

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

5th Year of Open Access

Vol. 5, Issue-6 December 2014

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"Transplanted Individuals": Anxiety of Dislocation and Cultural Alienation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*

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Abstract:

It is now almost an acknowledged norm that any discussion on Jhumpa Lahiri's work will begin with a mention on her delineation of the first and second generation immigrant experiences of her characters. Frequently, Lahiri's characters are haunted by a sense of cultural alienation, the feeling of 'not belonging' or experiencing 'foreignness' and they constantly struggle to construct an identity of their own. Their feelings of displacement from their homeland often lead them to an anxious state while they strive to recreate a sense of home in an unfamiliar place. Jhumpa Lahiri's third work *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) with its eight stories continues to trail its predecessors, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*, in portraying the anxieties and plights of the Bengali immigrants caught in the crisis of identity in an alien culture. This article is an attempt to explore and examine the anxiety of dislocation and the sense of cultural alienation prevailing among the characters mainly through textual analysis. The focus is primarily on three stories: 'Unaccustomed Earth', 'Hell-Heaven' and 'Only Goodness'.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri, anxiety, dislocation, cultural alienation, immigrants

"Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools" - Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands"

As a second generation immigrant who views her native country mostly from the outside as an exotic place of her origin, Jhumpa Lahiri in her works shows consummate skills in unveiling the complexities of dislocation, assimilation, anxieties associated with them and multicultural issues sometimes along with a sense of rootlessness among her characters living abroad. Her works are replete with the immigrant experiences of her characters and a careful reading of her writings unmistakably brings out a graphic picture of cultural alienation and anxiety of dislocation of uprooted individuals. In fact, anxiety among the characters due to a sense of dislocation is one of the most dominating and recurring themes of Indian English writers living abroad. People living together in one country often "acknowledge that the old country- a nation often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore-always has some claim on the loyalty and emotions" (Cohen). Jhumpa Lahiri, the daughter of Bengali immigrants, herself admits that she was always more comfortable while visiting relatives in Kolkata. "I felt accepted there in ways that I never felt accepted here," she says. "In the U.S., we were rootless, transplanted individuals who had no connection to anybody by blood." (Wolfe-"Jhumpa Lahiri: On Dislocation"). She almost echoes the words when she says to the Bengali Daily Anandabazar Patrika that she is not rootless. Her parents always feel their roots in Kolkata (Anandabazar Patrika). Some other prominent women writers who have expressed their expatriate experiences and sharply portrayed the cultural dilemmas, anxieties, yearnings and alienations in their works include Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Manju Kapur etc. As one of the major Indian diasporic writers, Anita Desai's remark on her feelings of ontological insecurity and cultural alienation is worth mentioning here:

“This has brought two separate stands into my life. My roots are divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I inherited from my mother.” (Desai, Anita- "The Book I Enjoyed Writing Most").

However, being “an Indian by ancestry, British by birth, American by immigration” (Nayak), Jhumpa Lahiri's depictions of the diasporic experiences are more vivid and buyont. The following lines portray the gloomy and anxious feeling of dislocation and cultural alienation of the writer intensely:

“I've often felt that I am somehow illegitimate in both cultures. A true Indian does not accept me as an Indian, and true American doesn't accept me as an American” (Interview with Barbara Kantrowitz)

Her diasporic fictional characters seem masterpiece accomplishments in this respect. "Lahiri mines the immigrants experience in a way superior to Bharti Mukherjee and others" (Sinha). Her debut work, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), has "double perspective – between the ancient traditions of her ancestors and the sometimes baffling prospects of the new world." (Dubey). The book contains characters like Mr Kapasi, Mr and Mrs. Das who signifies the insurmountable gaps between the cultures of American born Indians and residential Indians ('The Interpreter of Maladies'), Sanjeev and Twinkle who display "the disconnection between first and second generation immigrants in the United States" (Raman) ('This Blessed House') or Mrs. Sen who has a deep feeling of isolation from her extended family in India('Mrs Sen's'). The stories are woven in such a way that provides readers "a sense of exile and the potential for - and frequent denial of - human communication that can be found in all of Lahiri's short stories." (Brada-Williams). Again, in her novel *The Namesake* (2003), the members of a Bengali family settled in America try their level best to be transformed into true Americans while retaining their Bengali customs and cultures. The diasporic feeling, tension between two cultures, sense of dislocation and bewilderment- all are skilfully portrayed in the novel. The parents try hard to raise their children in America keeping their own culture. The children aspire for being American and thus are torn between two cultures. Gogol feels a sense of identity crisis in his name and at the end tries to assimilate himself in both cultures when he takes pride in the name Nikhil Gogol Ganguli. However, characters in Lahiri's second novel, *The Lowland* (2013), exhibit little sense of displacement. At the beginning, Subhash shows some cultural negotiations but finally he gets himself Americanised. Gauri never feels the anxiety of dislocation and the second generation immigrant, Bela, easefully assimilates herself with American culture and takes a "rootless path"(Lahiri, *The Lowland* 225).

Lahiri's third book as well as second short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* is poignant and perceptive in the depiction of expatriate experiences of the characters. The title of the collection is a reference to a line in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Custom House" which Lahiri mentions at the very beginning:

"My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth."

The mention of this epigraph may be a clue that the characters in this collection are "transplanted individuals" who need to be adapted in the unaccustomed soil of an alien culture. However, Hawthorne held the view that transplanting people into new soil rather than to "be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil" will cause the nourishment of human nature. But on *Unaccustomed Earth*, Jhumpa Lahiri appears to be

sceptical to accept Hawthorne's notion in this respect. Rather it seems that she is suggesting transplanting individuals may produce mixed outcomes. The botanic reference in the epigraph seems to be a deliberate attempt from the writer to connect it with the term 'diaspora' which has its origin in the Greek word 'diaspeirein' ('dia'- across, 'speirein'- scatter) and was originally "used to account for the botanical phenomenon of seed dispersal" (Mishra). Thus the title of the collection itself bears the very essence of the stories- the mental agony, the feeling of rootlessness, the crisis of adaptation in an alien culture, torments of the sensitive souls of the immigrants as well as the confusions, conflicts, anxieties and the sense of being dislocated. The stories in the collection mainly handle the crisis of the second generation immigrants and it seems that their suffering from exile and displacement is more acute than their parents as they have nowhere to claim as their motherland. "It's hard to have parents who consider another place "home"-even after living abroad for 30 years, India is home for them. We were always looking back so I never felt fully at home here. There's nobody in this whole country that we're related to. India was different-our extended family offered real connections." Yet the familial ties to India are not enough to make India "home", "I didn't grow up there, I wasn't a part of things. We visited often but we didn't have a home. We were clutching at a world that was never fully with us"(Lahiri's Interview with Vibhuti Patel). Thus, herself being the victim of such anxieties, Lahiri unmistakably brings out in these stories the crisis of identity and the failure to cope with the situation of 'in-betweenness'. The underlying theme of *Unaccustomed Earth* is that, observes Liesl Schillinger, "America is still a place where the rest of the world comes to reinvent itself — accepting with excitement and anxiety the necessity of leaving behind the constrictions and comforts of distant customs". There is the sense of loss of a national tradition as well as language and culture. The feelings of rootlessness and dislocation may also be perceived in the stories. However, a detailed analysis of some of the stories may distinctly bring out multi-faceted nature of the alienated and dislocated sensations of the characters.

The collection opens with the title story "Unaccustomed Earth" in which the main characters Ruma and her father are continually relocated- both physically and mentally. However, in the story Ruma, the thirty eight year old daughter, seems to be more reactionary towards change than her widower, old father. The monologic narrative of the very first sentence brings the indirect presence of Ruma's deceased mother to the readers and provides the emotional distancing of the father and the daughter:

"After her mother's death, Ruma's father retired from the pharmaceutical company where he had worked for many decades and began traveling in Europe" (Lahiri, *UE*, 3)

Readers are also informed that Ruma has just moved from Brooklyn to the eastside of Seattle and, therefore, in a sense she is now physically dislocated which is now to her a cause of anxiety and uneasiness:

"The sight of her father's rental car, a compact maroon sedan, upset her, freshly confirming the fact that she lived on a separate coast, thousands of miles from where she grew up...The connections her family had formed to America, her parent's 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, *UE*, 11)

To Ruma, her mother was a bridge between her two cultures and now the sudden death of her mother leaves her in a traumatic condition. She feels as if she is unable to return to her own

Bengali culture anymore. The sale of the parental house by her father makes the mental agony of Ruma more poignant as it is to her like "wiping out her mother's presence just as the surgeon had"(Lahiri, *UE*, 6) though to her brother Romi this event signifies almost nothing. Ruma is too much preoccupied with grief after the loss of her mother and a sense of alienation engrosses her. Her discomfiture is evident to the sight of her father who appears to her resembling "an American in his old age. With his gray hair and fair skin he could have been practically from anywhere"(Lahiri, *UE*, 11). Ruma's perception that "it was her mother who would have stuck out in this wet Northern landscape, in her brightly colored saris, her dime-sized maroon bindi, her jewels"(Lahiri, *UE*, 11) is deeply engrained in her nostalgia for her ancestral culture. Ruma is unable to perceive her father's freshly appearances and attires free from anxieties of life. Rather, her eyes find similarities of her father with that of an American tourist and contrast the appearance with her mother.

However, a careful reading reveals that Ruma's personality has a double perspective. On the one hand she has married an American boy much to the discontent of her mother who "had done everything in her power to talk Ruma out of marrying Adam, saying that he would divorce her, that in the end he would want an American girl" (Lahiri, *UE*, 26). On the other, she has a deep sense of disrespect to the American way of parenting:

"In spite of her efforts he (Akash) was turning into the sort of American child she was always careful not to be, the sort that horrified and intimidated her mother" (Lahiri, *UE*, 23)

Though after her mother's death, Ruma is not prepared even to take pains to familiarize her son Akash to the taste of Indian foods and "now he ate from boxes"

Ruma is a kind of second generation Indian immigrants caught between the dilemmas of two cultures with double standards. To her, for an old man like her father "wearing a baseball cap that said POMPEII, brown cotton pants and a sky-blue polo shirt, and a pair of white leather sneakers" belongs to a typical Americanised culture and yet after her mother's death, of the two hundred and eighteen sarees, the typical archetype of Bengali culture, "she kept only three, 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, *UE*, 17)

The readers are also informed that Ruma hardly speaks in Bengali, the language of her parents, and is unable even to decipher the language in written form. "Bengali had never been a language in which she felt like an adult. Her own Bengali was slipping from her...on the rare occasions Ruma used Bengali anymore, when an aunt or uncle called him from Calcutta to wish her a Happy Bijoya or Akash a Happy Birthday, she tripped over words, mangled tenses. And yet it was the language she had spoken exclusively in the first years of her life." (Lahiri, *UE*, 12). She even lacks the discipline to stick to Bengali while speaking to her son. As a consequence Akash, her son, "had forgotten the little Bengali Ruma had taught him when he was little" (Lahiri, *UE*, 12). Undoubtedly, refusal of one's native language and the acceptance of a foreign language imply the covert acceptance of that foreign culture mentally. Though, Ruma herself is not prepared to accept this fact.

The author's use of garden metaphor is worth mentioning here. Ruma's uncultivated, 'unaccustomed garden' is representative of Ruma's sense of dislocation. "That she did not know the names of the plants in her own backyard" (Lahiri, *UE*, 16) is metaphorical to her alienation from the locality. Her father, on the other hand, cultivates the garden combining various elements from Indian as well as American culture. Thus the garden becomes a recurring image as well as "the inscape of national identity"

In sharp contrast with Ruma, her father is depicted in the story as a man with progressive outlook and mind yet has his native culture engrained within the soul. He has no nostalgic addiction to his native language yet, unlike Ruma, he endeavours to teach his grandson Bengali words. In Bengali culture elderly parents aspire to the support of their children, physically or at least mentally. And he grapples with his conscience for denying this need of his parents:

"...he knew that he, too, had turned his back on his parents, by settling in America. In the name of ambition and accomplishment, none of which mattered anymore, he had forsaken them." (Lahiri, *UE*, 51)

However, in spite of his outwardly open-minded acceptance of a foreign culture, he, too, cannot ignore his roots. He is involved with Mrs. Bagchi in the tour primarily because of her Bengali origin. "Being the only two Bengalis in the tour group, naturally they'd struck up a conversation. They started eating together, sitting next to one another on the bus" (Lahiri, *UE*, 9). The word "naturally" here evidently points out the fact that for him, too, there is no escape from his cultural ties which he has left in Kolkata. To him his children do not resemble him or his wife- "they spoke differently, dressed differently, seemed foreign in every way, from the texture of their hair to the shapes of their feet and hands" (Lahiri, *UE*, 54). Thus Ruma's father is filled with an anxious sense of alienation from his own children. He is in pursuit of his own cultural self among his inheritors and interestingly it is his grandson "who was only half-Bengali to begin with, who did not even have a Bengali surname, with whom he felt a direct biological connection, a sense of himself reconstituted in another" (Lahiri, *UE*, 54).

Another character in the story, Ruma's mother is presented off screen as she is already dead when the narration begins. Yet we feel her presence in every step in Ruma's life. Contrasting Ruma's father, she is very traditional with a deep respect for her own culture. To Ruma she serves as the role model and her death to Ruma signifies the loss of the bridge between two cultures. She even censures Ruma for her marrying a white American boy, "You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian, that is the bottom line" (Lahiri, *UE*, 26). To her, marrying a white boy originates from a sense of disrespect for her own culture. Thus, Ruma wants the "white masks" (to borrow the concept of Frantz Fanon) to appropriate and imitate the American culture. The readers can easily associate it with the notion of 'Colonial Mimicry', i.e., "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (Homi K Bhabha). In her traditional dressing, in her strictness not to use English at home and in her advice to get Akash used to the taste of the Indian foods, Ruma's mother appears to be a counterfoil of Ruma's father and Ruma shows her inability to counterbalance two dominant forces in her life (mother/tradition and father/change). Thus, it is ultimately Ruma who is crushed between the two opposite forces of her parental cultures and it is for this reason that in spite of her outwardly Americanised demeanour, she is terribly shocked discovering the appearance of another woman in her father's lonely life after her mother's death. Thus, throughout her life, Ruma has to constantly negotiate between Bengali and American cultures.

The story "Hell-Heaven" is quite different in the sense that it is narrated in first person. A Bengali girl Usha recollects her childhood and adolescence experiences related to her family and a family friend Pranab Chakraborty, her 'Pranab kaku'(Pranab uncle). On the day Pranab meets them, he follows Usha and her mother "for the better part of an afternoon around the streets of Cambridge" (Lahiri, *UE*, 60) in order to find out whether they are Bengalis as being lonely he is badly in search of some Bengali friends. Usha's mother Aparna, whom he calls 'boudi' after Bengali tradition, after learning that he has not had a proper Bengali meal in more than three months, serves him "the leftover curried mackerel and rice that we had eaten for dinner the night before" (Lahiri, *UE*, 61). Thus, he becomes befriended with Usha and her family. At the outset it appears that although Pranab himself is a student there, he is too critical of American educational system:

" 'These Americans are learning equations I knew at Usha's age,' he would complain. He was stunned that my second-grade teacher didn't assign any homework and that at the age of seven I hadn't yet been taught square roots or the concept of pi" (Lahiri, *UE*, 63)

The use of the words 'these Americans' is suggestive of his sense of alienation with American culture. Outwardly, his appearances and behaviours seem to be of a typical person of Bengali origin. "He appeared without warning, never phoning beforehand but simply knocking on the door the way people did in Calcutta and calling out 'Boudi!' "(Lahiri, *UE*, 63).

However, the situation reverses when Pranab, to the utter surprise of Usha's parents and his circle of Bengali friends, marries an American girl Deborah without the consent of his family. Usha's mother who now has a secret love for him and who in no way connects herself with American culture, prophesies(much along the lines of Ruma's mother in "Unaccustomed Earth") that "she will leave him" and "he is throwing his life away"(Lahiri, *UE*, 73). After their marriage Pranab and Deborah begins to drift away from Bengali community and "their absences were attributed, by my parents and their circle, to Deborah, and it was universally agreed that she had stripped Pranab Kaku not only of his origins but of his independence...their example was invoked as a warning, and as vindication, that mixed marriages were a doomed enterprise" (Lahiri, *UE*, 75)

With the birth of twin daughters, Pranab becomes more Americanised. The little girls "barely looked Bengali and spoke only English and were being raised so differently from me and most of the other children. 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, *UE*, 75). They celebrate Thanksgiving and other American holidays forgetting the Indian traditions. Thus, the Americanisation of the Bengali boy Pranab Chakraborty is now complete. He has become the "reformed, recognizable Other". Culture to him is an 'either-or' entity as he is unable to counterbalance both cultures at the same time.

As a second generation immigrants, Usha in this story is also torn between two cultures- the Indian Bengali culture promoted by her family and the American culture of her outer circle of acquaintances. Ultimately, at the adolescence period, she gets habituated with counterbalancing both cultures and begins to internalise American values and ideology. She evades her mother and keeps other secrets from her:

"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 erections against my hip as we lay groping on a sofa or the backseat of a car" (Lahiri, *UE*, 76).

She finally makes her mother to accept the fact that she is "not only her daughter but a child of America as well" (Lahiri, *UE*, 81). Thus Usha maintains a judicious view of life and is less threatened by the sense of cultural alienation and anxiety of being a 'stranger'.

In this story, however, Jhumpa Lahiri makes some ironical comments in respect of cultural differences. The immigrant Bengalis are much critical about American culture. When in Deborah's house on the Thanksgiving Day, they are "told where to sit in an alternating boy-girl formation", they feel uncomfortable. Yet they do not have the feeling that it is a sign of disrespect to their Indian culture to criticize their guest Deborah and even call her 'asobbho'(uncivilised) in front of her in Bengali assuming that she cannot grasp the meaning:

"Sometimes she asked me how to say this or that in Bengali; once she asked me what *asobbho* meant. I hesitated, then told her it was what my mother called me if I had done something extremely naughty, and Deborah's face clouded. I felt protective of her, aware that she was unwanted, that she was resented, aware of the nasty things people said."(Lahiri, *UE*, 69)

Again, Bengalis including Usha's mother Aparna are too much sceptical about the stability of their marriage and from their deep-rooted disrespect to American culture on love and marriage even prophesize that the marriage will not last. Ironically, their prophecies come true but not for Deborah:

"After twenty-three years of marriage, Pranab Kaku and Deborah got divorced. It was he who had strayed, falling in love with a married Bengali woman, destroying two families in the process." (Lahiri, *UE*, 81)

Thus it is the man of Indian origin who is responsible for this mishap. And even in this situation, "in her shock and grief, it was my mother whom Deborah turned to, calling and weeping into the phone" (Lahiri, *UE*, 81). Here humanity is placed above all cultures and religions. The underlying message is further strengthened when towards the end of the story the readers come to know of a suicidal attempt by Usha's mother after Pranab's wedding. "It was not I who saved her, or my father, but our next-door neighbour, Mrs. Holcomb, with whom my mother had never been particularly friendly"(Lahiri, *UE*, 83). Thus at the end, the story becomes a humane tale of love and compassion denying the cultural gulfs and polarity.

In the story "Only Goodness", we again face the the sense of anxiety of the second generation Bengali immigrants, Sudha and her brother Rahul. The first generation immigrants, i.e., Sudha and Rahul's parents have already confronted with the sense of isolation in an alien land when in their early life in London they discovered that "half the rentals in London in the sixties said WHITES ONLY"(Lahiri, *UE*, 135). They ultimately settle in America and there also "they were stuck...(they) aware that they faced a life sentence of being foreign"(Lahiri, *UE*, 138). They feel the sense of dislocation in a foreign land and cannot assimilate themselves with the foreign culture. The mother cannot drive. They face the problem of not being accustomed to American habits and American accent. Still they prove themselves to be economically successful. However, the parents continue to maintain a mental distance from the local culture.

Their uneasiness is evident when, after Rahul's detention at the local police station, her mother blames the American police: "They probably stop him just for being Indian"(Lahiri, *UE*, 142). Mother blames the country and its culture for the spoiling of children and compares it with their own:

"That's the problem with this country...too many freedoms, too much having fun. When we were young, life wasn't always about fun."(Lahiri, *UE*, 143)

The parents maintain the view of Indian sense of stoicism, unaffected by sorrow and joy, and thus fail to comprehend the mental turmoil of the children. The narrative here even goes to the point of sarcasm:

" 'Depression' was a foreign word to them, an American thing. In their opinion their children were immune from the hardships and injustices they had left behind in India, as if the inoculations the pediatrician had given Sudha and Rahul when they were babies guaranteed them an existence free of suffering." (Lahiri, *UE*, 144)

The parents are so much preoccupied with a sense of anxiety and alienation from American culture that even they accept Roger as their son-in-law in spite of his previous marriage and a fourteen years gap with Sudha considering that "he'd been born in India, that he was English and not American, drinking tea, not coffee, and saying 'zed' not 'zee' "(Lahiri, *UE*, 152) besides his other achievements.

Sudha, their daughter, on the other hand is more Americanised and logical in her viewpoints towards life without any special fascination for her ancestral homeland. Unlike her parents who "were prudish about alcohol to the point of seeming Puritanical, frowning upon the members of their Bengali circle-the men, that was to say-who liked to sip whiskey at gatherings"(Lahiri, *UE*, 129), on weekends, she learns "to let loose, going to parties and allowing boys into her bed. She began drinking, something her parents did not do"(Lahiri, *UE*, 129). She maintains a romantic view about immigration and considers her parents early immigratory lives as "an adventure, living with paraffin heaters, seeing snow for the first time." However, Sudha also pities her mother for her refusal to acknowledge the unpleasant facts about Rahul and blaming American culture and its law instead. She feels that her parents should accept the life in a more logical way.

But in the story, it is the character of Rahul who actually leads a distressing life to live in-between two cultures. Like Ruma in "Unaccustomed Earth", he too is a product of hybrid culture having respect to none of the cultures. For years he has been constantly compared to other Bengali children. Indian life holds no charm to him and, unlike his sister, he has no romantic viewpoint towards immigration:

"While Sudha regarded her parents' separation from India as an ailment that ebbed and flowed like a cancer, Rahul was impermeable to that aspect of their life as well. 'No one dragged them here,' he would say. 'Baba left India to get rich, and Ma married him because she had nothing else to do'."(Lahiri, *UE*, 138)

Rahul is crushed in between his own wish to live an American way of life and his parents' expectation of retaining his Indian cultural origin. He is unable to counterbalance the pressure and takes recourse on alcohol. Thus, to the much distress of his parents, he remains the

embodiment of an utter 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, *UE*, 151)

In the story, it is Rahul who suffers most from the anxiety of dislocation and cultural hybridity. He is a dislocated subject. His inability to take the middle course of life by accepting his in-betweenness exemplifies the negative effects of cultural dislocation. He is the symbolic icon of anxiety of dislocation as well as a sense of cultural alienation.

In the story "A Choice of Accommodations" the protagonist Amit travels with his American wife Megan to attend the wedding of an old school friend, Pam Borden. The story is less burdened with the feelings of cultural alienation or dislocation though there are occasional flashes. Amit is haunted by the fact that "his daughters looked nothing like him, nothing like his family, and in spite of the distance Amit felt from his parents, this fact bothered him, that his mother and father had passed down nothing, physically, to his children...apart from their vaguely Indian names they appeared fully American" (Lahiri, *UE*, 94). Amit recounts his parents to be highly liberal with little nostalgia for their native culture. The dresses of his mother were mainly Western while his father kept a liquor cabinet. Yet, to the core of their hearts "they wanted him to marry a Bengali girl, raised and educated as he had been" (Lahiri, *UE*, 112). Here nothing is overtly spelt out. But a sense of cultural gulf pervades their minds behind their outwardly Western demeanours.

In "Nobody's Business", the American boy Paul gets involved with the personal affairs of his housemate Sangeeta Biswas, a Bengali girl. Sangeeta is frequently called by various boys, mainly Bengali, for matrimonial purpose as "they'd heard that she was pretty and smart and thirty and Bengali and still single" (Lahiri, *UE*, 174). Here the commentary about thinkings of the Indian community is that "they were interested in a mythical creature created by an intricate chain of gossip, a web of wishful Indian-community thinking in which she was an aging, overlooked poster child for years of bharat natyam classes, perfect SATs" (Lahiri, *UE*, 176). Thus the yearning of getting a suitable match from one's own culture instead of an alien culture is generalised here. Sang's phone-suitors are almost the symbols of alienation from American culture- a sense so much present in other characters in this collection.

In Part Two of the collection, both the eponymous characters of the novella "Hema and Kaushik" (which is a collection of three interlinked stories) suffer from the trauma of being dislocated. Though Hema can have a negotiation with her past, Kaushik who is of melancholic disposition cannot escape from it. Hema suffers from her in-between stage, the aspiration to marry a white man and the final retreat to her Indian culture. Kaushik's sense of rootlessness comes from his father's remarriage and ultimately he fails to keep the balance and dies in a tsunami in Indonesia. The sense of alienation and displacement works within both of them in different degrees and in different ways.

Thus an anxious sense of cultural alienation and dislocation runs throughout the stories of *Unaccustomed Earth*. They are the chronicles of social displacement and cultural unease. "Exiles or immigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (Salman Rushdie, "The Indian Writer in England"). Lahiri's characters in this volume voice that anxiety of the immigrants living far away from their homeland, leading bicultural lives, obsessed with a sense of mental anguish and

sometimes sandwiched between the pressures of two cultures. However, a deep introspection also reveals that the stories carry the message of cultural cooperation and assimilation rather than confrontation. The motif is focused and examined from a number of angles and different viewpoints-both from Indian and American. The hybridity of the characters draws our attention to the notion of multiculturalism as the characters in the collection who acknowledge and accept the existence of two different cultures in their lives can successfully navigate through the courses of life maintaining an intricate dynamic balance between their irrecoverable past and inescapable present. Ultimately in these stories, the theme of dislocation and cultural alienation has been intermingled with human relationships and the collection, with author's masterful handling of the prose narration, turns out to be a signature work of Jhumpa Lahiri in portraying social conflicts, the sense of alienation and melancholy, double consciousness and cultural dilemmas of the first and second generation immigrants in the modern globalised world.

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