relented when Mr. Das pointed out that he had given the girl her bath the night before” (43). Their tour guide Mr. Kapasi also noticed “Mr. and Mrs. Das behaved like an older brother and sister, not parent. It seemed that they were in charge of the children only for the day; it was hard to believe they were regularly responsible for anything other than themselves” (43).

Family disintegration and loneliness are the key factors Lahiri has posited as another trauma or aspect of diaspora in her stories. In “The Third and Final Continent,” Mala and her husband could not maintain upon the family organization as their only son grew to adulthood. The story evokes an emotional dependence of old parents who missed their grown child as the narrator said that his wife “weeps for our son” (197). Both of them were doomed to live an isolated life at the absence of their son in the home of their own, twenty miles from Boston. The disenchanted, lonely, old parents are the unhappy souls who are still wrapped up in an attempt to retain their own family, as Baber argues, “. . . parents who, when the last birdling has flown the nest, find no satisfaction alone in their home. They have become so wrapped up in the interests of their children that they cannot be happy away from them” (246).

The common silence that Lahiri’s characters feel in their sub-nuclear status is portrayed with a confusion and trauma at their loss of home and relationship. In “Interpreter of Maladies,” the basic problem of their lives is that they were conditioned to live a busy life being distanced from their families. “Only occasionally did they go out after Ronny was born and even more rarely did they entertain. Raj didn’t mind; he looked forward to coming home from teaching and watching

television and bouncing Ronny on his knee” (64). Mr. Das’s avoidance to understand the emotion of his wife who stayed in home all day resulted into family crisis that embittered their married life.

Similarly, “A Temporary Matter” is based on family disintegration that underscores the relationship of husband and wife on an individual basis. Shukumar’s passivity towards the emotional support for Shoba, after her delivery, or her indifference to both home and husband disturbed their relationship. In this regard, Shobhaa De’ writes in her *Spouse* about the basic link between a husband and wife: “We are all vulnerable, emotionally needy people in search of love and stability in our lives- this is the basic truth, no matter how much we may want to disguise it” (79). In Lahiri’s stories, not only Mr. and Mrs. Das but also Shoba and Shukumar were acutely unaware of their mutual need to verbalize every aspect of their lives. A happy couple is beyond being misunderstood but neither did they seem to care the meaning of their relationship nor did they seem to understand the value of home that is based on mutual emotional support. Their emotion and feelings were held in the mechanical routine of American life in the form of tension. Shoba moved from the office to the home, from the home to the office, thus her life became a constant repetition like Mr. Das’s. She “. . . treated the house as if it were a hotel” (6).

Lahiri’s stories have captured the hopeless subject caught within the framework of missing or the sense of loss her characters experienced in diaspora that resulted in depression. Though Lilia’s parents celebrated at the good news of Mr. Pirzada’s reunion with his family after the civil war was over, Lilia was troubled in his absence; she inherited the same sense of missing as Mr. Pirzada had for his wife and daughters. “Though I had not seen him for months, it was only then I felt Mr.

Pirzada's absence. It was only then, raising my water glass in his name, that I knew what it meant to miss someone who had missed his wife and daughters for so many months" (42).

As Lilia observed both a restless father, meanwhile was in America, and the insanity of violence in his homeland, Dacca, with a hope in the hopeless situation, she wondered, "what would happen if suddenly his seven daughters were to appear on television, smiling and waving and blowing kisses to Mr. Pirzada from a balcony" (31). But this conditional imagination to relieve Mr. Pirzada from the traumatic experience of missing never became true. She narrated, "I imagined how relieved he would be. But this never happened" (31). Her concern for Mr. Pirzada's distress or Mr. Pirzada's concern for accompanying Lilia and her friend during a Halloween night projects an emotional relationship that was developing between a grieved father, who was missing his daughters many miles away, and a ten years old girl, who was praying for the safety of Mr. Pirzada's family every night. "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" evokes not only an experience of a single pilgrim but also the universal experience of all those who are living away from their family, home, and country.

In relation to this story Lahiri seems to touch the same sentiments of an Afghani, who builds up an emotional connection with a five years old Bengali girl, Rabindra Nath Tagore has portrayed in his famous story "The Cabuliwallah." Tagore discovers the psyche of a long lost father and brings to the light an expression: "You have a little girl. I too have one like her in my own home. I think of her and bring this fruit to your child" (202). Similarly Mr. Pirzada who came to eat dinner and watch news in Lilia's house presented her a variety of chocolates every evening.

Lahiri's characters who migrated to America or who born to Indian parents in America are the confused souls at the loss of their community and parent culture.

"Changes and dislocations in their cultural environment will be followed by dislocations in personality itself" (Nisbet 17). It is the common experience that her characters felt in diaspora at the loss of home and relationship. Thus she projects the traumatic sentiment of Indian-Americans which may lead them to a paralyzing sense of individual helplessness and despair.

The Seeking Self: The Imaginary Trip Back to Ancestral Heritage

Lahiri expresses her search for real identity, the existential concern, the sense of loneliness that her characters feel through an echo of nostalgia. In "A Temporary Matter," Lahiri gives us two major characters that are tortured by their own meaninglessness. She projects a sense of emptiness and describes some phenomenon of human life. Lahiri's Shukumar experimented with loneliness like a true existential hero, seeking meaning in life, though he got nothing except that he came to the realization of his hollow existence in the end. Lahiri sums up his tragedy: "It sickened Shukumar, knowing that she had spent those past evenings preparing for a life without him . . ." (21). There was not only Shukumar who was seeking something that had lost long ago in his life but in it Shoba was also a character who had a miserable psychic life. She preferred non-existence to a meaningless existence. Thus, their relationship went with mutual indifference. Lahiri's characters are the person for whom alienation is the ultimate reality that compels them to review their past, "They wept together, for the things they now knew" (22).

Lahiri's fictional world is the world of journey that turns her characters into the reality of their lives. She foregrounds the confusion of her uprooted characters that are living under an uncomfortable shadow of double consciousness. Both Shoba and

Shukumar were trapped between “being-at-relationship” and “not-being-at-relationship” as they were living together but in their own separate world:

These days Shoba was always gone by the time Shukumar woke up. He would open his eyes and see the long black hairs she shed on her pillow and think of her, dressed, sipping her third cup of coffee already, in her office downtown, where she searched for typographical errors in textbooks and marked them, in a code she had once explained to him, with an assortment of colored pencils. She would do the same for his dissertation, she promised, when it was ready. He envied her the specificity of her task, so unlike the elusive nature of his. He was a mediocre student who had facility for absorbing details with curiosity. Until September he had been diligent if not dedicated, summarizing chapters, outlining arguments on pads of yellow lined papers. (4)

Shukumar’s and Shoba’s trouble started when they finally lost touch with one another despite sharing a single roof. The tragic loss of their baby led them to a breakdown in communication. They lost interest in relationship as they were shrinking into sub-nuclear status by “. . . avoiding each other in their three bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible” (4).

Lahiri’s fictions often verbalize the silent voice of past which signifies either a journey back to India or an imaginary trip to ancestral heritage. In this context Aruti Nayar says:

Lahiri negotiates the dilemmas of the cultural spaces lying across the continents with a master’s touch. Though endowed with a distinct universal appeal, her stories do bring out rather successfully the predicament of the Indians who trapeze between and across two

traditions, one inherited and left behind, and the other, encountered but not necessarily assimilated. (1)

Her characters live between cultures which give them an extra layer of complexity to situations and relationships that are difficult in and of them. In fact, they are incessantly striving to answer the question of their divided identity in “in between” the demarcations of their past and present. For such characters their journey is the journey inwards. Thus, their aching quest for their root takes them to the land of their origin. In “Interpreter of Maladies,” Lahiri begins the story of a couple Mr. and Mrs. Das with their journey to Konark Temple. Their journey kept alive with a changing dimension of Mrs. Das who was in search of “some kind of remedy” (65) for her total restlessness or dissatisfaction. Ultimately her search got a final touch of realism which can be linked to her journey from confusion to consciousness. It is this journey through which Mrs. Das felt, “. . . some certain knowledge seemed to pass before her eyes . . .” (66).

Her characters were longing for a meaningful connection but they did not find what they had expected. Mrs. Das and her tour guide Mr. Kapasi, in “Interpreter of Maladies,” both were longing for a meaningful selfhood. The sudden intimacy during their travel concerns a meaningful connection they were searching in each other. Mr. Kapasi never had tried to know his “a thankless occupation” (51) before Mrs. Das gave regard to his another job as an interpreter for a doctor who did not understand Gujarati speaking patients.

“When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” is the story in which social and political realities precede over probing of the individual’s mind. The story discusses the psychic problem of immigrants particularly the one who has left his family. It records the formation of identity from geographical division to cultural difference. Lilia

remembered what her father had told her, “‘Mr. Pirzada is a Bengali, but he is a Muslim’. . . ‘Therefore he lives in East Pakistan, not India’ ” (26). Lahiri picks up the story at a point when Lilia’s father told her that Mr. Pirzada was not an Indian as their country had been divided into India and Pakistan. At first, Lilia who was not conscious of the civil war in Bangladesh does not understand Mr. Pirzada’s exilic predicament, “Another refugee, I am afraid, on Indian territory” (28).

Lahiri’s portrait of Lilia is a typical example of children born to Indian parents whose history is being erased. Her seeking self was a search of oneself; bearing an Indian identity she tried to understand the difference between an Indian and non-Indian. Her notion of being an Indian is worth noticed as she made a comparative study between Mr. Pirzada and her parents:

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. (25)

But, her misjudgment about him as an Indian had been corrected by her father. Now it had been an interesting subject for her to study the difference between Mr. Pirzada and her Parents, “Now that I had learned Mr. Pirzada was not an Indian, I began to study him with extra care, to try to figure out what made him different” (30).

As a sensitive young girl, Lilia observed the continual dimension of seeking self. She discovered Mr. Pirzada’s identity that was determined, at first, by social and then by political division. When he had come to America, he had been a Pakistani but

he returned to his homeland as a Bangladeshi. This incidence provides a changing dimension of a man in various contexts.

“The Third and Final Continent” evokes not only an experience of an expatriate but also the universal experience of all those who abandoned their family, home and place in search of a better home. His search for a home was the place where he could have better opportunity, or his search was an escape from the situation he had due to his family disintegration and economical depression followed by his father’s death that haunted him throughout his life: “My mother refused to adjust to life without him . . . neither I, nor my brother, nor concerned relatives, nor psychiatric clinics on Rashibihari Avenue could save her . . . my brother abandoned his schooling . . .” (187). So, it was his seeking self for home that drove him in a new world where he settled and learnt to adjust with an unfamiliar society of America. Like many immigrants he left his country as he narrated “I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home . . .” (198).

His specific notion of a home that necessarily created his identity is the main component of the story. His family lived in their own house and now they were “American citizen” (197). As he was seeking his self, so did his wife Mala. She did not possess a fair complexion, one of the qualifications that determined the identity of a perfect bride in her society even though she “. . . could cook, knit, embroider, sketch, landscapes, and recite poems by Tagore . . .” (181). Her seeking self led her beyond the boundaries of her homeland and her community where she had been denied due to dark complexion and where her selfhood might have lost in vanity. So, her journey from India to America was compulsive for her parents to send their “. . . only child halfway across the world in order to save her spinsterhood” (180).

Lahiri's Mala represents the first generation Indian woman in America who set off an unknown journey toward a new milieu in search of a new home. However in this new home her seeking self did not seem to be completed as she was not touched and kissed by her husband even after a week. Mala's quest of self came to an end when she visited with her husband to Mrs. Croft's house. Mrs. Croft scrutinized her ". . . from top to toe . . . a woman in sari, with a dot painted on her forehead and bracelets stacked on her wrists . . ." (195) and at last justified "She is a perfect lady!" (195).

The justified selfhood determined by cultural environment where we dwell has always been an important aspect of our identity which gives us role to play in society. In this way Lahiri links this story to a full stop of seeking self in new cultural environment. "At night we kissed, shy at first but quickly bold, and discovered pleasure and solace in each other's arms" (196). However the themes of family disintegration and cultural displacement persist in their story as they felt an unhappy distance between the first generation and the second generation. Family disintegration had been a continual process in their lives but they maintained temporary connection with their son, on weekends, for his cultural orientation ". . . so that he can eat rice . . . with his hands, and speak in Bengali . . ." (197).

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* is the maladies of melancholy, trauma and loss in the context of Indian diaspora. Moreover, it is a story of diasporics who are cut off from their geographical, cultural and social milieu and experience of being foreign in an unfamiliar world. Her fictions reflect the exilic predicament of South Asians who are the alienated individuals living away from their homeland. In fact they are the alienated souls, haunted by memories of home in the western societies. Their mourning and melancholy in their isolated worlds, which is never fully with them, is an experience of sense of exile. Thus their sense of uprooting is marked by a strong thrust of inventing, conceptualizing, and fashioning India either from their own memories or from the memories of their parents.

Lahiri, living in a western society, away from her origin, tries to depict the migrants' experience and make her identity of her own root in her writing. Her focus to bring Indian culture to her fictions is a cultural interpretation of parent culture, a theme of loss and thus, indeed, of memory. Her navigation between two cultures and her role as an interpreter between two worlds occupies an intermediate terrain on the cusp between home culture and host culture. In other words, her short fictions can be defined as exile narratives that reveal the memorial reflection of both place and past.

Lahiri seeks to provide a context to the silence of exiled tongues who find themselves frequently at a loss. Her characters that migrated to the west in search of better future or opportunities are the lost generation confused by "cultural shock" in an alien environment. Such an intercultural contact gives them a sense of insecurity and lingering sense of nostalgia at the loss of homeland. However, her female

characters, separated from the ties of kinship, struggle to maintain the home culture in an unfamiliar world.

The second generation characters, Lahiri portrays in her stories are the generation born to Indian immigrant parents. However, they are never certain why they are erased from the cultural context that has been left many miles away. They are the confused generation trapped between parent culture and host culture. Indeed, Lahiri herself represents this generation who feels tense pressure to be two selves, one representing the country of origin and the other representing the country of migration. Their individuality carries a hyphenated identity, a new version of identity as a result of “sandwich culture”.

Lahiri interprets the predicament of hyphenated identity, tangled with double consciousness in diaspora. The basic problem of her characters is the complexity of double consciousness that gives them an extra layer of dilemma in relationship. They are the confused souls between “being at relationship” and “not being at relationship.” Her characters are conditioned to live in sub-nuclear status held in the mechanical routine of American life being distanced from both relationship and home. Their hyphenated identity is a confusion of selfhood in the fusion of two diametrically opposite cultures and societies. Thus they live under an uncomfortable shadow of dilemma which projects a sense of emptiness.

The issue underlined in the discussion above invariably concludes and tacitly verifies the idea that the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri are a strong pronouncement for the problems and frustrations of the characters despite widespread claims of the people in the favor of racial equality, harmony and fraternity against often committed cruel and inhuman segregations all over the world. Lahiri succeeds in delivering the message that there are several unspoken facts about the diasporic predicament of Indian-

American, and there is yet much to tell about the issues like exile, identity crisis and search for root.

The stories in Lahiri's famous *Interpreter of Maladies* address as shown above the sensitive dilemmas in the lives of Indians or Indian immigrants, with themes such as cultural displacement, loss of home and relationship and the disconnection between the first and the second generation United States immigrants. Her stories are the expression of the traumatic experience of diaspora with a clear emphasis on hyphenated identity and search for roots which are often revealed through her writing not only this one but her others novels and essays too.