

## DIASPORA IMAGINATION AND EXPERIENCE SHORT STORIES INTERPRETER OF MALADIES AND UNACCUSTOMED EARTH

**Surbhi Bhatt<sup>1</sup> & Mahipal Singh Rao<sup>2</sup>, Ph. D.**

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Pacific Academy of Higher Education and Research University

<sup>2</sup>Professor

### Abstract

Stories of Jhumpha Lahiri are the evidence of immigrant lives, their displeasures, disenchantment, struggles, dreams, integrations, etc. Immigrant experience, as well as identity, really is without question the elements of Interpreter of Maladies which have been explored possibly the most by researchers. In the stories in Unaccustomed Earth have been commended for presenting different aspects of the Bengali diasporic sensibility. The eight stories in the collection show the quest for identity in the diasporic situation. They scrutinize numerous identities as well as a dilemma in the lives of immigrants. This article will study the short story about the immigrants those who have to live their homeland by the Indian-American writer Jhumpha Lahiri, two of those three works, Interpreter of Maladies (1999) and Unaccustomed Earth (2008), are short story collections and are some of the very well known ones.

**Keywords:-** Diaspora, Jhumpha Lahiri, Immigrants, Interpreter of Maladies, Unaccustomed Earth English Fiction, Indo-English Diasporic Literature etc.



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at [www.srjis.com](http://www.srjis.com)

## INTRODUCTION

Stories of Jhumpha Lahiri are the evidence of immigrant lives, their displeasures, disenchantment, struggles, dreams, integrations, etc. Her characters might go to the very different way of inferences of marginality and otherness in distant lands. All of the nine stories in 'The Interpreter of Maladies' set in America as well as India are joined with each other by the themes of prohibiting, loneliness, and of course the search for contentment which is seen throughout the story.

Interpreter of Maladies won precarious acclaim and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and she shadowed up the superb act with Unaccustomed Earth.

This article tries to unpack or open some significant questions in this literary tradition which are related to the story, such as whether the short story becomes an enabling genre for diasporic authors like Lahiri or left some mark for them, by investigating what motivates this formal choice of all as well as what this medium offers to everyone which distinguishes it from the novel. I aim to analyze that if Lahiri's choice is to be viewed in the framework of a

North American tradition which is different in some way in short fiction or if her work can be considered within a broader South Asian pattern or even postcolonial ambit.

## 1 INTERPRETER OF MALADIES (1999)

Interpreter of Maladies is based upon Jhumpa Lahiri's personal experiences what all she has faced in her life and also those of her mothers and fathers and also their Indian immigrant friends (Shea, "**Interpreter of Maladies: A Rhetorical Practice Transmitting Cultural Knowledge,**" 20082).

In Maladies both the thing happened like precisely diagnosed as well as misinterpreted, matters were both temporary and some were life-changing, relationships in flux and unshakeable, unforeseen or unexpected blessings, as well as abrupt chaos, was also seen there, and of course the powers of survival also exist— these are generally among the themes of Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize-winning debut collection of stories who has made everyone moved. Traveling from India to New England and back again, Lahiri charts the emotional voyages of characters seeking love far beyond barriers of nations, cultures, religions, and moreover generations. Filled having the sensual details of both Indian as well as American cultures, additionally, they talk with universal eloquence and kindness to every person who has ever felt like an outsider.

Immigrant experience, as well as identity, really is without question the elements of Interpreter of Maladies which have been explored possibly the most by researchers. Among the list of the earliest studies written is "Writing the Second Generation: Negotiating Cultural Borderlands in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies and The Namesake" by Robin Field in 2004. Field points out, as opposed to first- generation immigrants, second-generation immigrants, are in a particularly vexed position regarding identity. Field explains that the second-generation exist in a "luminal space of cultural borderlands" amongst the United States and family's country of origin. Additionally, this group is constantly negotiating their cultural roots and also their American ways of living. As common as it is for the second generation to enjoy having some homelands, it is equally common for this group to experience a dual alienation (Field, 2004). This is because children of immigrants observe a mostly static representation of their cultural inheritance in their day to day activities. Field explains that the procedure of cultural formation has elements that are partly inherited, partly modified or transformed and likewise partly invented (Karthikadevi).

### **1.1 CONTENTS OF INTERPRETER OF MALADIES**

Interpreter of Maladies is a collection of nine short stories. It is about the experiences of Indians who live in an alien country and how they are deeply crushed under the burden of alienation and rootlessness. The stories present Lahiri's inter-continental journey during which she gets herself accustomed to both the cultures by her long stay abroad as well as regular trips to India during every summer. It seems that for Lahiri, the western culture forms a part of her emotional makeup. Her writings are scattered with the details of traditional Indian names, food, flavor and wardrobe which collectively give shape to her stories. Three of Lahiri's stories are based in India and employ the narrative voices and indigenous experiences of Indians living in India. She places focus on people meeting one another or separating, or on their subtle tensions and quiet moments of happiness or pain. Lahiri portrays Indians abroad, who face displacement, adhere to their native culture, attempt to integrate their own selves into their adopted homeland and suffer tensions over moral as well as emotional issues.

### **1.2 FOCUS OF INTERPRETER OF MALADIES**

Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies focuses on immigrants or expatriate Indians who have been on the move from India to UK and also to the USA or are on a short visit to their native country, in either case confronting surprising, even baffling, cultural dissimilarities. Lahiri has direct experience of these continents. It is quite natural that in her stories the two worlds of the East and the West have been brought together, as if in a simile—or even in a metaphysical conceit—which teases and pleases the reader. Whether they are set in Bengal or Boston, these sublimely understated stories, spiced with humor and subtle detail, speak to universal eloquence to anybody who has ever felt the yearnings of exile or the emotional confusion of the outsider.

### **1.3 STORY OF INTERPRETER OF MALADIES**

Published in 1999, Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies was a world bestseller. The collection consists of nine short stories. In each of the stories, Lahiri looked into the troubled and controversial position of the dislocated people. The majority of the characters in the stories are trapped in problematic situations to accommodate themselves in the new place. A few of them could assimilate easily, but some were just caught up in between circumstances ending up with failure. Interpreter of Maladies represents Lahiri's bicultural and bilingual heritage. In accordance with Angelo Monaco in Lahiri's work, her characters are almost all translators, insofar as they must make sense of the foreign to survive. They shuttle between

*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

India and America and also as translators attempt to voice feelings of dislocation as well as search for the happiness they have lost.

Lahiri takes a look at nature of human in a diasporic cultural context. The lives of expatriates, as well as first generation American of Indian origin and also their alienation, sacrifices and struggles, are the main themes. Arranged marriages, difficult or problematic human relationships and a general sense of displacement felt by the immigrants are likewise certain motifs in the stories.

In the story Mrs. Sen's we came to know about a young Indian housewife who soon after her arranged marriage migrates to North America. Her spouse is a university professor. Mrs. Sen is an ideal example of the individuals who suffer the consequences of shifting into an unknown land. Mrs. Sen resisted herself from assimilation to the new culture. She creates a small scale India within their American house. The foods, the kitchen equipment, her recipes, clothes, books and every other thing recall the life she had back in India. Although she had left the place, these things restore the memories. She continually can be described as India as her "home" even after she is settled down in an American household. Mrs. Sen starts babysitting an American boy named Eliot whose mother is a working woman unlike herself. In spite of their differences in age, ethnicity both of them developed a kind of solidarity and mutual companionship. They share precisely the same kind of loss and alienation. Eliot misses his mother's love and affection and grows a feeling for his babysitter. In the story, we can notice that how Mrs. Sen is not interested in assimilating into the American culture. She refused to learn driving which is an essential thing to know in a place like America. But Mrs. Sen thinks that India is much better than America because back at home they have a driver for their car and her "Everything is there."

***"By then Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables (Lahiri)"***

Lahiri tells us the story of Mrs. Sen from Eliot's perspective. Although he is just eleven years old, Lahiri gave him great insights.

***"Two things, Eliot learned, made Mrs. Sen happy. One was the arrival of a letter from her family. It was her custom to check the mailbox after driving practice (Lahiri)"***

The immigrants link themselves returning to homeland through letters, telegrams and messages or calls. Mrs. Sen implements same. She gets happier receiving letters from India, and Eliot noticed the enthusiasm in her while reading the Bengali written notes. He felt that while reading letters Mrs. Sen is no longer present in the room (**Lahiri**)

The food habits of the immigrants also depict their longing for the homeland. Mrs. Sen in most cases feels nostalgic for the fish she ate in India. For her, the fish in America tasted nothing like fish in India. She also remembered memories of eating fish daily from dawn to dusk.

Mrs. Sen also is someone who refused to blend along with the American society. Eliot's mother is an independent woman who earns on her own as well as knows driving and lives alone. Mrs. Sen refused to learn driving right after the failed attempt which caused a little accident. She is dependent upon her husband for almost everything, and she is satisfied and happy with it. "Mrs. Sen's" illustrated a woman's grief for her unresolved assimilation caused by her migration and made her a victim here.

Taking another story into the interpreter of maladies is "This Blessed House." Which depicts a marital relationship in a common American setting. Sanjeev and Twinkle have been married for just four months, and they differ from one another in just about all ways. Here we could see how the couples are representing two different kinds of diasporic characteristics. They are actually born and brought up as second generations of immigrants. While Twinkle accepted the given privileges and blended inconveniently to the host culture, Sanjeev portrays different perspective. Twinkle is an open-minded new generation woman finishing her Master's degree thesis, and Sanjeev is a manager in a company. Twinkle is representing a happy assimilation within the American background. Sanjeev is a representative of the brain drain of the new Indian diaspora who sticks to the traditional and spiritual feelings and compliances. From the name of the story, the readers can guess that Lahiri here emphasizes on some religious exercises. The couples get into an extreme kind of contradiction regarding the religious issues. While they moved into the new house after marriage Twinkle discovered a lot of Christian paraphernalia like postcards, crosses, posters, statues of Christ in the house left by previous owners. Twinkle found the objects spectacular and took them as welcoming signs indeed she believes that "This house is blessed." (**Lahiri**). Sanjeev did not like the items liked by Twinkle as blessed ones. He wanted them to throw these things away. He gets frustrated seeing his wife's childish attitude. She persuades him to display the objects all around the house. But Sanjeev keeps telling her that "we are not Christian."

Twinkle becomes the representative of the host country. She is good in everything that is not Indian. She likes to cook dishes which are less Indian and avoids spices and curries. Indian food, she complained, was a bother; she detested chopping garlic and peeling ginger (**Lahiri**).

Here Sanjeev in his own house starts feeling the experience of unhomeliness such as the migrated people in a foreign land. He was getting nowhere with her, with this woman whom he had known for only four months and with whom he shared his life. He thought with a flicker of regret of the snapshots his mother used to send him from Calcutta, a perspective of brides who could sing and sew and season lentils without consulting a recipe book. **(Lahiri)**. Here Sanjeev regrets getting married to Twinkle. It shows that how traditional and Indian he is by nature in spite of living in America. Sanjeev represents those immigrants who stick to tradition to keep it alive in the foreign land. They always have tended going back to the native land using memories, traditions, and rituals.

## 2 UNACCUSTOMED EARTH

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* cites Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Custom-House*: "Human nature will likely not flourish, any more than a potato, if it is planted and replanted, for very long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, as far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth."

Cultural alienation and consequent loss of identity form a central issue in the diasporic discourse. The pain of displacement continues to pinch not just the immigrants but will also their children who are rendered incapable of belonging to the country of their birth. The tragedy of alienation is felt as much by the immigrants as the next generation due to the reason that the sense of estrangement is significantly more intense in proportion to the sense of affinity along with roots. Immigrants find that they are unable to adapt to their adopted country failing to adjust to the foster culture; nonetheless, their dilemma is not as pathetic as that of their children. They are half-lost as there is a minimum of at least one place where they wholly and absolutely belong, but their children do not belong at any place becoming truly and pitifully nowhere persons. **Uma Segal** in her own discourse on the plight of Asian Americans, observes: "For the second and subsequent generations, identity formation becomes much more perplexing, for they need to decide the level at which they will become Asian." Commenting on her own writings, Jhumpa Lahiri reveals that her stories are "less a response to [her] parents' cultural nostalgia, and a lot more an attempt to forge [her] own amalgamated domain." Discussing this dilemma Segal writes: identity is not merely the same of their Asian as well as American identities, nor does it merely involve the inclusion of certain American characteristics and of course the rejection of others as well as the retention of only some Asian characteristics. What emerges is a synthesis of both the American as well

*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

as Asian identities, in fact, neither Asian nor American but a unique amalgam of both. Actually, Lahiri's fiction is a unique addition to the existing Asian American literary corpus. In comparison with various other well-known works set in postcolonial South Asia and narrated from immigrants' perspectives, Lahiri's is definitely a firm voice. A lot of her stories are located in America and written from a second-generation Indian American perspective. The immigrant experience is Jhumpa Lahiri's preferred theme and likewise one of her major areas of concern. Talking to Isaac Chotiner about the recurrence of 'exile' in her fiction, Lahiri said: "It interests me to imagine characters shifting from one particular situation as well as one location to another for whatever the circumstances may be." In her fiction, Jhumpa Lahiri addresses the issue of the intersection of cultures and threat of the loss of cultural identity. Through some favorite metaphors, she unfolds the strangeness of the situation in her stories as well as her novel. In her collection *Interpreter of Maladies* the story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" has Pirzada yearning for his roots, his country and his family in America. Dinner time becomes his savior as it brings him closest to his country with the similar kinds of food and similar eating habits shared by the host family of Lilia. **Asha Choubey** notices the food metaphor working through many stories in this collection: "Food serves more as a symbol and acquires a metaphoric stature than mother tongue for the simple reason that even in India a great number of characters speak English, but English food, though enjoyed occasionally, still an intrinsic part of the Indian cuisine or diasporic identity."

Lahiri's "Mrs. Sen's" has the protagonist clutching desperately to her native culture by clinging to her closet full of colorful saris and her frequent visits to the fish store. Her "This Blessed House" has Sanjeev detesting the Christian paraphernalia that his wife is delighted to find and preserve. For him, it is just the drifting away from her natal roots, which he does not appreciate. "The Third and Final Continent", is the story of a Bengali gentleman who migrates to America, weds a docile girl from Bengal and also has a son whom he sends to Harvard to study but makes it a point to bring home during holidays so that: "He can eat rice along with his hands and speak in Bengali". Beyond these intermittent sojourns to his natal home, the son's identity as an Indian is shaped by proxy by American sources. He does not have an idea of his own roots, his own culture outside of his American course books. India for him is a geographical mass and not a nation. In this context what exactly is also remarkable is the terms—'amalgam' and 'synthesis.' Synthesis considers 'difference' and sameness as one because the difference is contained in the sameness as per Braziel and

*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

Mannur Her let us divide the two terms: Amalgam is the formation of anything new, a completely different structure, by combining two sets of systems/cultures/elements. It is required to be examined whether what we know as an immigrant is an amalgam in this sense in Lahiri's literature. In her own stories whereas all characters in diaspora are likely to appropriate the white ways, they also practice what may be known as reverse-mimicry in as much as they so badly cling to their 'Indian ways attempting to be saved from a complete loss of identity.

Unaccustomed Earth symbolizes the new earth and soil in which the descendants of immigrants and also their parents submerge their roots as well as culture. The title conveys a dual meaning. Primarily, it is suggestive of the world of the first generation immigrants who are now not accustomed to the world of their children. Next, a different kind of world is occupied by the children of immigrants who often look up to the associative life which they share with their parents but can no longer connect emotionally and psychologically along with them. Lahiri's narration and plot construction are distinct. Every word assumes significance and language bear lucid and lyrical verve. Alienation, nostalgia, yearning for the native land and the dissatisfaction and mental discomfort resulting from them has been recurrently exposed in the stories.

'Unaccustomed Earth' is not the same as other works because its characters are the children of immigrants. Generally, Lahiri's characters who rely too heavily on homeland nostalgia and of course the characters that look only toward progressing in diasporic space are unsuccessful in finding a space for their own identity. Lahiri is careful to emphasize the point that characters must work equally within the contexts of their diasporic space. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Lahiri's stories are simplified or too optimistic. Her mixture of third and first-person narrations reveal a complicated process of self-construction: it is inherently personal, yet characters cannot avoid interacting with others during the process. The majority of her stories are written in the third person, with subtle shifts in perspective in between characters, a tendency that empowers certain characters at crucial thematic moments. The less used first-person narratives always reveal the learning technique of a character attempting to situate the self within a social context. The switching perspectives within and between Lahiri's stories do not essentially emphasize a clash between voices about the home and diaspora, but rather a clash of voices about home and diaspora. The multiplicity of the voices, even within singular characters, emphasizes the personal process of identity construction within a populated, diasporic space. Unaccustomed Earth is divided into two parts – the first  
*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*



part, holding five stories and the second one, with three. What binds the stories and the two parts together is the thematic of an alien space or the space of the host nation. The very title of the collection which is drawn from Nathaniel Hawthorn's story,

*Unaccustomed Earth* examines the difficulties the central characters have in integrating and relocating their identities to an empowered space beyond their familial homes. Their identities are hybrid, but they are of a vexed hybridity, deeply troubled by complicated as well as unresolved relationships or connections with their multi-cultural families of origin. Most of the marriages are mixed or inter-cultural marriages. In these marriages two persons of distant historical, social and cultural backgrounds share their experiences with others and out of these shared experiences emerge a 'third space.' These marriages in between Indian Bengali woman or man and American woman or man create a "hybrid culture," a new form of culture where both of them negotiate on various fronts of life. Their encounter in between two cultures, i.e. eastern and western constructs a hybrid culture in which both the parties negotiate and interact to reframe and restructure ethnic essentialism, nationalism, and fundamentalism.

## **2.1 EXPLORATION OF THE POWERFUL FAMILIAL TIES**

Lahiri takes a look at the very powerfully familial ties and emotional relationships. Her intricate dialogues with detailed observation render the stories powerful and universal in application. Lahiri has efficiently touched the hearts of her readers with the losses and uncertainties in the title story. The story relates to minute observation of life with humor and suspense. The story being elegiac leads the reader through a kind of personal introspection in relationships. She can enter into her characters thoughts and feelings like a very good psychoanalyst(Fine, 2001).

Jhumpa Lahiri's the second collection of short stories, *Unaccustomed Earth*, paints a powerful picture of life in the Indian American Diaspora. She describes the lives of the first and second generations of Indian immigrants who have settled in America, the majority of her protagonists being second generation characters. These characters face the opportunities and challenges of belonging to two different cultures, and must continuously negotiate an intermediate position within and in between two cultures. They occupy a middle ground that might easily turn into a battleground amongst the Indian and the American parts of their identities, but the characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* strive to maintain ties to both cultures, identifying themselves as Indian Americans. For that reason, no matter how predominantly Indian or American they feel, Lahiri's characters still retain a sense of self as Indian  
*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

Americans. The continuous renegotiation of their identities lies at the core of *Unaccustomed Earth*, providing an interesting perspective on the stories.

*Unaccustomed Earth* consists of eight stories that all feature central characters that are generally second-generation Indian Americans. However these stories show the obstacles that Indian Americans must overcome to pursue the lifestyles of their choice. Additionally they show some of the advantages that come with the territory. In particular, lots of the characters grow up to be high achievers who have been raised in a traditional manner and taught to enjoy family meals, to respect their elders and to honor the tradition of marriage. Thus growing up as Indian Americans is not without its benefits.

In my reading of *Unaccustomed Earth*, I will explore how identities that are formed in the Indian American Diaspora are shaped and function. Within this I will rely heavily on postcolonial theory, and of course the various ideas about identity and Diaspora which have surfaced within this theoretical tradition. I will consider that there are certain values and goals that are at the core of Indian American identity, paying particular focus to how these values are perpetuated, but as well as including the ruptures in these values, showing how characters may fail or succeed in negotiating their Indian American identities. My assumptions of Indian American core values will largely depend on sociological studies and surveys of American Indian identity, along with more general surveys of immigrant identity.

However *Unaccustomed Earth* is without question interesting from the vantage point of postcolonial theory and sociological studies, Lahiri's fiction is necessarily also interesting for the fluency as well as artistry of its prose. For that reason, in my approach to *Unaccustomed Earth*, I will rely on the method of close reading, giving examples, contrasting and evaluating. Thus, author hopes to highlight and discuss the idiosyncrasies in Lahiri's stories, and *Unaccustomed Earth's* relevance as a key to Indian American identity (Filipczak, 2012).

## 2.2 STRIKING ROOTS INTO UNACCUSTOMED EARTH

When Lahiri chose to begin *Unaccustomed Earth* with a Hawthorne quotation, she chose one that illuminates certain central aspects of the stories: "My children (...) shall strike their roots into the unaccustomed earth," stimulating a picture of people as living organisms that based on being rooted to survive. Diaspora is considered as much by the initial movement as by the re-settling in a new homeland, and this re-settling necessitates striking roots. Mostly, the characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* uproot their lives and settle in new places, and they all strive to identify themselves as belonging to a particular place. The pervasive pattern of movement and subsequent settlement in *Unaccustomed Earth* strengthens the claim that

*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

“Mobility ontologically implies its twin, stasis” (**Bonisch-Brednich and Trundle, 2010**). The personalities and characters in these stories, no matter what the extent to which they have been mobile, all seem to crave a secure and stable place to settle in. For that reason, at the end and between all the journeys of *Unaccustomed Earth*, the characters slow down and settle in one place. In this final stasis, the characters search a feeling of home and belonging.

In brief, *Unaccustomed Earth* is a reflection of the life of two separate cultures and the way people cope with each other. This collection of short stories concentrate on the theme of cultural dissonances experienced by second-generation immigrants who have to observe the traditional values of their immigrant parents and the values of the American society they live in. It is the important crisis of Indian diaspora in the new land that has been truly delineated by the novelist. In the story with the title "Unaccustomed Earth," Lahiri shows that being born in America, but also to Bengali parents, Ruma lives in the Third Space (American Culture) through her life. For this reason, she faces consistent tension amongst the culture of parents and her homeland, America, which results in the existential dilemma in her life. Ruma's life is a constant negotiation in between Indian and American culture. Her mother's loss of life makes her identify with Indian heritage. However, she has a taste for American clothes, American food as well as American language. The narrative inevitably implies that one has to accept the position in which he finds himself. The second and third generation immigrants need to keep the consciousness of their original roots and accept their living in the mainstream culture of the adopted land.

### **2.3 STORY OF UNACCUSTOMED EARTH**

In the opening story, “Unaccustomed Earth,” Ruma and her family have uprooted their urban existence in Brooklyn instead of a suburban home outside Seattle. In leaving her home in the east and traveling westward, Ruma is repeating the movements of her parents, who traveled from India to America. Living in American suburbia did not equate a happy life for Ruma’s mother, who passed away before her daughter gone to Seattle. Ruma’s father regrets the life that his wife led in America, comparing her with “morning glories” that are not typically intended to grow in the shade. Like this delicate plant, his wife required the right circumstances to grow and thrive, but she was deprived of this in her solitary existence as a housewife in America. According to this experience, Ruma’s father is concerned about his daughter’s new life as a suburban housewife in a foreign place.

Ruma is new to Seattle, even though she has settled in a home that she seems happy with, she has not ventured out much and also has not got acquainted with the city. Her reluctance to do

so is evident when she refers that she has not visited important landmarks of Seattle and has not bothered with getting in touch with potential employers. Additionally, she seems to have given up on making friends, as she merely mentions the buddies that she made in Brooklyn as a young mother, and also that she is losing touch with them. Thus she keeps within the confines of the home, even though she inhabits it by running the household and raising her son, she does not inhabit the space that surrounds her home, in fact, she does not even bother with the surrounding garden, let alone the neighbourhood or greater Seattle. Evidently, history is repeating itself in that Ruma, like her mother before her, only half-heartedly strikes her roots into unaccustomed earth. This half-heartedness might stem from insecurities surrounding her role as mother as well as a wife, but as well as the fact that she is in a new location that she feels no connection with, where she has no previous acquaintances and where she struggles with finding herself as well and successfully negotiating her identity. In a sense, she is unable to strike her roots afresh because she misses and grieves the loss of her original roots. To Ruma, her mother constituted her roots, and when her mother passed away, Ruma lost her footing and her sense of self, and she is unhappy. While Ruma was rooted to her mother, evidently her mother was rooted to India and her life there, and that after being uprooted, she was unable to strike new roots in America.

Parental approval is vital to Ruma in her domestic life in Seattle. When her father comes to visit, she would like to impress him with her new home, and is disappointed and even embarrassed when he does not compliment her on her home or her choice of being a stay-at-home-mother. Karttunen's ideas relating to negatives and of course the disnarrated are interesting when considering the roles of Ruma's father and her deceased mother, about their real and hypothetical reactions to Ruma's new home. When Ruma shows her father around the house,

Except settling in a suburban home and building one's life in it, this story presents few alternative life choices. Ruma's husband's job does not allow him to stay in the same place for any period, and he consequently travels a great deal. Ruma comments on this when she recognizes that "Tagging along with him was not an option." Here Ruma is in line with the majority of the characters in *Unaccustomed Earth*, and with **Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle's** opinion of migrants that "most people still become mobile with the intention of settling one more time and making the new locality a meaningful site for daily life." Being grounded in one place, to her home in Seattle, should grant Ruma a sense of security as well as a sense of self as mother and housewife. Was she to become rootless and tag along with

*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

her husband, she might not feel like an agent in her own right, but rather a burden, a role-less entity.

It is precisely this rootlessness that is at the core of the problems between Kaushik and Hema in the final story, "Going Ashore." Kaushik has traveled extensively throughout his life and finds that he craves a more settled existence. Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle illustrate this need as for how "in a fluid world of movement, the place remains a deeply contested and symbolically rich site in which to represent the self, even for those on the move". This ensures the importance of being grounded in one place along with its centrality to the negotiation of identity. The inclusion of "those on the move" indicates that migrants are not exempt out of this identity formation. Kaushik's restless lifestyle stands as a contrast to the other characters in *Unaccustomed Earth*. But even he, who throughout his life has been perpetually on the move, finds that he needs stasis. However he is pessimistic about entering into office life and building a home somewhere, imagining that he will hate it, he realizes that he needs to lead a different life and "be still". Nonetheless, he is unable to plan for more than perhaps a few years into the future and does not have anyone else's feelings to think about, until he meets Hema in Italy. Unlike Kaushik, she has settled and lived in the same place for a number of years. Here she has bought an apartment, which she inhabits by herself, and she is intent on continuing to live and work in this same space for the foreseeable future. Navin, the man she plans to marry, has agreed to these terms and is moving to come and live with her, a sacrifice that Hema rates highly. When Kaushik proposes that she cancel her wedding, and join him on his way eastward to his new job in Hong Kong, Hema is infuriated and hurt by the suggestion. Just as Ruma is unwilling to accompany her husband on his various business trips, nor is Hema prepared to let Kaushik's movements run her life. Both women find that they need a secure place to strike their roots, and also that a rootless existence as migrant women, wholly dependent on their men, is not an option.

When Kaushik and Hema travel to the Italian countryside, they find themselves jealous of the locals who are obviously deeply rooted in the place where they have spent their whole lives. As postcolonial subjects, Hema and Kaushik lack this belonging to a particular geographical location and are also at best partially connected to Calcutta and Rome, the cities of their past. At first glance, Lahiri's the second collection of short stories appears to be structured very much similar to her first, *Interpreter of Maladies*. On closer inspection or observation, however, *Unaccustomed Earth* is different because of the collection being divided into two parts. Part one consists of five stories whose characters seem wholly unrelated, while the

*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

settings and the themes are to a certain extent similar. Part Two, however, is made up of three stories that describe the lives of the same two characters, Hema and Kaushik. The first story, "Once in a Lifetime," is narrated by Hema, while the second, "Year's End," is narrated by Kaushik. What exactly makes both of these stories special regarding narrative technique is that the narrator in each story addresses the narrator in the other story as "you." Thus the stories taken together seem like two monologues, two stories the narrators tell each other. The third and final story sees Kaushik and Hema reunited as adults and they quickly become lovers. This story, "Going Ashore," is narrated from a third person perspective, shifting between Hema and Kaushik as localizers. The final trilogy of stories that makes up Part Two of the collection reads as an unfolding love story, and its cyclical form, beginning and ending in death and birth, makes it a departure from the style of the preceding stories.

#### **2.4 SENSE OF ALIENATION AND DISPLACEMENT**

Jhumpa Lahiri presents her observations of the second generation Indian Americans involved in the Western milieu in *Unaccustomed Earth*. The deep sense of alienation and isolation experienced by her characters are excellent soul studies on the background of uprooting and assimilation.

The sense of alienation and displacement is strongly reflected in the stories 'Hell-Heaven' and 'Unaccustomed Earth.'

In the title story 'Unaccustomed Earth,' the loneliness of Ruma is well understood by her father as he finds her in the situation of his wife. His wife has as well experienced the pang of managing the family alone in the foreign land and also has suffered deeper solitude. Like her mother, Ruma, though second generation expatriate and familiar with the American lifestyle, is not an exception to the solitude of life (Saha, 2009).

The representative of the second generation depicted in the story is in a different situation. Born in America to Bengali parents, Ruma lives in the Third Space all her life. Consequently, her life is marked by a permanent conflict between the culture inherited from her parents and of her birthplace and homeland, America, which results in bewilderment and failure to accept the American culture totally. Ruma is an example of upward mobility. Well-educated, hardworking, she becomes a lawyer in New York. Her thriving professional life is associated with equally successful family life: an American husband, a three-year-old son, Akash, one more pregnancy and a new residence on the west shore, in Seattle, the place in which the family shifts after Ruma's husband gets another job. Surprisingly, the pursuit of her professional life comes to a sudden halt; she quits the majority of the things she has

*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

accomplished so far: her career and independence. She decides to take care solely of the family and household. However this does not make her happy.

Ruma can identify neither with her homeland India nor with America, as she suffers from “double displacement.” She suffers from her rupture as a woman and as a second-generation immigrant.

The story reveals that the India-born parents have their dreams for their children by way of education and career; additionally, they have their doubts about their life in a foreign land. The children match into neither Bengali nor American cultures fully and feel the pangs of alienation and displacement. The inclination of person and different value systems have also resulted in the pangs of alienation. As Brinda Shah rightly remarks; ‘Alienation in diasporic realities is generally the artifact of conflicting personalities. Since the personalities are shaped by socio-cultural values and the immediate milieu, conflict of values, overt or covert, might be regarded as the root of alienation.’ (Shah, 2010)

The garden metaphor in the title story, ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ becomes a unifying aspect bringing three generations in the diasporic synthesis of optimism of further sustenance in their own new found world. This movement drives the garden metaphor to furthermore connectedness to cultural and linguistic roots in diasporic alienation. Akash uttering “Lal” “need” connects the distance created in between Ruma and her father. Cultural and linguistic identity cannot vanish in the diaspora as the feeling of being rooted in culture and tradition is inherent in any human being. This sense of belonging to a diasporic experience is powerfully portrayed in the sequence by Jhumpa Lahiri.

## 2.5 IDENTITY CRISIS AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

The stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* have been commended for presenting different aspects of the Bengali diasporic sensibility. The eight stories in the collection show the quest for identity in the diasporic situation. They scrutinize numerous identities as well as a dilemma in the lives of immigrants. The diasporic experiences of the central characters in the stories also concentrate and focus their sense of exile, alienation, and uprootedness (Rendon, 2011). Being essentially autobiographical in her writing, Lahiri captures details from her Bengali community and personal experiences in her fiction. The portraying life of the Indian migrants to America, Lahiri has been very affecting in capturing the diasporic spirit of her characters tangled in various emotional twists. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri makes her observations of the second generation Indian Americans engrossed into the Western environment, yet getting through a profound sense of isolation and alienation and displacement. All the stories deal

*Copyright © 2017, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*

with the theme of uprooting and assimilation with efforts made to establish connectivity in the relationship.

## CONCLUSION

Stories of Jhumpa Lahiri are the evidence of immigrant lives, their displeasures, disenchantment, struggles, dreams, integrations, etc. Her characters might go to the very inferences of marginality and otherness in distant lands. All of the nine stories in 'The Interpreter of Maladies' set in America as well as India are joined with by the themes of prohibiting, loneliness, and of course the search for contentment.

In the interpreter of maladies, Lahiri takes a look at nature of human in a diasporic cultural context. The lives of expatriates, as well as first generation American of Indian origin and also their alienation, sacrifices and struggles, are the main themes. Arranged marriages, difficult or problematic human relationships and a general sense of displacement felt by the immigrants are likewise certain motifs in the stories and in the stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* have been commended for presenting different aspects of the Bengali diasporic sensibility. The eight stories in the collection show the quest for identity in the diasporic situation. They scrutinize numerous identities as well as a dilemma in the lives of immigrants. The diasporic experiences of the central characters in the stories also concentrate and focus their sense of exile, alienation, and uprootedness (Rendon, 2011). All the stories in the *unaccustomed earth* deal with the theme of uprooting and assimilation with efforts made to establish connectivity in the relationship.

## REFERENCES:-

- Bonisch-Brednich, B., & Trundle, C. (2010). *Introduction: local migrants and the politics of being in place. Local Lives: Migration and the Politics of Place, 1-16.*
- C. G. Karthikadevi, *Diasporic Experiences in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies and Unaccustomed Earth*
- Field, R. E. (2004). *Writing the Second Generation: Negotiating Cultural Borderlands in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies and The Namesake. South Asian Review, 25(2), 165-174.*
- Filipczak, Iwona. *The American Dream in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Unaccustomed Earth' and 'Only Goodness.'* IRWLE, vol. 8, No. 1 (January 2012): 1-9.
- Fine, Laura. "Space and Hybridity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* and *Only Goodness.*" *South Asian Review 32.2 (Nov 2001): 209-222.*
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth. 1st ed.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. Print.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth.* New Delhi: Random House, 2008.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth.* New York: Bloomsbury publishers, 2008.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth.* Noida: Random House India. 2008.
- Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies and The Namesake*" *South Asian Review 25.2 (2004): 165-177.*
- Rendon, Catherine. "Jhumpa Lahiri. *Unaccustomed Earth.*" *World Literature Today 83.1 (2009): 68.* Literature Resource Center. Web. 31 July 2011.
- Saha, Amit Shankar, *Unaccustomed Earth, Book Review, Muse India the literary e-journal Issue 23, Jan-Feb 2009, http://museindia.com//show current 12.asp?id=1182)*