

## Chapter 3

### ‘Home is Where Your Feet are’:

#### Analyzing Fiction by Second Generation Indian Diasporic Writers

The scenario of diasporic literature has taken a gradual turn. This is to say that the second generation Indian diasporic writers don't cling merely to the conventions of diaspora, as migration experience of their ancestors has become a mere historical event for them or for some well adapted as a part of life. Though alienation is very much a part of the experience of the Indian diaspora, it doesn't mean that people, even if at home in any part of the world, will not become victims of the sense of alienation. In the prevailing era social alienation is replaced by metaphysical alienation. The second generation Indian diasporic writers- Neil Bissoondath, the nephew of authors V.S. Naipaul and born in Trinidad, Canada; Hari Kunzru, a British Indian novelist and journalist of Kashmiri Pandit origin and born in London; Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian American author, born in London but moved with her family to the United States when she was three years old, etc- tend to touch the contemporary phenomena such as self-consciousness (paranoia at some extent due to the notion of subjectivity), the quest for understanding the self and (not retrieving the selfhood as if lost and found), finding a grasp of one's place in the world (to search for your place in the world, you must first define the world in which you live, an endless task in itself), endless deferral and the distinction between life and art, reality and imagination, the blankness of suburban life (a then-recent phenomenon), a disease of aimlessness and spiritual emptiness that came about from gratuitous comfort and tedious routine. In the selected stories from two short story collections, *Digging Up the Mountains* and *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows* by Neil Bissoondath, selected stories from two short story collections, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth* by Jhumpa Lahiri and a novel

*Transmission* by Hari Kunzru and many other second generation Indian diasporic writers, we can encounter the same aimlessness, spiritual emptiness, paranoia, the blankness of suburban life and finding a grasp of one's place in the world.

This chapter explores the five primary sources by the second generation Indian diasporic writers - *Digging Up the Mountains*, *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*, *Interpreter of Maladies*, *Unaccustomed Earth* and *Transmission* - in the context of the fundamental postcolonial characteristics such as Uncertainty, loss of national tradition, sense of Rootlessness, Double consciousness, Generation conflicts, Dual Identity, Hybridity, Identity Crisis/ Identity formation, Ethnicity/ Cultural Change, Indigeneity/ Lack of Sense of Belonging, Discrimination, Assimilation/ Survival, Imagining Homeland, Alterity/ Otherness/ Exoticisation, Loneliness/ Alienation/ Sense of Loss, Multicultural Identity, Sense of In-betweenness and so on, derived from the postcolonial literary theories.

### **3.1. *Digging Up the Mountains* and *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows* by Neil Bissoondath**

Neil Devindra Bissoondath, the nephew of authors V.S. Naipaul, was born in Trinidad, and lives in Quebec. It is expected that Bissoondath's narratives often focus on the experience of (im)migrants for he has a family history of dual migration from India to Trinidad to Canada, where he has been living since 1973 and is considered by the literary world as both a Trinidadian and a Canadian writer. Bissoondath was born to Sati and Crisen Bissoondath in Trinidad, West Indies, where he lived until the age of eighteen and after his high school education; he left Trinidad to attend York University, Toronto. He earned his degree of B.A. in French in 1977 and began teaching French and English at the Inlingua School of Language. Between 1980 and 1985, he taught at the Language Workshop, Toronto. Although the aspects of the immigrants' experiences in Toronto that absorbs Bissoondath in his fiction, particularly in his collections of

stories, he has never regretted his decision to migrate to Canada. There are six novels - *A Casual Brutality*, *The Innocence of Age*, *The Worlds Within Her*, *Doing the Heart Good*, *The Unyielding Clamour of the Night*, *The Soul of All Great Designs*; one novella *Postcards from Hell*; two short story collections - *Digging Up Mountains* and *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*; and a non-fiction book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* to his credit.

Bissoondath is the author of several award-winning works of fiction, including *A Casual Brutality*, *Digging Up the Mountains*, *The Innocence of Age*, and in non-fiction, *Selling Illusions*. His first volume is *Digging Up the Mountains* (1986), a collection of fourteen short stories, most of which had been published before in such journals as *Saturday Night* and broadcast on the CBC literary program *Anthology*. This volume was shortlisted for the City of Toronto Book Awards. "Dancing", one of the short stories, won the McClelland and Stewart Award for fiction and the national Magazine Award in 1986. *A Casual Brutality* is a novel, shortlisted for the Trillium Award and the W. H. Smith First Novel Award. His novel, *The Worlds within Her* was nominated for a Governor General's Award.

About Bissoondath's first short story collection ***Digging Up the Mountains***, The New York Times quotes: "The superb short stories in Neil Bissoondath's first collection are alive with movement and flight, leaving and returning, insecurity and impermanence. Peopled by exiles and immigrants, deracines and runaways - perhaps the true representatives of the mobile 20th century - these are tales of two worlds, usually the Caribbean and Canada - and of those who are stretched between the two." In their book, *The Fiction of South Asians in North America and the Caribbean: A Critical Study of English Language Works Since 1950*, Mitali P. Wong and Zia Hasan writes:

Bissoondath's short stories in *Digging Up the Mountains* present characters of different ethnic background who try to cope with displacement, change, oppression, and migration. The emerging vision is almost existentialist, with recurring motifs of alienation and self-division....Of all the South Asian writers in Canada, Bissoondath has shown some of the problems that immigrants and visitors face in contemporary Canada. (107)

In the context of this story collection, Victor J. Ramraj says:

Bissoondath is alert to the plight of his uprooted protagonists, but he stands apart, often too far apart, from them. His writing is disciplined and steady with none of Austen Clarke's uncontrolled anger, but it lacks Clarke's affectionate portrayal – indiscriminate though it is – of the Caribbean migrant and exile. (217)

There are several characters in this collection who are Caribbean immigrants in Canada and who are trying to overcome the sense of dislocation, change, subjugation and resettlement. The setting of all the stories of *Digging Up the Mountains* are internal rather than external, wherein all the characters are confronting the fears and frustrations, being trapped in the rootlessness of modern life. The sense of fear, uncertainty, and insecurity associated with being an immigrant, is a prominent theme of Bissoondath's writings. As Lisa R. Rawlings states:

In the uprooting phase, which entails separation from one's place of origin or habitual residence, either voluntary or involuntary, several events may be experienced. These include physical departure, difficult life circumstances and multiple losses, including loss of family, friends, health, community and culture. These events may be accompanied by persistent uncertainty, anxiety, fear, trauma, stress of relief depending on the nature of the uprooting. (149)

The same sense of fear, uncertainty, and insecurity experienced by the immigrants in the host land, the land which they feel they belong to, is witnessed in the title story “Digging Up the Mountains”, which depicts the life of the protagonist Hari Beharry, a second generation immigrant, who wants simply to tend his garden and die in his own house, leading a comfortable life on a recently independent unnamed Caribbean island. Hari lived a comfortable life, until political plights worsen due to recent independence and a new government, declaring a state of emergency and making all the right progressive noises. The island’s earlier simplicity was replaced by the contemptuous politics of corruption, friends are mysteriously disappeared, and some are shot, leaving behind unknown threatening phone calls and letters for Hari. As he feels, “Now things had changed: the mountains spoke only of threat. He didn’t know if he could trust them any more” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 2-3). There was a time, when Hari enjoyed watching and attached to the range of mountains surrounding his house, while his father still clung to inherited images of India. “In those mountains, Hari had once found comfort...it was through them, through their brooding permanence, that he developed an attachment to this island, an attachment his father had admitted only in later life...” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 2). However, the circumstances compelled him to keep a revolver for the safety of his family, as the violence increased gradually, followed by fright. He is not ready to give up, as he declares to his wife, “This is my land and my house. Let them come. It’s bullet in their backside” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 4). When Hari’s wife suggests flying away from the worsening situation of the island, he denies and says, “This is my island. My father born here, I born here, you born here, our children born here. Nobody can make me leave. Nobody can take it away” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 13). “It was in this house that Hari planned to entertain his grandchildren and their children, to this house that he would welcome future Beharry hordes, from this house that he

would be buried. The house spoke of generations” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 14). However, in the recent pathetic situation of the island, Hari gets ready to go into impoverished exile: “Flight had become necessary, and it would be a penniless flight...He could leave with nothing. It was the price for years of opulent celebrity in a little place going wrong” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 20) and out of repulsion, he digs up the lawn he had been planting in his garden and also desires if he could dig up the range of mountains.

Another story with the similar theme of uncertainty is “Insecurity”, which tells the story of a self-made businessman in the Caribbean - Alistair Ramgoolam, who is worried and confused about the spoilt situation of his inhabitant island by the substandard politics and corruption, and to protect his children from the insecurities of future, he starts investing his money in other countries. Ramgoolam, into the business of the export-import and had witnessed the farewell of the last British Governor, is trying to escape by smuggling out his money and buying a house in Toronto through his elder son because on this island, the protest of the Black people is targeting the Indian immigrants like Ramgoolam, who progresses well. However, Ramgoolam is unable to substantiate his escape from the island because he has two diverse views of the island. On one hand, he has a high regard for the beauty of the island seeing that the foreigners admire its beaches and mountains and considers it as the best place to reside. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the island are now facing the rebellion and emergency like situations ever since the policemen with guns and the students parading Marx and Castro are gradually increasing. He is really worried about his future on the island because he observes that the military action against the protestors is leading the island towards poverty and he has no intention of becoming poor again as “He had no desire to return to the moneyless nobility of his childhood: pride was one thing, stupidity quite another, Alistair Ramgoolam was acutely aware of the difference”

(Bissoondath, *Digging* 71). However, as a traditional Indian, his desire for ready cash and a free house leads him to purchase a house in Toronto out of the balance he has in his bank and “The more insecure he saw his island becoming, the more secure he himself felt” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 72). The new attitude to insecure ‘security’ of the island makes Ramgoolam restless and leaves him perplexed between present and future. “The confusion had been prepared for, and all that was left was enjoyment that squeezed out of the island between now and then” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 72). Moreover, from the conversation about ballet with his son, Ramgoolam realizes that his son has gone far away from him, which indicates that the second generation of (im)migrants have no bonding or attachment to their originality and culture. Now the real insecurity of Ramgoolam is not only of the island but of his next generation who is becoming ignorant of their ancestry and originality and trying to sow new seeds in the new country. Ramgoolam also feels insecure for his children are hardly concerned about their parents who suffer from the loneliness: “He suddenly understood how far his son had gone” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 77).

The element of uncertainty is common to all developing countries because of political instability which is depicted in many stories of *Digging Up the Mountains* as prominent theme and which consequently affects the (im)migrants and their life changing decisions. In the case of Ramgoolam, apparently such predicaments are caused by political instability but gradually it brings to the fore that the causes are not always to blame. Rather, it is a clear case of displacement of the immigrants, who are unable to transfer the truth regarding poverty, their culture and tradition to their next generation who is totally detached from their origin and religious rituals as depicted in the story - the shrine in the house, the wearing of dhoti for prayers and the role of puja as a means of asking a boon or to assure success in life. It is not merely the

outer insecurity but within, which always bother people like Ramgoolam about how to secure such 'insecurity':

He [Ramgoolam] now saw himself as being left behind, caught between the shades of his father and, unexpectedly, of his son. And he knew that his insecurity, until then always in the land around him, in the details of life daily lived, was now within him. (Bissoondath, *Digging* 77)

Another story in the collection, "There Are a Lot of Ways to Die" traces a reverse journey of an immigrant, who finds his own homeland misfit for him after his long residence in a host land. The story traces the sense of displacement of Joseph Heaven to his own home island, after making good fortune in Canada. He sincerely intends to help his island economy, but is accused of exploitation and witnesses his illusions shattered one by one. As Moya Flynn states in her book, *Migrant Resettlement in the Russian Federation: Reconstructing 'homes' and 'Homelands'*:

...the feeling of displacement and loss of 'homeland' that the returning migrants were experiencing would be transitory across generations. The relationship of the first generation to the place of migration is obviously different from that of subsequent generations. Reactions amongst initial returnees to the new 'home' is mediated by memories of what was recently left behind, and by the experiences of disruption and displacement as they try to reorientate, to form new social networks, and learn to negotiate new economic, political and cultural realities. (74)

In the story, Joseph had grown up on a Caribbean island, but after his marriage he moved to Toronto to make good fortune with his wife and presently they moved back to the island after some years in Toronto. On his return to home island, Joseph feels: "Friends and relatives treated



it as a victory, seeking affirmation of the correctness of their cloistered life on the island, the return a defeat for life abroad... Joseph felt like a curiosity, an object not of reverence but of silent ridicule, his the defeat, theirs the victory. The island seemed to close in around him” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 80). However, after getting resettled in his home island, he soon realizes that the island has not remained as how he left it. He starts missing “the recollected civility of life in Toronto” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 81). When on a day, Joseph roam around the island, remembering his various moments from childhood and his time in Toronto, his day on the island could be considered as a nightmare. The island is terribly hot, humid, soggy, gloomy and everywhere Joseph goes seems to be filled with despair. It has turned into a hellhole where crime has become common, where dogs lying dead in the street. Joseph soon realizes that his decision of returning to his home island with a humanistic desire to help his people has proved to be a “big, idealistic mistake” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 91). What disheartens Joseph is the unsolvable absurdity and pathetic life on the island with the lush and disordered beauty of the landscape, rather than the intimidation of setting off violence. He is also demotivated by snobbish and derogatory behavior of his wife and her friends and his old friend Frankie, who is drained of life. He finally decides to leave again, leaving a note for his wife: “He took the notepad and a pencil and sat down...He drew a circle, then a triangle, then a square: the last disappointment, it was the most difficult act. Finally, in big square letters, he wrote: *I am going back*” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 97).

The same sense of displacement is witnessed in another story “Christmas Lunch”, which is set in Canada, and depicts the suppressed aggravation and bafflement of the narrator of the story, who is a Caribbean immigrant, when he deals with some Canadian habits and customs for the first time. The narrator was new in Canada and was invited for Christmas lunch by Raj, an

Indo-Caribbean immigrant and his host, who was a stranger to him. He accepted the invitation, as he had “nowhere else to go, nothing else to do, and it seemed wrong to spend all of a blustery Christmas day in a cold room with only a book for company” (Bissoondath, *Digging* 163). When he reaches for the lunch, he receives a cold welcome by his host and was introduced to other guests who were a group of Indo-Caribbean immigrants and as much strangers as his host. The very ambience and the crowd of strangers were making the narrator uncomfortable. In fact the narrator felt that everybody present for the Christmas get-together, were feeling bitterness, uncomfortable, distressing and alienated and were gathered just to follow the rituals. As a result, at the end of the story, the narrator is having a feeling of lack of belongingness — to the Caribbean, Canada, or anywhere.

Although slavery continued to exist in many era and in many societies such as African, Caribbean, and to name a few, they were not commercial slaves in this modern sense, it is one of the key inheritances of the slave trade and also of colonial rule that has been the creation of the Racism. As Bill Ashcroft and his other co-authors believes, “Slavery was often associated with exogamous groups, captives or members of other groups outside the community, but the post-Renaissance development of an intense ideology of racism produced the peculiarly destructive modern form of commercial, chattel slavery in which all rights and all human values were set aside and from which only a few could ever hope to achieve full manumission (legal freedom). Many of the pseudo-objective, ‘scientific’ discourses by which colonialism justified its practices flowed from the need to rationalize such an indefensible commercial exploitation and oppression, on a mass scale, of millions of human beings” (213-14). As Davidson expresses in his book, *The Search for Africa, History, Culture, Politics*, “...slavery gave birth to racism, at least in its modern form, just as racism became the excuse for slavery’s excesses.” It seems

almost impracticable to separate Racism from slavery, as it has been closely entangled with the colonial form of the institution of slavery.

However, the racism depicted in “Dancing”, another short story from *Digging Up the Mountains*, can be read as a diverse disclosure. As Toorn expresses, “Dancing” depicts the story of a black Caribbean servant woman migrating from Trinidad to Toronto for a better life, where she experiences racism as the underside of “ethnic separatism” (84). The surprising part of the story is that it is not the Caribbean immigrants, but the dominant Canadian ethnicity, who becomes the victim of racialism by the Caribbean immigrants. In other words, the story depicts racism as a means to exploit a social system in which resilience towards other communities is systematized and at the cost of humanity any limit can be crossed. More precisely, the marginalized community has learned to take benefit of this worn-out system of racism, which hardly subsists among the dominant community. As Bissoondath has it, “this is a story that says: not only whites are racist. The fact is that non-whites can also be racist” (Srivastava 319).

Through the story of Sheila, a young black uneducated Caribbean maid, “Dancing” exposes the bitter reality that those Trinidadians, who proclaim to be discriminated by the superior community, may themselves display their very racialism through their own action, and in addition they blame the ethnic mainstream of. Sheila recently joins her sister Annie and her brother Sylvester in Canada for better life and the next day of her arrival, Annie and Syl takes her round the city, leading her to Sylvester’s one bedroom apartment, where they have party with other West Indian friends of Sylvester. After a while during the party, a white neighbour comes complaining about the loud music, but an ugly confrontation occurs between him and partying drunken West Indians and they humiliate the white neighbour badly. Sheila is too upset by the incident that she wants to go back to Trinidad, but her brother rebukes her: “We have every right

to be here [i.e. in Canada]. They [i.e. the Canadians] owe us. And we [i.e. the Caribbean immigrant community] going to collect, you hear me? (Bissoondath, *Digging* 208).

Forced to dance Sheila by the other emigrant Trinidadians at Sylvester's apartment and Sheila's unwilling dancing in the story indicates the unsteadiness of a ghetto state of mind both merciless and repressive in its denial of individuality, as she does not feel like dancing once her fellow Caribbean immigrants have exhibited exactly the kind of cultural chauvinism that she at first wanted to run away from by bidding goodbye to the Caribbean but she soon realizes that she has no choice now. As Sheila feels, "Then Syl grab me and shout, "Somebody put on the music. Turn it up loud-loud. For everybody to hear! This whole damn building! Come, girl, dance. Dance like you never dance before." And I dance. I dance an dance an dance. I dance like I never dance before" (Bissoondath, *Digging* 209).

It is really tragic that Sheila accidentally becomes the part of a violent initiation into a West Indian community, she feels no longer of her own, but she is forced to be the one. After interrogating the story "Dancing" from racist perspective, it can be concluded that the contemporary diasporic identities provide a strong basis from which to oppose contemporary expressions of racism. As Michel Wieviorka writes in his paper "Racism and Diaspora":

Immigrant and mobile population have been able to construct images of identity that are based neither on an assimilationist model, nor defensive strategies against assimilationism rather, the older internal relation between racism and diasporization has been broken by the ability of groups to claim a diasporic status on the basis of a public and not private articulation of self identity.

Neil Bissoondath's *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*, as reviewed by Janice Vaudry:

It is the violence of beating wings that attracts Joaquin's attentions"; and so begins *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*, Neil Bissoondath's third fictional work. It is, however, the solid, consistent and moving writing that attracts our attention and holds it through this collection of short stories. The ten stories included cover a wide range geographically, emotionally and experientially. While one would expect V.S. Naipaul's nephew to write of the immigrant experience, concentrating on those from the Caribbean, he has gone beyond.

As quoted in The New York Times: "Neil Bissoondath's *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*, concerned as it is with that spiritual and material anguish of exiles, seems both an impressive collection of stories and a persuasive document of historical witness." In these short stories, Bissoondath doesn't confine merely to the immigrant experience, focused on those from the Caribbean, rather he has moved out from Montreal to Toronto and from Spain to South America to World War II Paris, with the intention of revealing the past experiences of people from every corner of the world. The word 'uncertainty', or variations of it, the sense of in-betweenness or unbelonging, the injustice of everyday living, from the inevitability of death to the insidiousness of immigration lawyers and the disrespect of children for their parents, is a common concern in these ten stories.

The sense of uncertainty for the future in foreign lands is quite frightening and the diaspora community victimizes to the dialectic tensions in the face of these unremitting circumstances. As Milton Israel states – "by migrating, the expatriate, constrains his ability to live a tradition based life, but not his need. At the same time he becomes part of the challenge to the traditions of his new home by merely being there" (9). The title story of the collection, "On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows" presents a range of characters, mostly exiles from oppressive

regimes, for whom migration into liberal, multi-cultural Canada is beset with profound difficulties and uncertainties. For them a border existence is more than a metaphor, and similarly their 'in-between' status has no positive or celebratory features. In the story, the seven political refugees in a rooming-house, a Vietnamese couple and five single men are identified simply as victims of torture from unspecified Latin American country. They are anxiously waiting in hope of a Canadian visa and all they want is a fighting chance. The story depicts a day time experience of all the seven immigrants, who are desperately waiting to know if their appeal for the position as the immigrant of Canada will be approved or not. Confined to the rooming-house, Joaquin, the central character of the story, exists on the edge of an unknown life beyond him. The situation of the vast experience of the political refugee is indicated by Joaquin and his fellow asylum-seekers, who exist on the other side of the edge of identity: the region of the unbelonging. From the imprisonment of his rooming-house, when he stares to the colourless towers of a few tall buildings of the city, he feels as if: "They suggest an unknown life, a world of blood and flesh and everyday ambition, a life within his sight but not, still, yet, within his grasp" (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 2).

Another fellow asylum-seeker of Joaquin in the rooming-house is Amin, who has already adopted multi-culturalism and plans to change his name to Thomson, a rich and respected name in Canada, as he thinks. Jeremy Windhook, the refugees' lawyer, knows that acceptance of his clients' application for the status as the refugee means the scaling down of difference, assimilation and translation into the symbolic imagery of the Anglo-Canadian host culture. The refugees' future depends completely upon an effective performance in the immigration interview, a set of representations during their interviews, in which they have to extirpate the

remnants of their original belonging, otherness, and their political threat. The uncertainty can be expressed in Joaquin's feelings, when he thinks about Amin's interview:

for today, ...is his tomorrow; today is the day that will determine whether tonight he [Amin] celebrates, or whether tonight he cries...the hard part is not knowing what tomorrow will bring for me. Where will I be? What will I do? Will I be happy, or will I be sad? (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 3)

Joaquin feels: "Tomorrow: it is like a forbidden woman, enticing, creeping into his daydreams, invading his fantasies. It robs him of sleep, grates his nerves into a fearful impotence" (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 5). Once Joaquin returns from La Barricada, a restaurant frequented by illegal immigrants, a place Joaquin thinks the only refuge for refugees: "It is like a closet for the Soul, built for containing dusty memories of lives long lost, for perpetuating the resentments of politics long past. Here, he [Joaquin] thinks, there is no tomorrow; here, yesterday becomes forever" (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 15). When he returns to the tensions and distances of the rooming-house, Windhook hands over Amin's somber grey jacket to him for his interview next day and informs that Amin has been refused entry, as he is classified as an economic refugee and he is scheduled to be deported, not to his country of origin, but to Germany, his last point of departure. The news hollows out the entire space in rooming-house. The anguish and despair of Amin for refusal as immigrant status in Canada will probably result in his death in his native country. At last, Joaquin realizes that unbelonging is the permanent condition of being on the eve of an uncertain tomorrow.

Other stories in this collection, "Security" and "Cracks and Keyholes" are the stories that share the same theme of uncertainty. "Security" is a sequel to the story "Insecurity" from Bissoondath's first collection *Digging Up the Mountains*. The principal character of both the

stories, Mr. Alistair Ramgoolam, having escaped the political turmoil in his Caribbean island to be with his sons in Canada, purchases a house in Toronto, but he discovers to his dismay that the investment of house in Toronto causes him to feel even more insecure as realization dawns on him that Toronto signifies a second dislocation for his family. His family is now “Canadian to the point of strangeness” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 87) and he spends endless stretches of being alone, as his wife now works outside the home, and his sons, although being Hindus, have become adapted to the Canadian culture, even eating pork and beef. He tried to find work for himself but couldn’t and soon realized that “in this alien land, far from all that had created him, far from all that he had created, they were vital” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 107). The story depicts the cultural differences, the intergenerational problems, psychological trauma, the sense of insecurity and uncertainty about the future, the trouble of learning new languages, which the family is forced to tackle due to unexpected migration. The fact is that Ramgoolam is just as insecure as he was in the Caribbean, only in a different way and “most frightening of all, though, was the realization that he too had grown away, not just from his sons, not just from his wife, but from himself. He no longer recognized himself, no longer knew who Alistair Ramgoolam was” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 102).

“Cracks and Keyholes”, is more of an experience of a black Caribbean immigrant, whose life in Canada contains less happiness than humiliation. The main character is an impoverished black Caribbean immigrant, Leonard, a man who has lived in Canada for fifteen years, “And in all this time, all these long fifteen years, I [Leonard] been driftin’ from one cainin’ minimum-wage job to another cainin’ minimum-wage job, never movin’ up, sometimes movin’ down” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 152), and who at the moment is washing dishes and beer mugs in a strip joint on Yonge Street and “more or less just survivin’ in the middle o’ the rich and shinin’



city” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 152). This is a story about immigrants like Leonard, trapped in their lives, about how some lives don't always work out the way they are supposed to, as he feels:

Is a good fifteen years I in Canada now, and I's livin' proof that not every immigrant is a multicultural success story. Maybe is a question of too much dreamin' and not enough doin'; maybe is a question of dreamin' the wrong dreams or doin' the wrong things. (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 150)

Leonard is really disappointed by the domination of powerful people, suppressing feeble immigrant like him, “It ain't really a dog-eat-dog world, as my granma use to say. Is more a cat-eat-mouse world, and I ain't foolin' meself 'bout who is the cat and who is the mouse. The hard part is seein' the traps and avoidin' them or, the best, usin' them for your own good” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 151) and his all efforts to take control of his future by making sense of the present moment are in vain, precariously making him wait for the eve of a better tomorrow. At the end of the story, it seems Leonard has accepted his fate of an immigrant. For Leonard life isn't always fair. The time is Christmas, and Leonard, looking at the tacky and worn street decorations, which couldn't please him much as he feels that “it have few things more depressin' in this world than decorations that doesn't decorate” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 148-49).

Generational conflict is another prominent theme of the story, “Security”. In the study of migration, some issues like ‘generational conflict’, ‘generation gap’, ‘older generation’, etc are frequented, which as discussed by Kertzer, lead to the following problems:

- People sharing the same genealogical and generational position may belong to different historical periods, coming from an origin society and arriving in a destination society which will have both changed over time.

- Parents often migrate with their children, and in some cases even three generations move together. Are both parents and children to be considered first-generation? The concept of ‘fractional’ generations (1.5 generation etc.) resolves this question to some extent, but we are still left with an anomaly of how to ‘define’ the grandparents, who may either migrate with their first-generation children or join them at a later date.
- As we move beyond the first generation in the host country, subsequent marriages are not necessarily generation-homogenous nor ethnically endogenous. It is quite common (for various reasons) for the second generation to seek spouses from the ‘home’ country. Any children thus have one second- and one first-generation parent – in which case they could be labelled 2.5 generation, although this term has little currency (qtd. in King, and Christou 7).

However, these problems complicate the research on the second generation diaspora, they also enhance the study by alerting us towards the intricacy of reality and the basic difficulties of categorizing generations. In the earlier story “Insecurity”, Ramgoolam was living in fear of harassment and death in the Caribbean and in this story, he is an immigrant, no longer in fear of his life, but bored at home, suffering from loneliness, aimlessness and anxiety about his sons for despite being brought up as Hindus, they are being transformed into barbarians by living in Canada. This very reason results into the conflicts between two generations – Ramgoolam and his sons. Seeking a sense of belonging, he gets himself engrossed with his religion, but the more he tries to engross himself in his religious practices, the more alienated he feels. His wife paid little attention to his deepening devotions, for she is pleased that he is keeping himself occupied, but his sons, less tolerant, protested mildly, but backed down before his adamant rules. “You always did your *pooja*, Pa,” his youngest son said to him one evening... “but how come you

never get into this incense and beef-banning and all this other shit before? How come now, here, of all places?” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 105) “It was from this loneliness, this sense of abandonment that emerged Mr. Ramgoolam’s deepest worry: would his sons do for him after his death all that he had done for his parents after theirs?” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 108)

“The Power of Reason”, another story from this collection, also shares the same theme of generational conflict. The story emphasizes the migrants’ experience of gender specificity and the problem of equal opportunity for women by the West Indian protagonist of the story, Monica, a single mother with five children. At the end of the story, she overcomes the feeling of stagnation that has infected her life by correcting the sense of alienation that has developed between her and her three sons. Monica has two daughters, who like their mother, work hard to take benefit of the opportunities that migration has offered. However, her sons, by contrast, either lazily lying in front of the television or hang out on the street with their friends, mimicking the young Black American males they see on television. Although she understands her sons when they are at home because they speak with an ‘island accent’ that she is familiar with, she does not know who they are when she hears them on the street as “they speak in a dialect not of the island, not even of Canada, which would not have surprised her, but of black America” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 223). To Monica, her sons are complete strangers, who are the reason of her anxiety. She resigned herself “to living with, and providing for, three strangers” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 224). She is worried for the late night calls, the huddled whisperings, and the strangers coming to the apartment at odd hours for her sons. She fears for the furtiveness of her sons’ lives but she feels helpless. When she thinks of her daughters, “of Sandra and Nora, and her strength surges. She thinks of her sons...and her strength subsides” (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 227). She many a times wonders: “Is this what she has come here for, to this cold and

wealthy land? ...Is this truly the result of all she has put herself through? The alienation from those closest to her, two years of domestic labour...Is this where it has all led?" (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 227) It is part of her distress: "Two years of living in a strange room in a strange house, in a strange city in a strange country among strange people, ministering to their [her sons'] needs" (Bissoondath, *On the Eve* 207).

Monica realized that it is the high time to bring her sons back on track. Eventually she kicks her sons out of her small apartment. In doing so she not only stops their freeloading but forces them to take responsibility for their own lives as their sisters have. In this small act of defiance Monica relearns the power both to reason and to love.

### **3.2. *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth* by Jhumpa Lahiri**

Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian American diasporic author, was born in London, but in her young age moved to Rhode Island, USA with her Bengali parents. Although Lahiri has resided in US for longer period of time, she has grown up observing her parents keep holding for sense of emotional expatriation and her experience as a child of Indian immigrant parents and their double immigration makes her both a migrant and a diasporic writer. Her capability as the diasporic writer to convey the oldest cultural conflicts in the most recent trend through the voices of many diverse characters have captured the attention of an extensive audience throughout the world. Her writings include two novels – *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*, two short story collection - *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*, uncollected non-fictions - "Cooking Lessons: The Long Way Home", "Improvisations: Rice", "Reflections: Notes from a Literary Apprenticeship", "Teach Yourself Italian", etc. Her writings generate a narrative that reveals the variations of the conception of identity crisis and cultural discrepancy in the field of diaspora. In the words of The Hindu on the cover page of *Interpreter of Maladies*:

What makes Lahiri special is not just the limpid prose with hints of fearful currents below. Beguiled by the placidity, you are not quite prepared for the sudden jerks which almost sweep you into drowning. This mingling of the expected and the unexpected, is through telling details, “almost inanimate” ...she has the outsider’s perception of the insider.

Lahiri got ‘DSC Prize for South Asian Literature’ for her novel, *The Lowland*. *Interpreter of Maladies*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000, is Lahiri’s first book and an instant triumph over the two renowned writers - Annie Proulx’s *Close Range: Wyoming Stories* and Ha Jin’s *Waiting*, making her the first South Asian, to win an individual Pulitzer Prize. The title story, “Interpreter of Maladies”, won an ‘O. Henry Award for Best American Short Stories’, ‘PEN/Hemingway Award’ for best Fiction Debut of the Year, ‘The New Yorker’s Best Debut’ of the Year, and was included in the anthology ‘Best American Short Stories’ in 1999. “The Third and Final Continent”, one of the stories from the collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, was selected as one of best American Short Stories in 2000. As on the cover page of *Interpreter of Maladies*, Amy Tan states, “Jhumpa Lahiri is the kind of writer who makes you want to grab the next person you see and say “Read this!” She’s a dazzling storyteller with a distinctive voice, an eye for nuance, an ear for irony. She is one of the finest short story writers I’ve read.”

The nine stories of Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* depict the interpretation of poignant pain and sufferings, sacrifices and struggles of Indian immigrants living in America. As quoted in The Hindustan Times: “There is a magic in the way Jhumpa Lahiri weaves her nine tales. Lahiri’s choice of subject is exemplary; her keenness of observation is astonishing, and her style taut and sincere.” The legacy of India is the base of these short stories, which deal with the issues of identity crisis, alienation and the physical and mental displacement. The identity of most of

the characters in the stories is fluid like other characters in contemporary diasporic writings i.e. their national and cultural identities are not permanent. They are constantly struggling to adjust between the traditions and culture of India that they have abandoned and western world that they have to come across every day. Moreover, they are not strong enough to give a tough fight to the hostile situations, instead they prove to be and fall an effortless prey to the circumstances because the distance from their roots has made them vulnerable. Regarding the treatment of the diasporic experiences in Lahiri's work Aruti Nayar in her article "An Interpreter of Exile" rightly observes:

...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. (qtd. in Densingh 67)

The first story "A Temporary Matter" is about a second generation immigrant couple- Shukumar and Shoba, settled in USA, whose life was filled with joy until the death of their first-born baby. The major themes of the story are trauma and alienation, but migration is nowhere responsible for them. Both Shukumar and Shoba started getting alienated from each other and feeling uncomfortable in the presence of each other, as Lahiri depicts: "The more Shoba stayed out, the more she began putting in extra hours at work and taking on additional projects, the more he [Shukumar] wanted to stay in, not even leaving to get the mail..." (Lahiri, *Interpreter 2*) and the electricity cut off for a few days at evening, as noticed by the power company made them start discussing and admitting their deepest worries and feelings to each other. The story depicts a young and financially independent woman's revolutionary steps against her drained marriage,

as Shukumar feels, "...she had spent these past evenings preparing for a life without him. He was relieved and yet he was sickened. This was what she'd been trying to tell him for the past four evenings. This was the point of her game" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 21). Shoba's act of walking out of her loveless marriage depicts her identity determination and capacity to choose her own way of life and a predication of independence from the emotional and physical trauma. As Lahiri expresses, "...now she [Shoba] treated the house as if it were a hotel" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 6). Shukumar and Shoba lost touch with each another in their relationship for Shoba is unable to deal with her agony and frustration at losing her baby. Although Shukumar was neither unconcerned nor careless towards Shoba or the child, she projected her anger and frustration on him because he was absent during her labour and silently blames him for the tragedy. Within six months of the incident, the couple has started getting alienated from each other,

...he [Shukumar] and Shoba had become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible. He thought of how he no longer looked forward to weekends, when she sat for hours on the sofa with her coloured pencils and her files, so that he feared that putting on a record in his own house might be rude. He thought of how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions they still reached for each other's bodies before sleeping. (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 4-5)

Shukumar even seeks refuge in the room which was planned for their baby, "partly because the room soothed him, and partly because it was a place Shoba avoided" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 8). The poignancy of the situation is revealed when Shukumar tells his wife about the gender of their child that it was a boy and told her that he kept it as a secret because she wanted it to be a pleasant surprise and now in their shared grief "they wept together, for the things they

now knew” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 22). This clarification brings a pleasing end and their alienation from each other is over. The title of the story ‘A Temporary Matter’ does not refer to the temporary power failure only, rather it means that it is their alienation, and not their marriage, that is temporary, which is reinforced by Shoba’s declaration that “she needed some time alone” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 21) not that she wants to get rid of their relationship.

The title story, “Interpreter of Maladies” deals with the marital issues and cultural alienation of second generation Indian immigrants settled in the United States. Most of the Characters of the story are suffering from psychological or social emptiness. In the story, both Mr. and Mrs. Das were born and brought up in the US and their parents now in India and the Dases visits them every few years. The Das family is in India on vacation, and Mr. Das has hired Mr. Kapasi, as a tour guide to drive them to the Sun Temple. However, being brought up in American culture, Mr. Das and family includes Mr. Das, Mrs. Das, their sons Ronny and Bobby, and daughter Tina, feel bored and lack curiosity: “... Mrs. Das gave an impatient sigh, as if she had been travelling her whole life without a pause” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 47). As Mr. Kapasi sensed about Mr. Das and his family, “They [Dases] were all like siblings...Mr. and Mrs. Das behaved like an older brother and sister, not parents. 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” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 49). Mr. Das was mostly absorbed by his tour book and Mrs. Das continued to polish her nails. The narrative of the story mainly focuses on the female protagonist Mrs. Das, “...A woman not yet thirty, who loved neither her husband nor her children, who had already fallen out of love with life” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 66), an isolated soul struggling to adjust with an alien culture, social and economic insecurity, tackling her oppressive matrimonial or extra matrimonial relationships. After marriage, life became boring and



monotonous for Mrs. Das, as Mr. Das becomes busy with his job: "...she was left at home all day with the baby...always cross and tired. 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..." (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 64). Her problems were doubled when she had to keep the secret for eight years before revealing it to Kapasi that her younger son Bobby was conceived of a sexual encounter with a Punjabi friend of her husband who once stayed with them for a week. The sense of her guilt raises when she thinks of her husband who doesn't even suspect it and thinks his wife is still in love with him. About the secret she feels: "terrible looking at my children, and at Raj...terrible urge...to throw everything I own out of the window, the television, the children, everything" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 65). She revealed this secret with Mr. Kapasi, thought of him as a parent, who would help her with right kind of advice or suggest some solution. However, because of his typical Indian mentality, Mr. Kapasi could not understand the complexity of the situation and wonders "if Mr. and Mrs. Das were a bad match, just as he and his wife were. Perhaps they, too, had little in common apart from three children and a decade of their lives" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 53). The signs he recognized from his own marriage were - "the bickering, the Indifference, the protracted silences" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 53). Instead of being sympathetic towards the dullness of Mrs. Das's married life, he considers it an act of adultery and arouses her pain and suffering by asking, "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs. Das, or is it guilt?" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 53) At the end of the story, not ready to accept that it is her sense of guilt that causes her sufferance, Mrs. Das, ignoring Mr. Kapasi and his analysis, seeks retreat in her motherly responsibilities, nursing her injured illegal son, Bobby.

In this collection of stories, the contemporary perspective of Lahiri is marked in her definite feminist orientation and portrayal of marriage not as a reliable and fulfilling social and

religious institution which is based on mutual love, respect and understanding or as a typical representative of Indian or even emigrant Indian community in general. Such narratives of her raise certain issues about security, reliability, happiness, fulfillment, love, affection, meaningfulness, etc.

Lahiri's expression of the sense of alienation continues in her another story of the collection, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine". The story depicts about the cultural harmonious relation between Mr. Pirzada, a Pakistani young man and an Indian family of Lilia, a ten-year-old girl, on a foreign land. It has a setting of 1971. Mr. Pirzada, is from Dacca, once a part of Pakistan and who comes to a ten-year old Indian American child, Lilia's house to have dinner each night. He migrated to US for a fellowship to study the foliage of New London, suffering from the agony of leaving behind his wife and seven daughters in his homeland Dacca. As his fellowship offered him only a small room, every night he comes to Lilia's home to dine and watch the news of the Indo-Pak War on television. The contradiction of the diverse nationality plays a integral role in the story for Lilia, the narrator of the story, is a Bengali from India, whereas Mr. Pirzada is a Pakistani soon to be turned into a Bangladeshi. Mr. Pirzada suffers from the pain of parting from his family, that he prefers to keep his pocket watch "set to the local time in Dacca, eleven hours ahead on his folded paper napkin on the coffee table" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 30). Lilia remembers that out of nostalgia to remain connected to their homeland, every new semester her parents searched for the Indian migrants in US through the university directory and that's how they happen to meet Mr. Pirzada. Lilia also remembers that when the war was declared officially on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1971, how her parents and Mr. Pirzada have watched the bloodshed and killing of formation of Bangladesh on T.V with heavy hearts, sharing their feelings of past and present displacement, how "...three of them operating during that time

as if they were a single person, sharing a single meal, a single body, a single silence, and a single fear” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 41). Through this description, Lahiri conveys that such sort of oneness, empathy and harmony helps in reducing the sense of alienation among the immigrants. Mr. Pirzada represents the fear of immigrants away from their homelands, in the crucial situation like war, worried about their homelands. The news showed that Dacca had been occupied by Pakistan and thousands of people of Dacca were tortured or killed by Pakistani army. Mr. Pirzada has written many letters to his family, but couldn’t get reply of them for last six months. The war finally ends in December 1971 and soon Mr. Pirzada had to return to Dacca, searching for his family and after few months he informed about the wellbeing of him and his family. Thus, Mr. Pirzada’s brief alienation with his homeland and family comes to an end with no reason to return to US and Lilia’s family never sees him again.

The story also depicts double consciousness of Lilia as an ethnic minority in the United States, who is trapped between the traditions and culture of her parents and America. She could never know the reason of her parents’ complaints about “the supermarkets did not carry mustard oil, doctors did not make house calls, neighbors never dropped by without an invitation” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 24). The second generation immigrants in US like Lilia generally study the history and geography of America in schools and have assimilated with American culture and celebrate American festivals like Halloween. However, they carry with them the knowledge of history and geography of the culture of origin of their parents, which reflects the relative marginalization of the second generation immigrants. Through this story, the broader adult presuppositions behind the conceptions of nationality and citizenship remains unsettled as what confuses Lilia is that Mr. Pirzada is invited to their house just because he is Indian; or, as her father explains, “Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered Indian...Not since Partition. Our country was divided. 1947...That too.

One moment we were free and then we were sliced up...like a pie. Hindus here, Muslims there. Dacca no longer belongs to us” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 25).

Her father tries to explain the difference by showing her a world map but for Lilia it made no sense for she expresses: “Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same joke, looked more or less the same...ate rice every night for supper with their hands...took off shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol...” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 25). Her mother understands that Lilia has little knowledge about the geography and politics of India and Pakistan because she is the product of America and in fact she is proud of the fact that Lilia is an American for she will claim “a safe life, an easy life, a fine education, every opportunity...never have to eat rationed food, or obey curfews, or watch riots from roof tops...read during power failures by the light of kerosene lamps” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 27), but her father is worried, “But what does she learn about the world? What is she learning?...American history, of course, and American geography” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 27).

Again the sense of alienation of a first generation Indian immigrant is depicted in the story, “Mrs. Sen” through the European point of view. The story presents the alienation, nostalgia and hardships experienced by the Indian wives on a new land, without friends and family, struggling to cope with the new environment, thousands of miles away from their homelands. It is a typical story of the culturally outcast, Mrs. Sen never named, but even her dilemma is compensated by the loneliness experienced by an eleven-year-old American boy, Eliot, her obedient ward for a few hours every day. Mrs. Sen is a thirty-year-old dependent, submissive, Bengali wife brought to America by her husband, Mr. Sen, who is mostly busy with his works as a mathematics professor. Consequently, Mrs. Sen feels lonely and alienated at

home, spends most of her time doing household work, cooking Bengali dishes to soothe her nostalgia for home and baby-sitting for Eliot. Mrs. Sen feels awfully offended many a times by the comments of Eliot's mother on her Indian mannerisms and dishes that she serves to Eliot's mother as a sign of Indian hospitality. She always feels agitated and nervous when her relatives in India asks her to send pictures of her new life, as she knows that they think, "...I [Mrs. Sen] live the life of a queen...I press buttons and the house is clean...I live in a palace" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 125). Mrs. Sen is always lost in thought of her homeland, which can be realized when she says, "Everything is there [in India] (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 113). It shows that forced or unwilling diasporic community builds an imaginary homeland from the fragments of their past memories. Two things make Mrs. Sen happy – a letter from her family at India and fish from the seaside. When a letter arrives from India, Mrs. Sen calls her husband and reads the contents word for word. The letters also make her restlessly nostalgic. Being isolated from her family and friends and displaced from her home, she finds her new life in America irritating and prefers delaying her learning driving, which is inevitable for the North American life. On the contrary, despite the fact that there are now she and her husband to eat the food, she daily prefers to cook Indian food excessively as if her cooking style and her interest in buying and having fish connect her with her homeland, boost her to survive in the alien environment and assert her cultural identity. As Eliot recognizes, "When Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 116). Some of her daily activities represent her sense of escapism from alien environment i.e. about her driving, Mrs. Sen once expressed her feelings to Eliot: "...once I receive my license, everything will improve. What do you think, Eliot? Will things improve?...Could I drive all the way to Calcutta? How long would that take, Eliot? Ten thousand miles, at fifty miles per hour?" (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 119) She also

expresses to Eliot: “When I was your age I was without knowing that one day I would be so far. You are wiser than that, Eliot. You already taste the way things must be” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 123). These words express the sense of terrible nostalgia that Mrs. Sen is suffering for her homeland.

“The Third and Final Continent” is the final story in the collection, in which Lahiri depicts how Europeans still dominate the third world people and how the first generation immigrants stopped getting engrossed with their past, and try to strengthen their roots in an alien land. This is a story of a young Indian, who is also the narrator of the story, for the first time sail to London for studies at the London School of Economics, leaving his homeland behind in 1964. After five years, he gets a job offer from Boston and by the same time, his marriage was fixed in India, so he first takes a flight for his wedding in Calcutta and immediately after marriage onto Boston to resume his job. So the story depicts the narrator’s experience on three continents as he is born in Asia, attains higher education in Europe and finally settles in North America. Although he has adapted to the British lifestyle as a student, he lives in “a house occupied entirely by penniless Bengali bachelors like him, at least a dozen and sometimes more, all struggling to educate and establish abroad” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 173) and keeps his Asian cultural identity intact by keeping the most trivial of Indian traditions alive, such as “...cooking pots of egg curry, ...ate with hands on a table covered with news papers...played Mukhesh on a Grundig real-to-reel...” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 173-74). When migrated to America, he relies on the British ways that he has learned in London as a survival strategy, “converting ounces to grams and comparing prices to things in England” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 175).

In Boston, initially six weeks, he finds a cheap room in order to save money for a real apartment and then moves into Mrs. Croft’s house as a tenant until his wife arrives. When his

wife Mala arrives in America and they happened to visit Mrs. Croft, she called Mala “a perfect lady” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 195) after seeing her in the Indian sari. This admiring comment from Mrs. Croft aroused the feeling of love and sympathy in the mind of narrator for his wife because until now he had an idea of an arranged marriage as a proposition of neither objection nor enthusiasm. The narrator could only see the difference between him and his wife, whereas Mrs. Croft could see the grace and charm in his wife. The interaction between Mrs. Croft and the narrator diverted him positively towards his arranged and adjusted marriage and also evokes his consciousness of the differences between Indian and American ways. With this incident, Lahiri explores the idea that a sense of identity is something that is essential, especially for immigrants, which they gain through their family, society and culture. The narrator could realize that the sense of being at home comes only from having a strong sense of self. The “ambition that had first hurled him across the world” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 197) had helped him to realize his capabilities and also to realize the fact that the strength he has gained from his origins is the real foundation on which to build a strong identity. The story also focuses on various factors liable for the dissonance and dissatisfaction at different phases of matrimonial relations.

The circumstances of Mala’s life in Boston reminds that of Mrs. Sen’s for in America as a wife, just like Mrs. Sen’s, Mala is totally dependent on her husband and trying to assimilate with an alien social and cultural environment. However, unlike Mr. Sen, the narrator used to spare time for his wife and “together (they) explored the city and met other Bengalis... discovered that a man named Bill sold fresh fish...walked to the Charles River to watch sailboats drift across the water, or had ice cream cones in Harvard Yard...bought an Instamatic camera with which to document life together... took pictures of her...so that she could send them to her parents and discovered pleasure and solace in each other’s arms”( Lahiri, *Interpreter* 196). The

narrator thinks that after years of stay in America, he and his wife became Americans, but still they attached with their India traditions, food and ways of life such as eating rice by hand and speaking Bengali, which shows that the original culture remains always important for the immigrants.

The present day, the narrator has a glance at his past life on three continents, remembers about Mrs. Croft, with whom his bonding is beyond any explanation and of that moment, when he has fallen in love with his wife for the first time. He also remembers his disappointment at the cold goodbye received from Mrs. Croft: “I did not expect any display of emotion, but I was disappointed at the same. I was only a boarder, a man who paid her a bit of money and passed in and out of her home for six weeks. Compared to a century, it was no time at all” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 191). When he learned of Mrs. Croft’s death, he says, “...I was stricken... Mrs. Croft’s was the first death I mourned in America, for hers was the first life I had admired; she had left this world at last, ancient and alone, never to return” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 196). Today, He and Mala have decided to grow old on this third and final continent and they have a son, who attends Harvard University and the narrator also shares the story of his life at Mrs. Croft’s with his son. The narrator desires his son to preserve his Indian culture, “...so that he can eat rice with us with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 197). Through the modest and down to earth character of the narrator, Lahiri explores the fact that the man-made differences of cultures is trivial and if one can realize this fact, the glory of a common life is achievable, “I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first...” (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 198). When he shares with his son about the troubles he faced in finding a home in America, away from his homeland, he encourages him:



Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years...there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have travelled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination. (Lahiri, *Interpreter* 197-198)

***Unaccustomed Earth*** won the 2008 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and was a *New York Times*, *Time* and *Outlook* book of the year. The title story "Unaccustomed Earth" won 'Asian American Literary Award' in 2009 and "Nobody's Business", another short story of the collection was selected as one of the 'Best American Short Stories'. The book investigates mostly the highly successful, upper middle class Indian emigrants' experience in America from the point of view of both the first and second generation emigrants. However, the book mainly focuses on the second generation, who believes to be American but always burdened by the Indian cultural past and has neglected so much of their inheritance by marrying or forming family with non-Indians. As quoted by Random House India on the cover page of *Unaccustomed Earth*:

*Unaccustomed Earth* returns to the terrain - the heart of family life and the immigrant experience— that Jhumpa Lahiri has made utterly hers, but her themes, this time around, have darkened and deepened. Poised, nuanced, deeply moving, here is a superb collection: the finest she has written yet.

There are two parts in *Unaccustomed Earth*. First part is consisted of five different stories, entitled "Unaccustomed Earth", "Hell-Heaven", "A Choice of Accommodations", "Only

Goodness” and “Nobody’s Business”. Second part of this story collection is entitled “Hema and Kaushik” which consists three stories interlinked with one other - “Once in a Lifetime”, “Year’s End” and “Going Ashore”. The main theme of these three stories is related with the main protagonists Hema and Kaushik and their lives.

To the core of nostalgia, there are usually personal and social circumstances that are connected with the feeling and a sense of a loss that is both lamented on and accepted. The same simultaneous sense of loss and acceptance is skillfully depicted by Jhumpa Lahiri in her one of the well-written stories, “Unaccustomed Earth”. In his book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym focuses on the derivation of the term nostalgia, which was coined by Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation in 1688, using two Greek words, *nostos*, meaning home, and *algia*, meaning ‘pain or sorrow or longing’, to denote a pathological yearning for one’s home country. One would define the term nostalgia as a longing or craving for a home that no more subsists or has never subsisted. As Boym expresses,

Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, of past and present, of dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface. (xiii-xiv)

Nostalgia is frequently narrated in the numerous literatures on immigrants, because the immigrants experience and confront nostalgia every now and then. As Boym expresses, the immigrants recognize the confines of nostalgia and the tenderness of ‘diasporic intimacy’, which cherishes non-native, elective affinities. Diasporic intimacy is not opposed to displacement,

uprootedness and defamiliarization but is constituted by it (252). For uprooted, exiled and dispersed souls, the new and old surroundings and environments are vivacious, real, occurring together simultaneously, that arouse the feelings of immigrant shame as well as nostalgia.

In this story “Unaccustomed Earth”, the writer has nicely portrayed the division between immigrant parents and their American- raised children; emptiness of Ruma’s relationship with her father, where in the only link was Ruma’s mother, who is no more now; and the haunting memory of past, when Ruma’s mother was alive, which every now and then peeps in to the present of both Ruma and her father. After her mother’s death, Ruma’s father retired and as he has planned his retirement, he frequently travels to Europe.

Being the American child, Ruma has never appreciated her mother before she spent weeks with Ruma after Ruma’s son Akash’s birth. According to Brockmeier, ‘the autobiographical time’ is the sequential dimension of human life, the perception of the course of human lives in time, is particularly inconsistent. This is the process by which an individual, in reflecting on and living through his or her course of life, ‘constantly links the past with the present...in the light of present events and future expectations’ (Brockmeier 55). Below the surface of the romanticized memory of nostalgia there may be concealed conflicts, a point that may explain some of the ‘bitter’ component of bitter-sweet reminiscences. “There were times when Ruma felt closer to her mother in death than she had in life, an intimacy born simply of thinking of her so often, of missing her. But she knew that this was an illusion, a mirage, and that the distance between them was now infinite, unyielding” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 27).

They were sentences her mother would have absorbed in an 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, *Unaccustomed* 59)

In the conventional consideration of diaspora, the concept of 'home' has been identical with the diasporic country of birth or origin. Another interpretation of 'home' is that it is a symbolic, at some extent physical space attached to the place the diaspora leaves behind when they migrate, constituting their close friends and relatives. A further distinct idea of 'home' is joined with the locality of origin and the places where they inhabited throughout their formative period of childhood and youth. As Gaston Bachelard utters,

Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost. (87)

The identical distinctive idea of 'home' is projected in the story, in which Ruma gets upset with the freshly confirmation of the fact that,

...she lived on a separate coast thousands of miles from where she grew up, a place where her parents knew no one, where neither of her parents, until today, has set foot. The connections her family had formed to America, her parents' circle of Bengali friends in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, her father's company, the schools Ruma and Romi had gone through, did not exist here. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 11)

Another theme that we encounter in the title story "Unaccustomed earth" is the loss of a national tradition by not only second generation immigrants but also first generation immigrants. The representatives of the loss of a national tradition by the first generation immigrants in the story are Ruma's father and Mrs. Bagchi, whom Ruma's father seeing after his wife's death. The

steady assimilation process of the immigrants is responsible for the loss of national tradition in both the cases of Ruma's father and Mrs. Bagchi. Ruma's father feels more liberated and happier with his life in America, when the ultimate bond with India is kaput after his wife's death. He assimilates with the American culture willingly, as he plans his retirement just like any typical American. After his retirement, he becomes a volunteer for a Democratic Party in Pennsylvania, starts to travel choosing package tours to Europe and also from the east to the west coast to visit his daughter. After spending much time in Europe journey, when comes back to Seattle, he still feels familiar and at home with the American land, unlike in Europe. "...his surroundings did not feel foreign to him as they had when he went to Europe" Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 28). His appearance too resembles with any American, as when he comes to visit Ruma, "She was struck by the degree to which her father resembled an American in his old age. With his gray hair and fair skin he could have been practically from anywhere" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 11).

Mrs. Bagchi, his fellow traveler, is a Bengali widow, who realizes her desire for free and independent life in America and also prefers Western clothes and lifestyle. Her life is an escape from Indian values and traditions, at the same time willing assimilation to the American values. America has offered her the opportunity to earn the degree of doctorate in statistics, become a lecturer at a university, and lead an independent life, even though in the eyes of the Indians, she is a queer, aberration, lonely Indian woman. In the story, the first generation diaspora although assimilates with the new culture, they are all the same cultural hybrids, because although the realization about their roots in India, they are also aware that adaptation with the new culture is unavoidable. They live in the Third Space, characterized by 'in-betweenness', the term coined by Homi K. Bhabha. They can be considered, as Bhabha expresses in his essay "The Commitment to Theory", "neither the One ... nor the Other ... but something else besides which contests the

terms and territories of both” (41). Their ingression into the Third Space is a conscious and willing action, for they have realization of what they have left behind in their country of origin and what opportunities have been offered in the host country.

In the story, the situation of Ruma, who is the representative of the second generation diaspora, is different from that of the first generation, because being born and brought up in America but in Bengali family, she is compelled to live in the Third Space all her life. Her life is an example of a consistent confusion and tension between her parents’ Bengali culture and the American culture. Consequently, She is neither able to identify herself with her country of origin India, nor with America, her homeland as she believes. Thus, as Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt expresses, Ruma being the second generation diaspora, suffers from ‘double displacement’ and from “a series of maladjustments that takes place within the dominant culture and [her] home front provide for [her] feeling of alienation, estrangements and dislocation in two or more spaces simultaneously” (54). Her sense of unbelonging is expressed in her movement - from Pennsylvania to New York and then to Seattle - on ‘routes’ rather than growing ‘roots’.

The position of in-betweenness is more traumatized by the sudden death of Ruma’s mother. Unlike with her father, Ruma and her mother have very close relationship with each other so with her mother’s death; she feels that she has no way to return to traditional culture. On the contrary, she is worried when her father offers to visit her after her mother’s death. She is afraid of the situation if her father will move in to live with her family permanently. According to Bengali culture, people enjoy an extended family where children should take the responsibility of their parents when they grow old. But for Ruma, the independent life offered by America has dispossessed her of her traditional Bengali culture. “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..." (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 7).

Ruma feels that she has lost her Indian culture after being married to an American guy without her parents' consent. Ruma remembers that ten years ago her mother had done everything in her power to convince Ruma not to marry Adam, an American guy and how bold she had to be in order to endure her mother's outrage, and her father's refusal to express even that, which had felt crueler. "You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian, that is the bottom line," (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 26) her mother had told Ruma again and again. Ruma also remembers over the time how her mother grew her attachment with Adam as a son, a substitute of her own son Romi, who had sustained only distant ties. Ruma prefers western clothes instead of Indian saris that her mother left for her in abundance after her death. "She kept only three [saris], placing them in a quilted zippered bag at the back of her closet, telling her mother's friends to divide up the rest. And she had 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, *Unaccustomed* 17). She finds herself poor in using her Bengali language now, which indicates that she has accepted the foreign ideologies by using the foreign language and became a stranger to her own culture by refusing to use her native language.

However, Ruma often remembers and appreciates her mother for she holds many qualities of a traditional Indian woman like endurance, patience and hard work. She remembers how "her mother who would have been the helpful one, taking over the kitchen, singing songs to Akash and teaching him Bengali nursery rhymes, throwing loads of laundry into the machine" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 6). She appreciates her mother's qualities as an excellent housewife who

cooks well and runs the house efficiently “as if to satisfy a mother-law’s fastidious eye” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 22). Ruma often wondered how different she is from her mother as a wife. Both, her marrying a white guy and loss of culture of origin is due to suffering, self-hate and inferiority complex, as Anne Anlin Cheng calls it ‘the melancholy of race’ and as Frantz Fanon discussed in *Black Skin White Mask*. For Ruma, the death of her mother signifies not only the loss of a mentor in her life but also the scope of returning to her culture of origin. On her father’s visit, he teaches Akash to grow a garden and speak Bengali and guides his daughter to re-concentrate on her professional career. At the end of the story, memory of her mother and advice offered by her father helps Ruma to come to terms with her traditional culture and the death of her mother, expecting pleasing future life both for her father and herself. In this story Lahiri celebrates hybridity in context of the differences between generations of immigrants and accomplishes the title of the story “Unaccustomed earth”, which is also the title of the whole story collection.

In another story “Hell-Heaven”, Lahiri has endeavoured to give voice to the theme of ‘double consciousness’. Regarding double consciousness of African Americans, W. E. B. Du Bois asserts in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (3)

In “Hell-Heaven”, both, the narrator of the story, a young girl named Usha and her guest from India, a young man, Pranab Chakraborty are the Indian Americans, who live an exiled life



also struggle with double consciousness. They feel that their identity is split into various segments and they are constantly striving for a unified identity by persistently trying to reunite the two cultures that constitute their identity. They recognize India as a country of their origin and America as a host country where they rediscover themselves in order to survive. In the host country, they begin to unconsciously assimilate with the prejudices and values against the minority communities and suffer from inferiority, which consequently develops into self-hatred and self degradation. The story begins when Usha remembers the experience of her Indian family in Boston with a young man, Pranab, who alone migrates from India for his graduation. Usha's family gives him shelter and feeds him daily. Usha's mother starts liking him and even falls in love with him because of his young age and a lot of common interest with her. However, after graduation, Pranab almost gets detached with Usha's family, abandons the Indian American community and marries an American girl named Deborah without his family's consent. Pranab becomes a completely Americanized person. When Pranab and his wife give birth to twin daughters, "The girls were named Srabani and Sabitri but were called Bonny and Sara...who barely looked Bengali and spoke only English and were being raised so differently...They were not taken to Calcutta every summer, they did not have parents who were clinging to another way of life and exhorting their children to do the same" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 74-75). They celebrate Thanksgiving, "the ritual of a large sit-down dinner and the foods that one was supposed to eat was lost on them" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 77) and other American holidays other than observe Indian traditional ones. So by now Pranab transforms into a completely westernized person. As Usha was in her teenage years and Influenced by Pranab and Deborah, she also becomes a disobedient young woman, who started assimilating American values and ideologies, causing much anxiety to her mother, the conventional preserver of cultural purity. This story

gives voice to schism that has been developing between first and second generations. Usha's increasing anticipation and liking for Deborah over her mother indicates her attachment towards the dominant culture of the country where she is born and brought up. Like any other American child, she demands privacy and freedom and dislikes her mother's interference in her life. She "learned to scream back [on her mother], telling her that she was pathetic, that she knew nothing about [her]" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 76). She started feeling that her mother's grip on her tighten when she would say from time to time, "Don't think you'll get away with marrying an American, the way Pranab Kaku did" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 75). The more her mother puts restrictions on her, the more she finds pleasure in disobeying her:

I [Usha] began keeping other secrets from her [my mum], evading her with the aid of my friends. I told her I was sleeping over at a friend's when really I went to parties, drinking beer and allowing boys to kiss me and fondle my breasts and press their ejections against my hip as we lay groping on a sofa or a back seat of a car...I learned to scream back, telling her that she was pathetic, that she knew nothing about me, and it was clear to us both that I had stopped needing her, definitively and abruptly, just as Pranab Kaku had. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 76-77).

In Usha's case, this may be the consequence of the popular club culture, prevailing among the second generation Indian American youngsters or a reaction to the first generation immigrants' imposing the ethnic culture on second generation immigrants, where sex is a moral taboo. After twenty three years of marriage, Pranab, as a minority living in a white community, has started suffering from inferiority complex, caused by double consciousness. He found himself under great pressure, which finally leads him towards an affair with a married Bengali woman and destruction of two families. By narrating the story of Pranab, Usha realizes the

importance of balancing her native Indian culture and her prevailing American cultures, her past and present life and also learns to negotiate her relationship with her mother:

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. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 81-82)

“A Choice of Accommodations” is third story of this collection that revolves around the theme of conflict between first and second generation. The story illustrates the details about a married couple Amit Sarkar and his white wife Megan, who are attending the wedding ceremony of one of Amit's former schoolmates, Pam Borden and their relationship which was gradually deteriorating after the birth of their second daughter. The marriage of Pam was to take place at Langford academy, a boarding school where Pam's father was the principal, and from where Amit has completed his graduation eighteen years back. Amit was the only Indian student at Langford, where at the end of the day there was no way out for him as he badly missed his parents, who “had plucked him out of public school in Winchester, Massachusetts, where he'd been raised, and sent him here, for they'd decided when Amit was in the ninth grade to move back to India” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 95). “He couldn't imagine sending his daughters to Langford – couldn't imagine letting go of them as his parents had let go of him” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 86). “He was crippled with homesickness, missing his parents to the point where tears filled his eyes” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 96). However, gradually he learned to live without them.

Both Amit's parents came from wealthy family in India and "the relative affluence of America never impressed them" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 96). Amit's wife, Megan, doctor by profession, comes from a working class family in America. "Megan's ordinary background had displeased his parents, as had the fact that she was five years older than he was. Her stark prettiness, her refusal to wear contact lenses, her height, had not charmed them" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 95). "His parents had not even met her [Megan]. He was aware of what an insult it was to them. For all their liberal Western ways he knew they wanted her to marry a Bengali girl, raised and educated as he had been" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 112). The relationship between Amit and his parents has been deteriorated due to his marriage, resulting him into the miserable feeling towards both his family and his wife.

At the wedding reception of Pam Borden, Amit ends up drinking too much for Megan flirts with one of his former classmates. In his half unconscious condition, he even confesses to Felicia, a strange woman attending reception, about how disappointed he feels towards his marriage. But on the last night they spend together at a school dorm before they leave, they begin to reveal their secrets and true feeling to each other, which help them regenerate their emotion for each other. Amit reveals that he had a great crush on Pam Borden, during his graduation years. The story ends with the couple's indulgence in harmonious sexuality with each other, which indicates Amit's determination to fix the relationship both with his parents and his wife.

Compared to their parents, the situation of the second generation Indian Americans is more pathetic because their parents can always claim India as their homeland, but the second generation has no choice for their life and nowhere to claim as belonging. As a daughter of an Indian immigrant family herself, Lahiri shares about her characters' yearning for a homeland and belonging in a press conference: "No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile

whichever country I travel to, that's why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile" (qtd. in Joshi 86).

The similar theme of generational conflict can be encountered in another story, "Only Goodness", in which the first generation immigrants are parents of Rahul and Sudha, who are again Bengalis and first immigrate to London in search of successful life. However, in London, they frequently experienced discrimination, hence from there, disheartened, they move to the U.S. Despite some initial problems in America, they could attain economical stability in the atmosphere of equality of opportunities and could pass on the desire for successful, prosperous and easy life on their children, with greater expectations from their son Rahul than their daughter Sudha.

In the story, Sudha's mother, just like Ruma's mother in the story "Unaccustomed Earth", plays an important role in transferring the Indian values to the next generation. She still endeavours to sustain Bengali culture in America, blaming America and its values and prevents her children from the drinking habits that the Americans usually do and the western values that Americans have, which according to her, are not suitable for the Asian Indian values. She said once: "That's the problem with this country, too many freedom, too much having fun. When we were young, life wasn't always about fun" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 143). Sudha always felt: "Her parents had always been blind to the things that plagued their children: being teased at school for the colour of their skin or for the funny things their mother occasionally put into their lunch boxes... 'Depression' was a foreign word to them, an American thing" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 144). After living in America for years, Sudha's parents still bifurcate the two worlds of India and America, creating contradictory situations: on one hand they think, "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, *Unaccustomed* 144) and on the other hand, they celebrates the opportunities offered by America to their children for lavish life for after Rahul graduated from high school their parents celebrated, having in their opinion now successfully raised two children in America for Rahul was going to a prestigious university of Cornell and Sudha getting her Masters degree in international relations. According to Sudha’s views, “Her father had no patience for failure, for indulgences. He never let his children forget that there had been no one to help him as he helped them,so that no matter how well Sudha did, she felt that her good fortune had been handed to her, not earned” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 140).

Being the child of America, on one hand, “Sudha had waited until college to disobey her parents. Before then she had lived according to their expectations, her persona scholarly, her social life limited to other demure girls in her class, if only to ensure that one day she would be set free. Out of sight in Philadelphia...she learned to let loose, going to parties and allowing boys into her bed. She began drinking, her parents did not do” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 129). However, being a dutiful student, she obediently fulfils their parents’ desires. Somehow she attains her master’s degree and decides to study further at the London School of Economics. In London she meets Roger, a calm, slightly older Englishman, falls in love with him and gets engaged. On the other hand, Rahul, the more expectant child of his parents, abruptly becomes defiant to their dreams. He used to be handsome, intelligent, talented, the only boy and so pampered baby but now a hopeless alcoholic, the greatest pain and bewilderment of the lives of his immigrant parents. He has distressed his parents and shattered their high hopes, being a dipsomaniac and arrested twice for driving being underage and completely drunk. With the passage of time his attitude towards his parents kept on becoming harsh and his grades in studies were gradually

falling, eventually drops out of Cornell University. He is forced to live with his parents with little finances he could manage through a tedious job he gets of managing a Laundromat, which is certainly embarrassing for his parents. They prefer to keep the comedy of lies among other Bengalis, instead of admit their son's failure and alcoholism, and seek help for him. His failure becomes their shame:

They lived in fear of the day someone they knew would see their son weighing sacks of dirty clothes on a scale. Other Bengalis gossiped about him and prayed their own children would not ruin their lives in the same way. And so he became what all parents feared, a blot, a failure, someone who was not contributing to the grand circle of accomplishments Bengali children were making across the country, as surgeons or attorneys or scientists, or writing articles for the front page of The New York Times. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 151)

Rahul's failure and his alcoholism being a symbol of the conflict he has found himself indulged between two cultures. While he wants to sustain his American spirit of individualism, desire for freedom and self-fulfillment, his parents want him to preserve the Indian way of life, nevertheless take advantage of opportunities that America offers, such as excellent education and job. As Filipczak observes:

Rahul is a dislocated subject. He does not want to identify with his Indian family and Indian way of life. However, when he eventually finds strength in himself to abandon his parents in order to live his own way, the American way with an American girlfriend, he fails. His failure should be read symbolically as a hybrid, he cannot be the One, or the Other, he cannot live as an American or an Indian. He will

not succeed until he agrees to his middle position, his in-betweenness. Only from this position he can start building a new. (8)

In the story, the serious issue of alcoholism and the destruction of a family caused by it, is depicted in light of Asian Indian people in host country, for whom success is measured on how they can accomplish higher education, how they can make money from prominent workplaces, and how they choose the wives or husbands. As a minority community in host country, hard working and creating a new generation that make them proud are essential values for first generation Asian Indians. However, in transferring these values to the new generation, there is bound to irrupt the conflict between both the generations. In “Only Goodness”, the spoil of Rahul’s life because of alcohol and Sudha’s marriage to Roger, a British widower is part of the acts of resistance by second generation to the Asian Indian values, imposed by the first generation. In the end of the story, however, Sudha’s parents accept her marriage with a non-Indian and the bitter reality of their son’s ruined life.

In part two of the short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth*, there is a novella “Hema and Kaushik”, which comprises three stories - “Once in a Lifetime”, “Year’s End” and “Going Ashore” – which are interconnected, depicting the unusual tragic love story between Hema and Kaushik from puberty to midlife. In this novella, both the title characters undergo trauma due to their rootlessness in different senses, for Hema’s suffering is caused by her negotiation with her past, whereas Kaushik is unable to resist his loss in the past and becomes a person of melancholy and dies at last. Trauma has been an all time cause for mourning. In his essay, “Mourning and Melancholia”, Sigmund Freud states:

Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or the loss of some abstraction which has taken place such as one’s country, liberty, and ideal and so



on. As an effect of the same influences, melancholy instead of a state of grief develops in some people, whom we consequently suspect of a morbid pathological disposition. It is also well worth noticed that, although grief involves grave departures from the normal attitude of life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a morbid condition and hand the mourning over to medical treatment. (qtd. in Eng, and Kazanjian 3)

The novella depicts the life span of Hema and Kaushik, two US-born descendants of Bengali immigrants from adolescence to early middle age, focuses on the way in which the death of Kaushik's mother at an early age bears on the destinies of both the protagonists. This death opens the possibilities of a new generational sense of investigating the relation between mourning and melancholia. According to Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, for the second generation character like Kaushik:

The loss of a parental figure becomes a loss of both root and route. It is a loss of root given that these parental figures are the only reminder of an on-going basis for the second generation regarding their ties to their ancestral homeland. It is a loss of route since the very parental figures that migrated to America or elsewhere; carrying with them the stories of the past and the trajectory of their travels are now dead. (qtd. In Munos 3)

In this context, finding one's place in the world is the main theme of this novella "Hema and Kaushik", in which Lahiri explores the second generation as detached, directionless, unstable individuals, who though burdened by wrecked lineage and trans-generational memories of loss, remain persistently attached to a lost and yet subsisting world. Throughout the novella, destinies of Hema and Kaushik are interconnected, frequently separating them to unite again.

The narrator of the first story “Once in a Lifetime” is Hema and the addressee is Kaushik. The very beginning of the story suggests that from the very beginning, the presence of Kaushik in Hema’s life somehow surpasses her own consciousness and expands beyond the remnants he left within her memory: “I had seen you before, too many times to count, but a farewell that my family threw for yours, at our house in Inman Square, is when I begin to recall your presence in my life” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 223). Years after the departure of Kaushik to India, the ongoing influence of Kaushik’s ‘absent presence’ is also represented by his winter clothes that Hema is forced to make her own by her mother, which indicates an anxiety of sustaining identity:

I found these clothes ugly and tried to avoid them, but my mother refused to replace them. And so I was forced to wear your sweaters, your rubber boots on rainy days. One winter I had to wear your coat, which I hated so much that it caused me to hate you as a result... I never got used to having to hook the zipper on the right side, to looking so different from the other girls in my class with their puffy pink and purple jackets. When I asked my parents if I could have a new coat they said no. A coat was a coat, they said. I wanted desperately to get rid of it. I wanted it to be lost.

(Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 226)

This passage expresses Hema’s yearning to escape from both paternal and their cultural way of life and to identify herself fully with the American prevalence. She represents the classic obedient daughter of Indian immigrants, who is stuck between two worlds, and tries to assimilate with her surrounding culture as much as she can without disappointing her parents. This is depicted through her description of her family’s sleeping arrangements:

My mother considered the idea of a child sleeping alone a cruel American practice and therefore did not encourage it, even when we had the space. She told me that

she had slept in the same bed as her parents until the day she was married and that this was perfectly normal. But I knew that it was not normal, not what my friends at school did, and that they would ridicule me if they knew. The summer before I started middle school, I insisted on sleeping alone. In the beginning my mother kept checking on me during the night, as if I were still an infant who might suddenly stop breathing, asking if I was scared and reminding me that she was just on the other side of the wall. In fact, I was scared that first night; the perfect silence in my room terrified me. But I refused to admit this, for what I feared more was failing at something I should have learned to do at the age of three or four. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 229)

In spite of her later academic success, Hema always suffered from inferiority complex and fears of failure in her personal life, not only because she is a child of immigrants, but because she is raised according to Indian norms that are more old-fashioned than those of other Bengali homes. As she mentions that although her mother belongs to a modest family in Calcutta, “she had neither eaten at a table nor sat on a commode before coming to America” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 225). Kaushik’s return to US with his parents after seven years initiates a new chapter of his relationship with Hema and their families. When Kaushik’s parents, Choudhuris decide for a temporary stay at Hema’s place, that reveals how the sense of self, home and belonging is deeply affected for second generation immigrant like Hema, as once she thinks about Kaushik: ‘I didn’t know what to make of you. Because you had lived in India, I associated you more with my parents than with me.’ (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 240). Hema’s reluctant giving up of her room to Kaushik for an unspecified time prompts in her the feeling of being homeless in her own house and casts Kaushik as an annoying alien in her mind. Her guest’s arrival

compels her to let go her self-imposed American challenge of sleeping alone in her own room and to opt for the Indian practice of sleeping in her parents' room. While emptying her room and packing up her stuff before Kaushik's arrival, she compares the process with the process of her preparing before departing for India, her parents' country:

It was like deciding which of my possessions I wanted to take on a long trip to India, only this time I was going nowhere. Still, I put my things into a suitcase covered with peeling tags and stickers which had travelled various times back and forth across the world and dragged it into my parents' room. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 230)

Hema's shifting to her parents' room in terms of physical distance is hardly considerable, but her using the suitcase that had travelled between India and America, indicates that her trip within her own house may open new vistas on her parents' country of origin. In this story, Kaushik's mother prefers smoking, drinking, wearing Western clothes and disapproves the role of the traditional Indian wife, which conveys the message that mothers even become a metaphor for the motherland, arriving at a new identity altogether, allowing or preventing return to the homeland. Kaushik suffers from double migration, as his father expresses, Kaushik is "furious that we left, and now he's furious that we're here again" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 238). However, in Bombay his parents "managed to raise a typical American teenager" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 238), and because of the American element in him, the only thing he missed during his stay at Bombay are "the cold" and "the snow" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 235). The astonishing fact is that the discrepancy in culture and the lack of warmth in relations never bothered Kaushik. There is a specific narrative twist in the story, when Kaushik reveals to Hema the secret behind his family's circular migration to the US, by referring to the fetal disease his mother is suffering from and her

desire to die away from the suffocating attention of her family in India. When Hema and Kaushik wander near a grave in the nearby woods, Kaushik accidentally expresses his anxiety to Hema, “it makes me wish we weren’t Hindu, so that my mother could be buried somewhere. But she’s made us promise we’ll scatter her ashes into the Atlantic” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 249). Here, neither Kaushik’s mother’s desire of scattering her ashes into Atlantic Ocean bothers Kaushik nor Atlantic Ocean is foreign to him, but his wish for her to be buried instead of cremated may simply because he wants to have a concrete place to visit and cherish the memory of his mother after her death. Through this incident Lahiri depicts the second-generation subjects’ sense of loss and displacement that parental death causes. After his mother’s death, Kaushik’s sufferings echoes his sense of bitterness in a migrant context, because he is unable to tackle the loss of his mother, that signifies a sense of loss that remains unexpressed and transforms into the eternal craving for the sense of belonging into endless melancholia.

Kaushik’s revelation triggers intense rage in Hema, as if she held Kaushik and his father responsible for the demise of his mother, her role model. Although, her rage towards Kaushik, she has no desire to distance herself from him, because by the time she realizes that neither her parents’ conventional Indianness nor Kaushik’s mother’s westernized Indianness can help her envision a sense of future. At the end of the story, Hema’s hesitancy and uncertainty towards Kaushik ties her more closely not only with his own fate of eternal craving for the sense of belonging but also with his impossible mourning and endless melancholia.

The second story “Year’s End” proves to be the most haunting text because it directly depicts the themes such as sense of loss, death, and impossible mourning. The story turns the narrator of the first story into addressee and the addressee into the narrator. Hence, the narrator of this story is Kaushik and Hema is the addressee. This story is from Kaushik’s point of view,

about his as well as his father's changed life after his mother's death due to breast cancer. He felt in terrible depression not only due to his mother's death but also his father's second marriage, which has ruined his relationship with his father, his step-mother and his two step-sisters. There is also a some traces of budding affectionate relationship between Kaushik and his step-sisters, but soon it all faded away, leaving Kaushik choosing a profession of a photographer, wandering off to different places, driving aimlessly towards the isolated, rough and rock-bound country near the Canadian border. After traveling around pine forests and exploring ocean, which was the most intolerant things, he is able to sense an indescribable power his diseased mother would have possessed.

The story begins a few years after the death of Kaushik's mother and he is preparing to return home in India from college to spend Christmas holidays with his lonely father and comes to know through a routine phone call of his father of his recent remarriage with a Bengali widow. Kaushik feels shocked and the same detachment for his father on listening the news of his remarriage as the day he learnt in Bombay that his mother is dying. His reaction to his father's phone call is noteworthy: "No turbulent emotion passed through me as he spoke, only a diluted version of the nauseating sensation that had taken hold the day in Bombay that I learned my mother was dying, a sensation that had dropped anchor in me and never fully left" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 254).

When Kaushik returns home in India, he is constantly haunted by loss – the loss of his mother and the feeling of being at home. He is very disturbed by the way his father and the things are getting changed in his house after his mother's death and father's remarriage with Chitra. Though he has no sentimental attachment to his mother's things, "the thought of Chitra going through the box, watching her sift through everything, upset me [Kaushik] just as it had

upset me, throughout the day, to watch her handle the cutlery, the teakettle, at one point to hold the telephone and speak with my father to learn that he was on his way home” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 279). He is also terribly upset with his father, “when my [Kaushik’s] father had tried to remove the signs of my mother from the house I blamed him for being excessive, but now I blamed him for not having done enough” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 279). Chitra’s “heavy smell of cooking” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 258), “arrangement of the bowls...the old fashioned, ceremonious way (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 261) and appearance of his father with “no drink in his hand, no bottle of Johnnie Walker set out” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 259) irritate him. Though Kaushik’s mother hardly spent time in the kitchen, Chitra’s presence in the kitchen sickens him:

I had no memories of my mother cooking there, but the space still retained her presence more than any other part of the house. The jade and spider plants she had watered were still thriving on the window sill, the orange-and-white sunburst clock she’d so loved the design of, with its quivering second hand, still marking the time on the wall ...I imagined her hands on the taps of the sink, her slim form pressed against the counter. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 263-64)

Kaushik’s craving for home, a need for defined connection and cultural maternity, is visible in his developing sibling bond with his two step sisters, Rupa and Piu, teaching these girls how to handle American money, taking them to museums, an Aquarium, and Dunkin Donuts. However, the limitations of their bonding were soon revealed just few days after Kaushik’s realization about his step sisters: “I felt separate from them in every way but at the same time could not deny the things that bound us together” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 272). The fact is Kaushik can share everything but can’t share his mother’s memories with anyone and when Rupa and Piu giggle over his mother’s pictures, it angered him:

You have no right to be looking at those... They don't belong to you, do you understand?... you've seen it for yourselves, how beautiful my mother was. How much prettier and more sophisticated than yours. Your mother is nothing in comparison. Just a servant to wash my father's clothes and cook his meals. That's the only reason she's here, the only reason both of you are here. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 286-87)

However, he could not understand the simple fact that like him his step sisters are also in a fluid state in a foreign culture. What irritates Kaushik more is the drastic change in his father after his remarriage. His father becomes more Indian after his remarriage and shifts with his family to a less secluded conventional house, where other Bengalis and Indian grocery stores nearby, which were "more important to Chitra than the proximity of the ocean and Modernist architecture had been for' Kaushik's mother" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 292). He considers both his father and himself "thankful to Chitra for chafing under whatever lingered of my mother's spirit in the place she had last called home and for forcing us to shut its doors" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 293).

In Kaushik's case, his dead mother and distant father symbolize his homelessness, and in a eternal condition of mourning, he "never fully trusted the places he'd lived, never turned to them for refuge. From childhood, he realized now, he was always happiest to be outside, away from the private detritus of life" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 309). His self-imposed compulsion to be in motion and inability to settle down has proved to an asset for his professional life as a photojournalist, but he could never have a personal life of his own. His sense of guilt for his constant coverage of war-zones and human suffering, and his first instinct at such scenes to pull



out his camera, have left him pessimistic and detached. In his essay “Reflections On Exile”, what Edward Said suggests is certainly true of Kaushik:

For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be. (186)

Said argues that isolation and displacement produce “a kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community. At this extreme the exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments. To live as everything around you were temporary and perhaps trivial is to fall prey to petulant cynicism as well as to querulous lovelessness” (183). Kaushik also out of extreme sense of exile, leads a loveless life away from all connections and commitments, with the feeling that everything around him is temporary and hardly of any importance.

The last part of this novella, “Going Ashore” is depicted by both of them: Hema and Kaushik, when coincidence brings them together, as they met again in Italy after two long decades. Hema is a scholar, who studies Etruscans, a dead people in Rome. Being a second generation Indian American young woman, she always feels very abandoned and going through identity crisis. She wants to get rid of her Indian identity by marrying an American and also having an affair with a married American, Julian for ten years, but later on she realizes no future of such an affair. Although Hema has adopted the American culture around her instead of the

Indian in her home, she still attempts to strike a balance between her needs for security and freedom. In his book *Beginning Postcolonialism*, John McLeod suggests that "...home is no longer a stable concept, and that belonging to a diaspora means embracing movement and fragmentariness... home has become more a mental space than an actual location" (qtd. in Arjopalo 43). This is certainly true in case of Hema, who resists classification as an Indian as well as an American and tries to find retreat in Italy with the realization that one chapter of her life is over and another one to begin. She enjoys her days in Rome:

Now she was free of both of them, free of her past and free of her future in a place where so many different times stood cheek by jowl like guests at a crowded party. She was alone with her work, alone abroad for the first time in her life, aware that her solitary existence was about to end. In Rome she savoured her isolation, immersed without effort in the silent routine of her days. ... Like Calcutta, which she'd visited throughout her childhood, Rome was a city she knew on the one hand intimately and on the other hand not at all – a place that fully absorbed her and also kept her at bay. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 298-99)

However, soon she accepts her Indian side and an Indian husband, Navin, arranged by her parents, due to a failure in her previous affair with Julian and out of her desperation for a secure life. "From the beginning it was assumed that as long as she and Navin were attracted to each other, as long as they got along, they would marry. And after years of uncertainty with Julian, Hema found this very certainty, an attitude to love she had scorned in the past, liberating, with the power to seduce her just as Julian once had" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 298). Meanwhile after a long gap she happens to meet Kaushik coincidentally at Rome before her marriage and observes that Kaushik has become as stated by Gholipour and Sanahmadi: "the psychological

refugee [who] appears to be most comfortable in his or her un-homed condition, the lack or existence of a home makes no difference to this subject whose identity is fluid and who has a double consciousness” (55). As Bhabha suggests,

...those in the minority recreate tradition, influenced by the uncertainty and contradictions of their situation. Identity is more a negotiation of temporalities than a permanent state of being... in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, and the border is that from which something comes to be, starts its *presencing*. (qtd. in Arjopalo 44)

The coincidental meeting of Hema and Kaushik proves to be the last adventure of Hema before settling into the life of security that she craves. After saying goodbye to Kaushik, she turns back to her Indian cultural identity, travels to Calcutta for her wedding, and begins a new life that is, to an extent, predetermined. As described by Said: “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that is contrapuntal” (186). In this context, both Hema and Kaushik have an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, the contrapuntal or plurality of vision. Their prevailing cultural understanding does not decrease their longing for belonging. When on their way to Volterra, Hema and Kaushik meet a group of people who have lived in the same place, in each other’s company, all their lives, and will probably die there too, Hema expresses, “I envy them that...I’ve never belonged to a place that way. Kaushik laughed [and said] You’re complaining to the wrong person” (320). Unlike Kaushik, Hema represents those second generation immigrants who longs for stability, who are aware of simultaneous dimensions and able to choose between them. Hema survives because of

this ability, whereas Kaushik has remained a wanderer forever that it has made him insensitive towards the need of home and stability, his way of survival is staying on the move.

Unlike Kaushik, The survival instinct is visible even in the profession of Hema for she tries to understand history, and surveys what significance it may have for the present, whereas Kaushik captures and documents only brief moments. In his analysis of “Going Ashore”, Jeffrey Bilbro observes: “Hema’s profession, the translation and study of ancient texts, signifies an attempt to come to terms with her past in order to find closure and understand the present” (qtd. in Arjopalo 43). Further Bilbro suggests, “Hema and Kaushik’s professions are metaphors for their coping strategies for displacement: Hema is a classicist who translates and resurrects old texts, while Kaushik is photographer who attempts to freeze the past” (qtd. in Arjopalo 56).

Hema seems quite aware of herself, and conscious in decision making. However, she is capable enough to lead her life the way she wants, she no longer prefers to and chooses to turn back to Indian culture and an arranged marriage in order to reinforce her self-respect and identity. About her relation with Kaushik, she considers that “In another two weeks everything would be wiped clean—they [Hema and Kaushik] would be in different countries” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 317), which makes her more courageous in her relation with Kaushik. Kaushik’s selfishness compels her to leave him. “Unlike Navin, he was not offering to come to her” instead “he was telling her what to do” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 321). When asked by Kaushik why she wanted to marry Navin, Hema replies, “I thought it might fix things” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 313). She addresses to Kaushik, her thoughts about Navin, “I was repulsed by the sight of him, not because I had betrayed him but because he still breathed, because he was there for me and had countless more days to live” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 332).

McLeod suggests that “Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves... they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription” (qtd. in Arjopalo 28). Hema has the practical approach to dislocate, the adaptability and the capability to reinvent herself from the roles she has played and winded up – a dutiful Indian daughter, a one-sided beloved, a mistress of a married man – and now a bride in an arranged marriage as a conscious attempt to find a firm ground. Whereas, Kaushik cannot tune with the loss of his past and his family and leads a mobile rootless life as a photographer. It seems that in third story “Going Ashore”, Kaushik is stuck at the same beginning point of “Year’s End”, when he returns home in India from college to spend Christmas holidays with his father. He is the melancholy person, who can’t come to terms with his personal tragedy, who can’t accept his father’s remarriage and two step-sisters, who can’t negotiate from his past and the death of his mother, who can’t keep the balance between memory and forgetting and finally dies in a tsunami in Indonesia. He could never confess to himself how much Hema means to him, for “...she was the first person he’d ever slept with who’d known his mother, who was able to remember her as he did” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 313). His detachment is evident in his relationships with Hema, as he cannot get himself rid of the haunting memory of his mother, a metaphor for motherland. Like his mother who was fond of seas and desired to scatter her ashes into the Atlantic, Kaushik also seeks his eternal retreat in the sea due to Tsunami.

Kaushik’s death left nothing for Hema to look behind and wait for. Despite her love for Kaushik, her ignorance of many facets of Kaushik’s life unable her to have a lifelong relationship with him. At last she returns to her prearranged not unhappily life, arranged marries Navin and bears his child, still thinking of Kaushik until she hears of his death:

I returned to my existence, the existence I had chosen instead of you... Those cold, dark days I spent in bed, unable to speak, burning with new life, but mourning your death, went unquestioned by Navin, who had already begun to take a quiet pride in my condition. My mother, who called often from India to check on me, had heard, too. ‘Remember the Choudhuris, the family that once stayed with us?’ she began. It might have been your child, but this was not the case. We had been careful, and you had left nothing behind. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 333)

Lahiri’s pessimistic approach towards the second-generation migrant men like Amit, Rahul and Kaushik is depicted in the light of the lack of emotional steadiness and inability to balance between their home and host cultures and are left to their own devices. Whereas the second-generation women characters in her writings are expected to act as cultural conveyors and inherit that role from their mothers. Lahiri depicts her male characters with culturally fragmented identities, who are unable to negotiate their cultural background and build hybrid identities; and are plagued by uncertainties and insecurities.

### **3.3. *Transmission* by Hari Kunzru**

Hari Mohan Nath Kunzru, of mixed English and Kashmiri Pandit ancestry, born in 1969 and grew up in Essex, is an Indian British novelist and journalist, author of the novels *The Impressionist*, *Transmission*, *My Revolutions* and *Gods without Men*. He studied English at Wadham College, Oxford University, and gained the degree of MA in Philosophy and Literature from Warwick University and recently lives in East London. His writings have been translated into twenty different languages and investigate the contentious heritage of colonialism and its impact on contemporary globalised world on the formation of individual identity, which is

uprooted from its soil of origin and dispersed through the routes of global technological capital.

Kunzru's second novel *Transmission* is the example of contemporary migration novel, a novel of migration and beyond migration, set in an American city and offers very different images of not only of the city landscape but of the immigrant's position in the contemporary world. The Novel depicts various aspects of the interconnected globalizing world: opportunities and insecurities produced by the globalization through the characters of the professional wanderers like Arjun and Guy. It narrates a global associations and dissociations of disparate destinies, about the global vagabonds of nowhere and everywhere, about the confrontation of virtual cybernetic world and the real world. As per the views of Peter Childs and James Green,

*Transmission* has been described by Kunzru as a straighter attempt to talk about the condition of under a globalized world. His second novel thus engages a contemporary digital arena that has, at its core, a dynamic model of subjectivity that is a more dislocated and dispersed version of his first novel's self-conscious experimentation with inter-textuality and exoticism within imperial identity. (79)

In her paper "Far Away, So Close: Translocation as Storytelling Principle in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*", Lucia Kramer states:

*Transmission* is full of examples of processes of translocation simultaneously resulting from and perpetuating the increasingly interconnected nature of today's world. While Kunzru places the transfer of people, signs and texts in the globalized world at the centre of his novel and emphasizes the mechanisms by which they are interlinked, he also insists on the ambivalence of global interconnectedness through

his treatment of the metaphor of (noise in) transmission and by providing his characters with a profound sense of isolation, dislocation, and/or alienation. The disjunct cultural flows depicted in *Transmission* thus lead to manifold losses of or inabilities to establish contact: both with oneself and with other people, as well as with both local and traslocal culture. (78)

The prominent theme of the novel is the investigation of uncertainty and fears of a contemporary man at an individual as well as collective level. The main character of the novel is Arjun Mehta and his act of worldwide spread of virus on computer can be interpreted as the remonstrations by a man of today against discriminating treatment and economic opportunities, craving of acceptance and vain efforts to find one's place in the world, fear of becoming a social exile and a devastated life. Although, the act of spreading virus was to ensure his job stability, Mehta loses control over the virus and it takes the shape of a global chaos, changing the position of the protagonist from a Third World immigrant worker into a global terrorist, raising fears of the Other in the Western society.

The novel can also be interpreted in terms of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's theories of 'liquid modernity', in which the condition of liquidity is visualized as a main source of fears, instability and uncertainty. The uncertainties of our times have been well defined by Bauman, for his term 'liquid modernity' denotes the contemporary times, which can also be called as postmodern or late modern times. In the term 'liquid modernity', the adjective 'liquid' is used to indicate the contradiction of the 'solidness' of the phase before modernity. According to Bauman the liquidity i.e. fears, instability and uncertainty of the modern times are the after effects of globalization, frequent migrations, new technologies of information and communication. He argues that in our day to day life, everything changes on an extraordinary scale, for there is a



constant movement, gush of people, goods and information. These frequent changes unable to sustain stability of social and individual life: “a condition in which social forms ... can no longer (and are not expected) to keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them, and once they are cast for them to set” (Bauman 1). In other words, the current world is the world of temporariness, short-termness and disjointed lives, which necessitate every individual to adopt flexibility and adaptableness. This temporariness and short-termness lead to dissolution rather than preservation, and hence uncertainty and unpredictability are the undividable components of the contemporary liquid times.

The temporariness, short-termness, uncertainty and unpredictability radiate almost from the very first page of the novel *Transmission*: “That smile. The start of all your problems” (Kunzru 3). The novel revolves around an immigrant who is the conveyor of unfulfilled American Dream for himself and a threat at the collective level in a large community. Kunzru also raises the recent burning issue of terrorism, not as a real danger to the security of nation, but as a tool used by countries to authorize their power in these liquid times, when economic and social security is indefinite and shifted to the personal ground. Through its narratives, the novel also reinforces the theme of prevailing uncertainty due to the prevailing era of globalization and interconnectedness.

Being second and later generation writer, Kunzru is suffering from a sense of identity crisis, for he struggles to figure out if he should consider himself as one of the Indian diasporic writers or a normal writer of English literature. It seems that this novel has either helped him to fix his identity by some means or sarcastically saying leave him of nowhere. This is so because while reading his novel *Transmission*, one can experience Kunzru’s dual identity, sense of

displacement, whether forced or self imposed, as a second and later generations of the diaspora writer.

Arjun Mehta, a young Indian and a fresh graduate in software engineering from North Okhla Institute of Technology, lives in Noida, New Delhi with his orthodox middle-class family. He is fascinated by two things- Bollywood films, especially Bollywood actress Leela Zahir, and the dreams of making a bright career in America. He appears for an interview with a software contracting firm, Databodies and offered a job in California. Employed by Databodies as a guest worker in computer engineering, Arjun, like many other talented Indian young men, believes that he is going to Silicon Valley to realize his dream; after all the US is the “Residence of the Non-Resident Indian” (Kunzru 8). His family is very proud of him and celebrates his departure. Upon arrival in California, Arjun is given accommodation by his firm in a small shared low standard apartment. Being a foreigner, he is given an H1-B visa and software consulting work, which is paid on a contract according to the time he spends with clients, but is considerably low paid compared to American engineers.

The very first project of Arjun is to assist a fish processing company in setting up their data networks. The assignment is very small, but Arjun deliberately makes an effort to prolong it so that he has work for at least three week duration that he has to be on the project. After few months, Arjun gets a job in another company in Washington and instead of an impressive position, he finds himself working as a lowly virus testing assistant. However, he performs well there and enjoys his work although his American colleagues are reclusive and his boss, Darryl, does not prove to be a pleasant employer. As the novelist writes: “No one had ever noticed Arjun’s unauthorized presence, since he had always taken care to conceal it, especially when making his own alterations to the configuration of the network. If so inclined, he could have

wreaked havoc at any time, but havoc had never been on his agenda. Why destroy something so interesting when you could be creative instead?” (Kunzru 26)

However, soon after this workplace adds to his devastation when Arjun is fired from his job and his identity comes under crisis. Suddenly, the market collapses and Arjun has to lose his job. His company gives him two weeks to make preparations to leave and in this two weeks time he keeps pondering upon how to retain his job, because during his time in America, he has been telling his family a different stories of his immense success and wealth he earned, when in reality he is troubled and underpaid. For fear of being redundant and feeling of being treated unjustly, for the company wants to laid him off because he is an immigrant, as he later explains: “But they still said I have to go because of first in and first out and being foreign national and all” (Kunzru 227), Arjun is provoked to act something terrible out of his protest against the situation. “He could not go home, which meant he had to find a way to stay, to make Virugenix keep him on” (Kunzru 98). In a desperate attempt to improve his situation at work, he designs a mischievous plan. To retain his job, he decides to create a business for his company by creating a very serious computer virus that only he knows how to cure, and thus he will become an essential employee. He creates the virus and systems across the globe are affected and become untreatable, showing only the young Indian superstar diva, Leela Zahir, dancing covering the screen thus making his virus name, the ‘Leela Virus’. The virus, however, gets out of control and started to corrupt the global financial market, which makes Arjun to lose his job and identity in his dream country of America as well as from his homeland India. Realizing the havoc he has spreaded, Arjun laments “All I wanted was my job back. All I wanted was to work and be happy and live a life in magic America (Kunzru 148).” After all these, Arjun is discovered by the FBI and labeled as one of the most wanted terrorists of world. In fear of causing shame to his family, he makes efforts to leave

the country, gets devastated with losing all his existence and identities and finds himself of nowhere. In her article “Paradise Lost” – Shattered Dreams in Imperial Worlds: V.S. Naipaul’s *Half a Life* and Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission*”, Anna Bysiecka-Maciaszek states:

Mehta’s fear is intensified by the fact that he is an immigrant, which makes his position particularly vulnerable. He is subject to the dealings of the new global empire – the United States, which has no formal colonies but rests its power on economic domination and control. (qtd. in Filipczak 75)

On one hand, being an unemployed immigrant, Arjun is determined not to lose his job, for he is aware that only employment can justify his existence in his dreamland. On the other hand causing no any visible benefit for the host country, he is completely powerless and insignificant. On one hand he is terrified with this bitter fact that he is no more required in his dreamland, on the other hand the narrative of terror presents him as a global danger and at the same time a threat to personal safety. After the spread of the ‘Leela Virus’, the American magistrates declared high levels of emergency, but could not provide straightforward information about the intensity of danger to the press: “The New York Times wanted to know whether the administration could confirm or deny that the country was under attack...[t]he woman from the Times was not sure if this meant yes or no, but she filed a story that made the situation sound very tense, indeed” (Kunzru 145). Here Kunzru proficiently highlights on the role and the tendency of the media in creating and increasing the atmosphere of terror, which instead of availing the truth, offers assumptions and manipulates with the public emotions. As Kunzru narrates, “Across America, citizens started to look with suspicion at the computers on their desks. These machines...were now revealed to harbor something more sinister, something with an agenda” (Kunzru 145). The media propaganda of cyber-terror convicts the public that the

viruses inside personal computers are “the enemy within, a technological fifth column in the homes of ordinary Americans” (Kunzru 145) and transforms a person into a terrorist with an air of parody, revealing the drama of a subject with unrighteous and unlawful accuses. The narrator comments with a full understanding of the situation:

They were calling him [Arjun] a terrorist, which meant that he would probably just join the ranks of the disappeared, the kneeling figures in the orange suits against whom anything was justified, to whom anything could legitimately be done. It was the revenge of the uncontrollable world. He had tried to act but instead had made himself a nonperson. (Kunzru 148)

Meanwhile, the story of the novel is diverted from Arjun Mehta and focuses on another characters, who are affected by Arjun’s spread of ‘Leela Virus’ - British entrepreneur Guy Swift and a popular Indian actress Leela Zahir. Swift belongs to an affluent and successful family and CEO of one of the World's top marketing word suppliers and branding companies in London, named Tomorrow. He has remained unbeaten in whatever he has done in his life so far. However, Arjun’s ‘Leela Virus’ proves to be harmful for his company, blocking its computer systems. Moreover, Swift found himself in a tight corner when the chaos caused deportation of him due to the system error in his identification, for he is identified as an Albanian national, “suspected pyramid fraudster and failed asylum seeker in Germany” (Kunzru 263). During the deportation, Swift and his European partners realized that in the globalizing world, the nature of borders and the position of an immigrant are disintegrated, because it may create greater uncertainty if various people are free to migrate to any country without any strict criteria. So they dream of making changes in the immigration criteria with a policy to rebrand Europe as the world’s VIP lounge, and so to impose severe control on immigration: “A continent that wants

people, but only the best” (Kunzru 239). It is obvious that this policy is against those who do not come in the category of aristocratic, hence directed against the so called Third World populations i.e. ‘Others’, who are perceived as the economical threat to the Western society: “The problem with these people is they lie, they destroy their papers. You have no way of knowing who they are. They say they’re from the war zone but actually what they want is to take a job from a citizen” (Kunzru 235).

The second part of the novel deals with the consequences of ‘Leela virus’ that damaged the information transfer and communication systems, giving birth to fascination with uncertainty, various conspiracy theories with meanings, assumptions and interpretations, concerning the virus and its creator’s disappearance, regardless of his earlier explanations of his motives. Another weird consequence of the situation is the position Arjun attains after his disappearance: he is both a terrorist and celebrity, he combines “The figures of the outlaw and the underground genius are dear to many in the computer underground, and Mehta (combining both) has become a hero to younger generation of disaffected hackers who feel their contributions are undervalued by the corporations and misunderstood by an ignorant and hostile public” (Kunzru 267) and becomes a symbol of protest:

The hope that the genius hacker might be a revolutionary was so strong in certain quarters that it has survived the revelation that the Leela papers were the creation of a group of a Bologna-based radicals, who had appropriated Mehta’s name as a gesture and invited anyone else who wished to use it to do the same. In recent times, “Arjun Mehta” has authored statements on the food industry and the World Trade Organization. His Virugenix employee identification photo ... has been screen printed onto T-shirts with humorous ant capitalist slogans. (Kunzru 267)

It is ironic that all Arjun intended was to survive in his dreamland, to prove his ability to his employer and to regain his job. He never intended to be a rebel or a hero or a revolutionary in the eyes of people:

If I lose this job I have to go back to my parents in disgrace. Although of course I'm a much bigger disgrace now. What will happen to them?...I meant to cause a little disruption, just a small problem, because then I could step in and solve it and be the hero. But instead I am here and they are calling me terrorist and FBI most wanted and I'm scared... (Kunzru 227)

Despite Arjun's intention to act on a small personal scale, the unpredicted twist of actions, the inexplicable and irrepressible forces and the unexpected consequences illustrates the triumph of 'liquidity' over the globalized world of our times. At the end of the novel, Leela Zahir, a top Bollywood actress, who has, against her will, become the icon for the crash of worldwide economy and communication systems, is compelled to abandon her stardom and career owing to the spread of the 'Leela virus' and the strain due to her dominating mother. During the shooting of her latest Bollywood blockbuster, she escapes from the hotel and falls into a self-indulgent state of stupefaction.

In the novel *Transmission*, as one reviewer observes, the uncertainty of the protagonist's situation is represented by his mobility: "*Transmission* is about mobility – not just the malign mobility of the computer virus but the harassed mobility of the economic migrant and the meaningless mobility of the super-affluent vacuously jetting round the globe" (qtd. in Leonard 118). Arjun's mobility proves him a puppet at the hands of influencing globalization, moving around without being sure of his final destination. What the novel does have in common with the mainstream diaspora writings is Arjun's living at the edge of two cultures, the mixing of

languages and his experience of alienation in host country. Kunzru's *Transmission* is an imagined myth of successful resistance of the diasporic self, signified by the protagonist, who is frustrated his homing desire to create the home where one is, that is in the host culture, "Home is Where Your Feet are".



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