

**FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE  
NAMESAKE* AND KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF  
LOSS***

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## **ABSTRACT**

The second half of the last century has seen movement of populations from one country to another. This movement has occurred because of a variety of factors, ranging from socio-economic to political activism. Migrancy has given rise to mutations that have both erased and re-inscribed patterns of being and belonging. Self and identity have become problematic and the migrant's double vision often becomes the product of specific and irreversible history. I believe such factors influence family relationships to a great extent since the members of a family do not always have the same set of histories. Moreover family relations, both immediate and extended, are always in a state of flux because of travel from the home country to the host country. This thesis takes up two postcolonial novels, namely, *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri and *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai and investigates how family relationships are affected in the context of migrancy. In my analysis, I explore the different circumstances in the families of the characters that motivate them to migrate and the various factors that take place, both in the home and host countries, in the lives of the characters.

Lahiri and Desai attempt to encapsulate the characters' past prior to the period of westernisation as well as the characters trying to constantly position themselves in the completely unfamiliar space of the host country. Their constant struggle to seek an identity determines the dynamics of their family relations. I argue in my thesis that both Lahiri and Desai affirm the importance of kinship and hint towards further positive possibilities within the space of family relationships of the characters.

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**FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE* AND KIRAN**

**DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS***

**General Introduction**

Multi-cultural societies are the result of the extensive movement of people that has been taking place in the second half of the last century. Both Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai write about characters caught between the two completely separate worlds of the host and home countries. In this thesis I examine how different family relations in the two postcolonial novels namely, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (pub. 2003) and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (pub. 2006) experience migrancy, how different members of a family communicate among each other in a diasporic context, the quality of family relationships and how different factors affect family relationships in the diasporic space. I compare and contrast the two novels and argue that both novels affirm the importance of family relationships in the context of migrancy. Unconditional love and acceptance of family relations emerge victorious at the end of both the narratives. Although the characters experience losses in varying degrees in the wake of migration, they come out stronger by having an enabling experience where they have their family for support. The reason behind the choice of the topic is a personal one. The effect of migration on home and family relationships could be easily related to by me from the experience undergone by my grandparents as continually displaced immigrants who, being, the expatriates from the then East Pakistan had to adjust to an altogether new environment separated from their original culture after the Partition of this subcontinent in the year 1947. 'The inheritance of loss' and isolation

encompassing their changing position in life might have a part in inducing me to explore the varied nuances of family relationships in the writings of recent diaspora writers like Lahiri and Desai. In the following few pages of the Introduction, I attempt a general overview of migration in India's history, the patterns and trends that have governed the mobility of Indians around the world. Since *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* focus particularly on Indian migration to the US in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, I explore in the Introduction the relevant policies of the Indian government towards migration and the consequences of it. I review previous critical studies of the novels, and situate the writers themselves with reference to their own experiences of diaspora.

The term 'diaspora' (Greek *diaspeirein* means 'a scattering of seeds') refers to the movement of any population sharing common ethnic identity who were either forced to leave or voluntarily left their settled territory, and became residents in areas far remote from the former. The first mention of diaspora is found when the Jews were exiled by the Babylonians from Israel in 607 BCE. However, earlier evidences of diaspora can be traced in passages in ancient Sanskrit scriptures, particularly Vedic texts where cultural exchanges took place between ancient India with the rest of the world in as early as 2000 BCE.

Exchanges took place after the death of Gautam Buddha when Buddha's disciples scattered themselves throughout the country in order to spread his teachings. Indians during ancient times travelled across land and ocean to reach other contemporary civilisations such as those of Sumer, Assyria and Egypt. The similarities in languages, sculpting style, belief systems point to the possibility

that Indian travellers had regular exchanges with that of other civilisations. The archaeological excavations in cities of the Indus Valley civilisations such as Harappa, Mohenjodaro and several other ancient sites reveal a number of activities specifically related to maritime trade. Images of boats, sailing instruments, and storage houses, handicrafts made for export were discovered from these sites. During the period of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, Indian kings sent military and commercial expeditions to far off places. The primary aim was to attain economic prowess in the region. The expeditions established contact between the homeland and foreign nations. Indians linked with trade and commerce settled in Malaya and Burma. There were also movements of Indians to West Africa. The Indian diaspora attained momentum during the British imperialist rule when Indian labourers were sent to Canada, Africa, West Indies and islands like Mauritius and Fiji. Even today we find many Indians living in the aforementioned places for generations. The first batch of indentured labourers was sent to Mauritius in the 1830s and this system continued till 1917 (Mishra 1996, 427). It is estimated that around a million people were transported from India to Mauritius, South Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam and Fiji to work in the sugarcane plantations. A small number of Indians also migrated to Sri Lanka to work in the tea plantations. But after the Second World War, the movement of Indians attained a whole new meaning and became an important phenomenon to be reckoned with.

In New Zealand, the first recorded migration took place in the late nineteenth century. The Indian states of Gujarat and Punjab were the two main epicentres wherefrom Indian settlers arrived in New Zealand (Leckie 2010, 45). It is even

said that Edward Peters, an Anglo-Indian from the Indian state of Goa, arrived in New Zealand in 1853. Known as 'Black Peter' in Otago, he worked as a farm labourer and gold prospector and is credited for discovering the gold strains in Tuapeka that eventually attracted Gabriel Read to discover gold there in 1860. Peters was never rewarded and he ultimately died impoverished in 1893 in Dunedin's Benevolent Institution (Leckie 2010, 48). However, the volume and pattern of immigration of Indians in New Zealand has changed significantly since the 1990s. According to Statistics New Zealand, Demographic Trends, during the years 1996-2000, there were a total number of 9554 arrivals from India while departure to India figured at 1292, thereby recording a net migration of 8262. During the years 2001-05, a total number of 22,262 people arrived from India of which 2042 eventually returned, resulting in a total net migration of 20,220 (Zodgekar 2010, 67).

Indians today form one of the most significant ethnic communities in the United States of America and Canada. The majority of the migrants are professionals from the IT, health and other service sectors. In the first two decades following Indian independence, the Indian government's emphasis was on developing massive industrial and agricultural base through five-year programmes. These programmes called for the rapid expansion of higher education facilities in Indian universities. Universities were asked to look at both the capitalist and socialist block of countries mainly USA and the erstwhile USSR to adopt technologies that could be adopted and developed in India indigenously. There was an urgent demand for the professionals with technical and scientific knowledge. Graduates from Indian universities were allowed to migrate to



countries for postgraduate and doctoral research to get new technological knowledge to develop free India. Most of them never returned and settled down in the countries to where they had migrated. For a long time this phase was known as the 'brain drain' in India. Many of them who had migrated to the West were given scholarships and fellowships by the foreign universities and were encouraged to settle down in the West.

Around 1 million Asian Indian immigrants now live in the Silicon Valley in the US. People from virtually every Indian region, caste and religious community are now represented within the US immigrant population (Lessinger 2003, 167). The professionals in the US who form the diaspora come from the fields of medicine, financial consultancy, engineering, and are mainly executives and middle-class university professors. There were over 4,000 professors of Indian origin and 33,000 India-born students in American universities in the year 1997-98. In the year 2002, of the entire total 1,063,732 immigrants to the US from all countries in the world, as many as 66,864 were from India. According to the US census, the overall growth rate for Indians from 1990 to 2000 was 105.87%. Indians comprise 16.4% of the Asian-American community. In 2000, of all the foreign born population in the US, Indians were 1.007 million. Their percentage was 3.5%. According to a 2003 American Community Survey, Asian-Indians are the second largest group behind only the Chinese. A University of California, Berkeley, study reported that one-third of the engineers in Silicon Valley are of Indian descent, while 7% of Silicon Valley firms are led by Indian CEOs (Gangopadhyay 2010,42-43).

But there are others who hold working-class jobs as security guards, taxi drivers, factory and hotel workers. Johanna Lessinger is of the view that “slight differences in class background, a small town rather than a metropolitan origin, slightly less fluent English, a degree from a provincial technical college rather than a major university” (Lessinger 2003, 168) are instrumental for some people’s downward social mobility as they are forced to settle for distinctly non-middle class work after arrival in the US. With little money to spend on visits ‘home’, these immigrants have a very different experience from their more prosperous upwardly mobile Indian brethren.

After 1965, Indians in large numbers started to arrive in the US. These immigrants arrived in response to new US immigration laws that opened the gates to people who had advanced education, professional training or large capital to invest. Since the mid 1960s, the official US ideology has moved from earlier models of immigrant assimilation to a model of cultural pluralism. Today, ethnic groups, including new immigrants, are officially encouraged to retain, and even to recreate their separate ethnic identities as part of their celebration of ‘Americanness’. Within this cultural ambience Indians have created their own customs that adhere to their Indian heritage. Indian scientists, financiers, entrepreneurs and a host of other professionals began to fill the ranks of American science and medicine since the mid-60s. For Indian immigrants who began arriving after 1965, the possibilities of professional careers open to anyone willing to work hard in the US were extremely attractive, despite a haunting nostalgia for India and its culture. Most of the people who had emigrated to the US post 1965 argue that favourable employment conditions and

more open work culture of the US compared to India attracted them to make the move (Lessinger 2003, 171). By mid-1980s, with immigrant visas harder to get, the young generation began to migrate with student visas hoping to turn them into permanent residence. Well-paid jobs, more rewarding careers, easy access to consumer goods are the pulling factors for these immigrants. Post-1970, India has witnessed several economic changes and the urban middle class has been increasingly frustrated by the lack of economic opportunities in the home country. A new consumer culture, western style media and advertising and the increasing presence of multi-national firms have ensured that steady yearning for the west. Thanks to India's colonial legacy, a number of Indians speak English and have access to a western style of education which makes it all the more easier for them to take the decision to go to the US. Virtually every urban, middle-class family now has some members living abroad. Lessinger notes that even two decades ago, immigrants spoke as though they would eventually return to India. However, now they acknowledge that want to live in the US permanently and that their next generation should grow up as Americans, or rather as hyphenated South-Asian-Indian Americans (Lessinger 2003, 171). While the British empire changed the colonised countries and the 'American dream' redefined the boundaries of culture, the United States was changed forever by these diasporic intercourses.

Postcolonial critics have classified Indian writings in English in three categories — adopt, adapt, adept. The issues of home, belonging and identity continue to plague the emigrant, who is characterised by ambivalence and is a product of the cross-fertilisation of cultures. The latter half of the twentieth

century saw the gradual decolonisation of developing countries which resulted in diasporic literatures that have successfully secured their own place alongside other European literatures. It has been assumed and generally accepted that multi-culturalism is responsible for this new genre of Indian diasporic writing, which is again an offshoot of postmodernism that advocates and promotes multi-ethnic societies. The surge of globalisation has washed away solitary identities. Instead, identity has become fluid and relative, constantly shifting and multi-faceted with regard to the different kinds of societies from which it is perceived and looked at. National borders have got blurred and have been reduced into 'shadow lines'. Zygmunt Bauman calls this age of increased mobility as the "liquid modern era" (Bauman 1996, 20). Bauman argues that a new geography has emerged as a consequence of increased mobility, and also, new means of transportation and communication that have affected the psyche of migrants and their perception of their own experience. The existential fragmentation dismantling the absolute notions of identity that proclaim man's existence as unitary has been gradual but steady. Living in voluntary exile and finding difficulties in identifying with the alien society lead to a person who is 'unhomed'. The profound uncertainties that an immigrant faces bring forth an 'inbetween' situation that again gives birth to hybrid identities.

Till now, I have discussed two kinds of diasporas — the diaspora of indentured labourers who went to work in the nineteenth century in the plantations and the more recent migration of professionals in the skilled sectors. Vijay Mishra classifies the two kinds as "old or exclusive" and the "new or border" Indian diasporas (Mishra 1996, 422). The old diaspora is exclusive

because the indentured labourers were more or less self-contained and created 'little Indias' in the colonies. They resisted all attempts to mix with the host nation. Mishra believes that V.S. Naipaul is the founding writer of the old Indian diaspora. Mobility characterises the newer kind or the 'border' diaspora. Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai and others write about the new diaspora. This new 'border' diaspora is not as exclusive as the 'old' kind. Thanks to technological advancements in communication, new diasporic communities can maintain contact with their home countries easily. Robin Cohen, on the other hand, opines that there are five different types of diasporic communities, corresponding to those of victims, labourers, traders, imperialists and cultural suppression (Anthias 1998, 4). However, such communities can take dual or multiple forms or change their characteristics over a period of time.

In the past, migration was largely conceptualised as a bipolar relation between sending and receiving countries and the post-migration situation was perceived as being localised in the new country of residence. However, the effect of mass migrations can be distinctly seen in the works of diasporic writers. Narratives of migrancy and exile are often seen through acts of personal and collective memory. Rushdie observes that "America, a nation of immigrants, has created great literature out of the phenomenon of cultural transplantation, out of examining the ways in which people cope with a new world" (Gangopadhyay 2010, 239). The literary productions of diasporic communities represent both a celebration and an incisive critique of the different cultural spaces they inhabit. In sharing their experiences of multiple — linguistic, geographical, historical dislocations, the writers of the modern diaspora invite their readers to see

culture not as a fundamental model but in its interaction with other cultures. They ask their readers to experience life “on the hyphen,” to use Cuban-American critic Gustavo Perez Firmat’s metaphor. A hyphen simultaneously separates and connects, contests and agrees. It helps to create new dialectics. The existence of transnational communities implies that after the initial movement, transnational spaces are created between migrants and their kin that transcend the boundaries of nation states. Such communities carry traces of hyphenated subjectivities. They are visible presences; in the words of the Chicano novelist John Rechy, “we are seen, therefore we are” (Castillo 1995, 113). Since the existence of a diaspora is so intimately connected to cultural memory, diasporic writing articulates a real or imagined past of a community in all its symbolic transformations. Writers of diaspora often employ linguistic forms of loss or dislocation, such as fragments or elliptical recollections of ancestral languages, cross-lingual idioms, and mixed codes to create new definitions of community and community memory in exile. Memory here acts as an intersection between personal recollection and historical account, and at times, they are fragmentary. In the process of recounting, the status of memory is often challenged and effectively diluted. The hidden baggage of nostalgia is dismantled and repackaged through allegory and irony. For these hyphenated beings who carry traces of multiple cultures within themselves, a form of double consciousness occurs whenever they confront the push/pull factors of different social codes.

Stuart Hall is of the opinion that identity is a “production, which is never complete, always in process” (Hall 1990, 222). It undergoes transformation and

is never fixed to an “essentialised past” (Hall 1990, 225). Agreeing with Hall, Mishra believes that the new Indian diaspora of ‘border’ is a site for “rearticulation of an intercultural formation” (Mishra 1996, 426), that is heterogeneous in character and advocates the synthesis of differing cultural trajectories. Drawing on Rushdie, Mishra adds that the marginality of the Indian diaspora becomes a highly interrogative space from which one is more willing to explore contaminated, impure relationships, thereby, creating new and vibrant forms or transculturation (Mishra 1996, 76). Mary Louise Pratt explains the term transculturation as a “a phenomenon of the contact zone” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2009, 233). Pratt further defines that ‘contact zones’ are social spaces where disparate cultures meet “often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2009, 233). Both Lahiri and Desai’s respective novels *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* show traces of transculturation. Lahiri’s *The Namesake* portrays two generations in the Ganguli family, each having different sets of histories. While the first generation engages itself in nostalgia for the homeland, in this case India, the second generation perceives India, not as ‘desh’ or homeland but India, as a country on the map with no emotional attachment to it. During the course of the narrative, both generations show development in their respective characters, eventually imbibing residues of the mainstream liberal American culture as well as the more traditional Indian cultural heritage. *The Inheritance of Loss* does not record inter-generational differences in the context of diaspora. However, it does show different cultural trajectories running through the narrative. The retired judge adores the British imperialist culture so much that he readily abandons his native Gujarati rituals and customs that eventually leads to marital discord in his

life as well as isolation from the other members of his family. His grand-daughter having studied in an English-medium convent school is more at ease with English customs and manners than with Hindi. Biju, the son of the cook, goes to New York with the hope that he will earn enough money and be materially successful but ultimately returns to India empty-handed. Biju does not show in himself any trace of the mainstream American culture, because he resists being a part of it. Indulging in nostalgia, Biju remembers his father in Kalimpong and its familiar surroundings. The characters in *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* experience losses during and after their process of migration. They inherit elements of multiple cultures that have a direct bearing on their family dynamics. Therefore, transculturation and transnationalism are important in my thesis as both Lahiri and Desai use these concepts in their respective narrative, albeit differently. The thesis takes into account how different families negotiate diverse geographical, emotional and cultural terrains and eventually end up being transnationals and carriers of multiple cultures. Ultimately, the novels end by showing a re-confirmation of family relations in the context of migrancy.

While discussing the characters' coming in contact with a different culture, I use Bhabha's use of the term 'mimicry' in this thesis. The term is extremely useful to me when I analyse the character of the judge in Chapters 1 and 2. The judge migrates to England as a young student because he had perceived the British system of education as the best in the world that will empower him socially when he comes back to India. However, the judge faces racial discrimination to the extent that he indulges in extreme bouts of self-hatred. When he finally returns to India, he begins to follow British ways and customs



and thinks himself to be socially superior to his other family members. This leads to discord in his family relations. Bhabha believes that “mimicry ... ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualises power” (Bhabha 1994, 122). Jemubhai assumes that by mimicking British ways and customs he can subvert years of subjugation that he and his family had been subjected to in pre-independence India and in the process, assume social prestige and authority. Bhabha’s definition of mimicry explains the psyche of the anglophile judge and thus it is an important term to be analysed in the thesis.

Coming to *The Namesake*, Aparajita De argues that Gogol’s identity can be better analysed in the light of polygenesis (De 2007, 183). I agree with the critic that Gogol’s process of seeking his identity is continuously in a state of flux and re-fashioning that De defines as polygenesis. I explore the term ‘polygenesis’ further in Chapter 2 when I examine Gogol’s polyvalent identity that is ever-evolving throughout the novel. However, I believe that other characters in *The Namesake* are also subjected to a process of continuous re-fashioning of identities that ultimately shapes their family dynamics in a way similar to Gogol’s polygenesis. I also use De’s explanation of polygenesis to explore the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Localities are constructed and characters like Father Booty experience a lack of fixity when the Jesuit priest is asked to leave Kalimpong that has been his home for over a few decades. He is forced to leave behind his friends who had almost become an extended family to him. I explore these ever-evolving possibilities of family relations in detail in Chapter 2.

One of the important strands of narrative in *The Namesake* is the generational difference in the Ganguli family. The two generations have different

perspectives on the notions of the two cultures, that of the host and the home countries and this multiculturalism shapes the two principal characters of Ashima and her son Gogol, thereby making *The Namesake* a bildungsroman. Although *The Inheritance of Loss* has characters from different generations, the novel does not reflect generational difference in the context of diaspora unlike *The Namesake*. However, both novels do eschew the notion that culture is a fixed site of meaning. Robin E. Field analyses the second-generation's dual alienation from the host nation's cultural territory. In this context, Field quotes Min Zhou: "Many second-generation Asian-Americans, who are considered assimilated, are still subjected to a pernicious system of racial stratification .... The truth is, no matter how American you think you are or try to be, if you have almond-shaped eyes, straight black hair, and a yellow complexion, you are a foreigner by default" (Field 2004, 166). The second-generation is thus stuck in a "liminal space of cultural borderlands" (Field 2004, 167). Lahiri takes full advantage of her position within the 'cultural borderlands', as she too is a second-generation immigrant to the US and portrays the diverse life experiences of South Asian second-generation Americans from her own life experiences. Lahiri explores the difficulties of establishing a sense of self for the second generation, ultimately leading her to favour a transnational, post-ethnic global ethos.

Commenting on the confusions of second-generation immigrants, Shao-ming Kung believes that Gogol and his generation of immigrant characters in *The Namesake* often suffer from "a confused existence" of being "Indian-American, American-Indian, Overseas-Born-Indian, or American-Born-Indian" (Kung 2009, 127). Kung adds that the second generation struggles with two conflicting

realities of cultural expectations. Kung also observes that this struggle begins at a formative stage since it is the second generation “who are actively choosing and discarding pieces of their cultural legacy” (127). In *The Namesake*, Gogol’s identity crisis begins with his disliking his name that was given by his father. The kernel of Gogol’s cultural problem begins with his name but it continues to widen the gap between him and his parents. Like Kung, Indira Nityanandam too feels the same, that the problem of Gogol’s angst lies with his naming. Nityanandam compares Gogol to an existential hero who swings between estrangement and reconciliation (Nityanandam 2005, 92). She believes that the character of Gogol characterises a “constant conflict between the inner and outer worlds” (93), which ultimately leads him to his journey of self-realisation towards the end of the narrative. Naming seems to be favourite topic with the critics who have so far worked on *The Namesake*. Ruediger Heinze argues that “the entire novel hinges on a name: Gogol” (Heinze 2007, 193). Heinze believes that the issue of naming hides crucial topics of cultural identity, diaspora and multiculturalism. The critic draws a parallel between Nikolai Gogol’s “The Overcoat” and the character Gogol’s attempts to reject his name and adopt a new name. Heinze believes that Gogol feels safest when he rejects the name given to him by his father, “someone else’s overcoat” (195), although ironically it is part of his identity. In changing his name, Heinze believes that Gogol changes his ‘overcoat’ and replaces the singularity and oddity that come with the Russian name. Judith Caesar talks of identity and relationships in *The Namesake*. Like other previous critics, Caesar takes up the subject of naming and analyses it to determine how Gogol’s singularly odd name affects his relationship with the other characters. The name which makes Gogol “too different” (Caesar 2007,

109) highlights his generation's gap from the first generation immigrants. Caesar believes that *The Namesake* mainly concerns itself with "unconscious attempts" on the part of Gogol "to concretise identity" (114) that seems to be in a perennial state of flux. So far, from the above discussion of secondary criticisms that are available on *The Namesake*, it can be seen that most of the critics have taken up naming as one of the important subjects dealt by Lahiri. The observations of the critics tend to focus on the naming of Gogol that subsequently leads to the distance between his parents and Gogol's final realisation about cultural heritage. Although the critics have commented to a certain extent on the individual relationship between Ashoke and Gogol, none of them have so far attempted to explore family relationships that have seen changes because of migrancy and issues arising out of migrancy. I believe that absence of any comprehensive review on the topic of family relationships in the wake of migrancy is a research gap and my thesis addresses this gap and explores how family relationships and family as a unit undergo a series of changes throughout the novel because of constant travel by the characters between the homeland and the host country.

Attempting a review of the secondary sources that are available on *The Inheritance of Loss*, I observe that most of the critics explore subjects like the judge's anglophile nature and Biju's isolation in the US because of his illegal status. Commenting on the judge's psyche, David Wallace Spielman explores the judge's humble peasant background and how the judge negotiates his new found position as an ICS officer after he returns from England (Spielman 2010, 88). Spielman does not explore in detail the effects of the judge's anglophilic nature

on his relationships with his wife and his family members. Focusing on the character of Biju, Spielman concentrates on Biju's miserable existence and his determination to make a living in the US in spite of his illegal status. Spielman draws a parallel between Biju and the judge and comments that both the characters are motivated to go to the west because of socio-economic compulsions. The critic believes that both the characters attempt to create an exaggerated picture of social and financial success abroad because neither of them wants to project himself as "being a postcolonial person forced into contact with cultures in conflict" (88). Rather they try to frame an appearance of success through their communication with the other family members. Spielman's observations throw light on the contexts of the judge and Biju's migration. However, the critic does not explore the effect of the characters' migration on their family relations. Margaret Scanlan analyses *The Inheritance of Loss* as a political novel and analyses the narrative in the context of the aftermath of 9/11. Scanlan believes that the paranoia that is there about immigrant characters like Biju and Saeed Saeed is obvious given the fact that the novel is written after the Twin Tower attacks (Scanlan 2010, 272). The critic hints at the elements of cynicism the novel contains. Scanlan continues that political disturbance directly affects the characters in some way or the other. Although Scanlan does not focus on the effects of the Gorkhaland movement on family relationships, the critic does explore the significance of Biju's return from the US and his subsequent robbing by the insurgents. Scanlan comments that Biju's return to India can be regarded as "the least heroic homecoming" (273) in the sense that he cannot be identified as a person who has just returned after a successful life in the US. I carry forward this observation of Scanlan and explore how Biju's return from the

US and his subsequent reunion with his father reaffirms the bond of unadulterated love between father and son.

Yu-yen Liu explores the elements of multiculturalism in *The Inheritance of Loss* (Liu 2009, 98). Liu explores the formation of racial and cultural identities that straddle “multiple national sites” (98). Liu believes that the novel’s two world approach suggests that Desai’s inclination to “re-border cultural reality” (98) is necessary to explore the demands of a transnational world. In subsequent discussions, Liu explores transnationalism as reflected in Desai’s novel and gives a detailed discussion of how Desai’s characters are cultural hybrids, identified by their multiple cultural affiliations. However, Liu does not explore the effects of such multicultural affiliations on the inter-personal relations of the characters within the space of family. I carry forward Liu’s arguments in Chapter 2 of my thesis and explore how affiliation to more than one culture determines the dynamics of family relations in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

*Critical Responses to Kiran Desai*, edited by Sunita Sinha and Bryan Reynolds, covers quite a wide range of issues that are there in *The Inheritance of Loss*. The topics that are discussed by a host of critics in this work can be broadly classified as involving examinations into the judge’s psyche in the context of his migration to England, and Biju’s migration to the US as an illegal immigrant. Critics like Sanghita Sen and Beena Agarwal have explored the psychological terrain of characters like the judge and Biju who migrate to other countries to assume a state of power. Sanghita Sen observes that for the young England-returned Jemubhai, “participation in colonial administration is viewed as a tool of empowerment” (Sen 2009, 102). I explore this argument further in my chapters

where I discuss the judge's attempts to mimic his colonial masters and in the process how his family relationships are affected. The principal characters of the novel come from a position of the 'other'. Jemubhai comes from a poor peasant family that does not have the empowered social status in colonial India. Biju comes from a poor family; his father works as a cook for a paltry sum of money. For these characters, migration provides a source of escape as well as an opportunity of empowerment. Speaking in the same vein, Beena Agarwal focuses her analysis on the cook who regards the US as "the best country in the world" (Agarwal 2009, 215). For a poor man like the cook, sending his only son to the US makes him feel extremely happy and motivates him to think that his son must be very successful working there. However, the reality is completely different which he is unaware of. Biju realises that his status as an illegal immigrant in the US makes him vulnerable and he is continuously exposed to a situation where even turning back is impossible because of his lack of papers (see also Madhu Shalini, p. 198 and Jackie Haque, p. 65 in *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai*). I agree with Agarwal's comments and further analyse how Biju hides his miserable state from his father so that he doesn't unnecessarily worry the latter. At the same time, the cook puts up a false appearance that everything is alright in Kalimpong, whereas in reality the hill town is on the boil because of the Gorkhaland insurgency. These apparent attempts to hide the reality from one another show how both the characters care for each other. At the end of the narrative, Biju's reunion with his father affirms the bond between them and establishes the strength of filial love without any material expectations or desires.

Other contributors in *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai* like Srutimala Duara and Gulrez Roshan Rehman focus on the theme of isolation experienced by the characters in varying degrees. Duara explores the reasons behind the judge's isolation, his anglophilic nature, and also the other characters' experiences of loss that occur in some way or other at some point in the narrative. Duara's analysis also takes into focus Biju's isolation in the US and his desperate attempts to get a Green Card from the American authorities. The critic believes that the seemingly disparate characters share a similar "historical legacy as well as a common experience of impotence and humiliation" (Duara 2009, 162). I take into account the critic's observations and explore further how the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss* are subjected repeatedly to the economic and cultural power of the West at different points in history. This subjugation directly affects their family relationships as each one of them tries to put on a mask of success so as to prove their superiority over others. My thesis explores how family relationships are altered and affected throughout the narrative because of travel by characters like the judge and Biju. Like Duara, Gulrez Roshan Rehman explores the themes of isolation experienced by the characters. Rehman too focuses his attention on the dreams that characters have before they migrate to the West (See also Kripanath Mishra, p. 145 and Nishi Pulugurtha, p. 189 in *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai*). When they return, they find a world completely unfamiliar to what they had expected. The judge returns to find himself surrounded by relatives who are not western educated as he is, whereas Biju returns "sans dollars, sans leather jacket and sans any sign of American possessions whatsoever" (Rehman 2009, 128). I explore Rehman's arguments further and examine how interpersonal dynamics within the unit of family directly relate to travel by the



characters. I carry forward my analysis to make my argument that it is the re-affirmation of family relations that emerges triumphant after a period of political turmoil and migrancy. From the above literature review of secondary sources available on *The Inheritance of Loss*, it can be seen that critics have taken up topics of multiculturalism, insurgency, themes of isolation experienced by the characters, etc. but none have analysed the effects of such themes on family relations. I consider the absence of any review on family relations as a research gap and believe that my thesis attempts to analyse family relations in the context of migrancy, explores how family is positioned, and how different family members experience and perceive migration as it directly or indirectly affects their lives.

Speaking about women in the context of diaspora, Gayatri Spivak comments that women are the worst victims in the context of migration. She continues that women are “super dominated, super-exploited” (Spivak 1996, 249) when they have to migrate to a completely new country. They can never reap the benefits of migration nor can they adjust to the new surroundings. They are “never the full subjects of and agents in civil society: in other words, first-class citizens of a state” (Spivak 1996, 249). Spivak believes that a migrant woman’s entire energy is spent on her attempts at successful transplantation or insertion into the new state (251). Thus the migrant woman is relegated to a state of non-entity where she finds little scope of interacting with other people and, thereby, becomes the victim of migrant activism. Spivak’s observation of the condition of women in a diaspora is another strand of thought that I cultivate in my thesis. Spivak’s comments throw light on the relationship between Ashoke and Ashima, the

latter being forced to migrate because of her marriage to Ashoke. Her subsequent angst, isolation and suffering in the completely unknown foreign country corroborates Spivak's claim that a migrant women has to continually adjust herself to her surroundings, both in the domestic sphere as well as in relation to the outside world.

Diasporic literature mirrors a 'double vision', at once of yearning backward and looking forward. Of the yearning for the past, immigrant Indian-Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry observes that all writers go down memory lane, "look at the past, at lost moments, lost opportunities, lost loves" (Das 2008, 15), and rethink and reassess them. Mistry further remarks that all diasporic writers use their memories and experiences and make stories out of them, changing something, adding something and imagining something. Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction too reflects this return to the past through memory. Born in 1967 in London, Jhumpa Lahiri is herself the product of cross-cultural identities. She is the daughter of a librarian and a school teacher. After receiving a BA and an MA in English, she went on to acquire an MA in Creative Writing and Comparative Studies in Literature and Arts. She did her Ph.D. in the area of Renaissance Studies after which she taught in Boston for sometime. She lives in New York now and considers herself a product of three countries — England, America and India. She began writing at the early age of ten by which time she had already realised that she had a divided identity — one half required her to be 'Indian' enough towards her parents, while her American friends wanted her to be American in her bearing and appearance. Frequent visits to India, accompanying her parents, helped her retain some cultural traits of her native land. Naturally,

her writing focuses on the strong ties that linked her to three countries and made her feel homeless, with an inability to feel accepted anywhere. As she confesses time and again, she felt that she did not belong to the US where she felt like an outsider because of her appearance and language. At the same time she felt equally like a stranger in India because as she admitted to Vibhuti Patel in an interview, “I didn’t grow up there (India) ... we were clutching at a world that was never fully with us” (Nityanandam 2005, 12). She further comments that “growing up in America is different — I have my own room, I can shut the door” (Das 2008, 14). But when she was at her parental home in Calcutta, she “became a part of other families, lived according to their schedule” (14). She, however, adds that Calcutta has played a significant role in her imagination:

I spent much time in Calcutta as a child — idle but rich time — often at home with my grandmother. I read books, I began to write and to record things. It enabled me to experience solitude ironically, because there were so many people, I could seal myself off psychologically. It was a place where I began to think imaginatively. Calcutta nourished my mind, my eye as a writer, and my interest in seeing things from different points of view. There’s a legacy and tradition there that we just don’t have here. The ink hasn’t dried yet on our lives here. (Das 2008, 14)

Before the *Interpreter of Maladies*, which brought her immediate fame and recognition, Jhumpa Lahiri had published a few short stories. Almost all of them explore the process of cultural mixture where there is a sense of both belonging and loss. Each one of her protagonists persistently has the feeling of being the other — not American enough, not Indian enough, straddling fences, stretching identities. The characters in her early short stories seem precursors to the ones that were to follow. Pulitzer Prize winner in the year 2000 for *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri was an immediate success. She stayed for a long time on many

best-seller lists and has been translated into more than 29 languages. She also won a host of other prizes and awards like the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award, New Yorker Debut of the Year Award, Addison Metcalf Award, O. Henry Award, Louisiana Review Award, etc. Even prior to this, Jhumpa Lahiri had been the recipient of awards, indicating that her literary talents were already recognised. This is also proved by the fact that she was listed in 1999 as “one of the best writers under 40” by the New Yorker. Her *Third and Final Continent*, which was published in the “New Yorker,” got the magazine the National Magazine Award for fiction. In 2003, *The Namesake* was published and once again Lahiri was the recipient of rave reviews.

Lahiri writes using a male point of view. She explains that she has no brothers, and while she was growing up, men had seemed to her like mysterious creatures. This probably led her to write from a male point of view. Lahiri can be categorised as a multi-cultural, diasporic, postcolonial, marginal South Asian woman writer. As a second-generation expatriate, she stands at an interesting border as well as a crossroad of culture. As a part of the margin, she belongs to a force that has in the US always broadened the mainstream. As a non-native, she is an outsider and is on the “cusp created by the intersection of two cultures, which one identifies as the space of the exile” (Kanaganayakam 1996, 205). The home that the parents left behind is no longer the home for the second-generation and hence she faces a greater problem — with a fixity in space hardly possible, and an identity that seems elusive, with attempts to transcend marginalisation by bridging the gap between the centre and margin. Like most expatriate writers, she realises that she can portray only what she has

experienced. Lahiri provides in her writing her truth — as an outsider and yet an insider living in the US. In a press conference in Calcutta, Lahiri had said, “No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile which ever country I travel to, that is why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile” (Nityanandam 2005, 13). With their dual personalities, some of Lahiri’s characters attempt to assimilate and integrate while others are never able to break the umbilical cord that binds them to their homeland. If they choose to stay on — not go back to their homeland — they remain on the periphery as permanent aliens, outsiders and expatriates. As in her short stories, so too in her novel, America is a distinct constant presence even when India continues to be a part of the fictional landscape.

About her early experience as a writer she says, “When I first started writing I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough to allow in life” (Das 2008, 12). Speaking on the title and the theme of *The Namesake*, Lahiri says,

I always knew that the protagonist of *The Namesake* would be a boy. The original spark of the book was the fact that a friend of my cousin in India had the pet name Gogol. I wanted to write about the pet name / goodname distinction for a long time, and I knew I needed the space of a novel to explore the idea. It’s almost too perfect a metaphor for the experience of growing up as a child of immigrants having a divided identity, divided loyalties. (Das 2008, 13)

About her own name she says, “I’m like Gogol in that my pet name inadvertently became my goodname” (13).

While Lahiri's first-generation Indian-Americans cherish their past and consider their memories as an indispensable, integral part of their roots and their being, her second-generation Indian-Americans reflect both proximity and distancing from it. More particularly, since they are born and raised in America, they look forward to the concerns and modes of their hybridisation and cross-cultural fertilisation in the increasingly multi-cultural space of the US, and not absorption in the dominant culture. They refuse to be a part of the marginalia, as the anonymous 'other'. Her narrative unfolds the complexity of diasporic life in terms of the variations and diversities as also the contrasts and contradictions of human experience. The movement of the narrative, though linear, encompasses the lateral spread of characters and their encounters, their points of view and authorial observations. The language she uses is relaxed and carries nuanced notations of layered significances and enriched meanings.

Born on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1971 in Chandigarh, India, Kiran Desai spent the early years of her life in the Indian cities of Pune and Mumbai. At the age of fourteen she left India to live with her mother in England. After a year, she moved to the US where she studied Creative Writing at Bennington College, Hollins University and Columbia University. Like Lahiri, Desai too is a product of multiple cultures, having lived in three countries. She first came to literary attention when in 1997, her excerpts found mention in Salman Rushdie's edited anthology *Mirrorwork: Fifty Years of Indian Writing*. Her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was published in 1998 and received the Betty Trask Award. In 2006, eight years later, Desai's second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the Man Booker as well as the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. Winning the Man Booker was a

double achievement for Desai because her mother Anita Desai, herself a celebrated novelist, was thrice shortlisted for the same.

After being declared a winner, Desai was asked about her mother's influence on her work, to which she said it was as much "hers as it is mine" (Sinha 2009, xvi). Desai believes that her mother's decision to relocate from India to England and subsequently to the US when she was a child benefitted her immensely, as she began to understand what it meant to travel and the kind of feeling and emotion that travel generates. She adds that "the characters of my story are entirely fictional, but these journeys (of her mother and grandparents) as well as my own provided insight into what it means to travel between East and West and it is this I wanted to capture. The fact that I live this particular life is no accident. It was my inheritance" (Sinha 2009, xix – xx). Like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai too believes that her own self being caught between two worlds is instrumental behind her success as a diaspora novelist. Her own experience in negotiating two completely different cultures, that too at the tender age of fourteen, has definitely moulded her sensibilities as a writer on diaspora. Commenting on diaspora writers, Rushdie believes that "the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss (without any singular tie to a particular country or culture) in an intensified form" (Rushdie 1992, 12). They can write from a "kind of double perspective: because they, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society" (19).

John Sutherland, chairman of Man Booker panel of judges for 2008 acknowledges *The Inheritance of Loss* as a novel that "registers the multicultural reverberations of the new millennium with the sensitive instrumentality of

fiction, as Jhabvala and Rushdie did in previous eras .... It is a globalised novel for a globalised world” (Sinha 2009, xx). Rushdie describes the novel as “majestic” and that it captures “the pain of exile, the ambiguities of post-colonialism and the blinding drive for a ‘better life’ when one person’s wealth means another’s poverty” (xx). Desai is successful in illuminating the pain of exile of the characters who are caught in the vortex of globalisation. The novel spans generations, cultures, religions and races. She successfully illustrates how individual characters living in different parts of the planet often intersect in surprising ways. A father’s love for his son, the son’s ambition to succeed, the bitterness of a lonely man living out his last days in a small town in the north-eastern Himalayas, two sisters’ yearning for the past are all presented by Desai as dislocated frail human beings in search of love and happiness. Sunita Sinha describes *The Inheritance of Loss* as

a perspective, an inside look into post-independence India, with its roots dug in colonialism, its branches embracing Americanism, but its leaves brown and dusty with the age-old prejudices that govern people’s minds; an India where a class of people still speak only English and squirm at the mention of their mother tongues; where a mother is proud because her daughter has chosen to marry an Englishman; where a foreigner is treated suspiciously in spite of his honest efforts to lay foundations of indigenous industries; where thousands of Indians enter America as illegal immigrants — in the eyes of their families, they are the heroes, but in reality, they sleep with mice on the kitchen floors of restaurants or in squalid suburbs of big cities. (Sinha 2009, xxi)

Set against the backdrop of Kalimpong, Manhattan and the Gorkhaland movement in India, *The Inheritance of Loss* explores anglophilia and issues of colonialism, racism, immigration, young love, regret and hope. Kiran Desai uses familiar modernist/postmodern devices, such as disjunctive chronology to revise the West’s vision of itself as a haven for the oppressed. She speaks about the



oppression of people when they migrate to the West. Given that much of the book was written after the 9/11 attacks, there could have been hints of paranoia about immigrants as sources of contagion and explosions. However in Desai's narrative world, the insurgents and terrorists stay at home while the poor go to America to join the underclass where they are exploited by the capitalist US economy in general. The novel speaks about the loss — the loss of home, faith and love and exposes the lop-sided nature of immigration. Desai explores the pain of the immigrant in a world where “one side travels to be a servant, and the other side travels to be treated like a king” (Sinha 2009, xxiv). Her scope is broad, looking at the consequences of large cultural and political forces for both people and individuals.

Both *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* centre on examining modes of connection across national, cultural, racial, political borders — defying confinement of boundaries, and constantly evolving and entailing necessary multiple engagements and thereby, “new subjectivities are produced” (Liu 2009, 102). Transnational studies enable examination of the counter-hegemonic strategies of resistance that have arisen from dislocated cultures and populations who have been affected by the power of capitalism. People of the third world who were once subject to direct colonial rule are now caught up in the more fluid processes of global capitalism, providing cheap labour to the first world. A transnational approach highlights cultural assimilation that necessarily erases cultural differences and automatically anticipates a borderless world. Nicholas DeMaria Harney and Loretta Baldassar comment that

While many researchers use the concept of transnationalism to name or analyse processes, patterns and relations that connect people or projects in different places in the world, its associations do have their interpretive limits, obscuring and eliding different scales, networks, and manifestations of connections, which as a result, diminish its clarity as a conceptual tool. (Harney and Baldassar 2007, 190)

Seen in this light, the characters in *The Namesake* seem to assimilate both Indian and American cultures in themselves. However, characters such as the judge or Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* appear to be following a single cultural code. Biju resists all attempts to be a part of the mainstream American culture while Jemubhai leaves no stone unturned in his efforts to be a part of the British culture, resulting in his alienation from his countrymen and relatives. Yu-yen Liu defines transnationalism as the “historically specific processes of globalisation” that began at the end of the twentieth century. Kandice Chuh defines transnationalism as “a socio-political collectivity produced in diversely local and global articulations within an ever changing matrix of nationalisms and circumscribed by the flow of capital within and across national boundaries” (Chuh 1996, 96). This concept of transnational transforms the idea of national boundaries caused by the shifts of global and local, political, economic changes and most importantly, by the gradual obliteration of specific cultural terrains, resulting in an interdisciplinary perspective that is reflected in both the narratives of *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. Khachig Tololyan seconds Kandice Chuh and comments that

Diaspora is undergoing an accelerating transition from exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism ... this transition is challenging the agendas, discourses, and resources of existing institutions, causing changes and occasionally leading to the creation of new organisations. (Tololyan 2000, 107)

Both Lahiri and Desai's characters have a common thread of experience of being 'foreign' running through them. Lahiri, having got rave reviews for her writings, believes her own position as an immigrant helps her to understand the angst and pain of a fellow immigrant. In this context, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni opines, "We cannot ignore the crucial part played by the growing number of immigrants who read our books because they understand their own communities better since we write from a perspective that is not available to a writer who has lived in India or China for most part" (Gangopadhyay 2010, 290). She continues, "But a growing number of American women — who are curious about the foreigners living in their middle — want to read their stories too" (290).

Vandana Singh, author of the Youngcircle series of children's books, believes that

Americans in general are sadly uninformed about India and what little they know is often caricatured and stereotyped beyond recognition. In addition there are a lot of western writers who have used Indian characters or settings in their stories, sometimes honestly and sometimes with a hostility that harks back to the old colonial British hack writers of penny-dreadfuls. An Indian writer thus has to overcome all these stereotypes. (Gangopadhyay 2010, 306)

Singh maintains that one of the things that help Indian writers in North America is that they get access to different ethnicities such as African-Americans, South Asians and the like. Cheryl Morgan, writer, critic and blogger, who runs an online magazine *Emerald City*, believes that American publishing houses are now looking for something new. Hence, if a diaspora writer can blend South Asian culture and traditions into his or her writing "it will help get it noticed" (Gangopadhyay 2010, 310). Morgan adds that the general belief is that the

American Economy is on the wane, and the future lies in India, China and South America.

Divakaruni, based in San Jose, USA, believes living in North America has a beneficial aspect on women writers of the Indian diaspora. She says that her mother wanted to be a writer but “she could not do it because of family responsibilities. Had I lived in India, I would have been expected to get married, raise children and pursue a career — if at all — that was not very demanding. Of course, women writers have succeeded in India but the struggle there is far bigger than the one here” (291). Anjana Appachana believes that a writer’s life is comparatively more comfortable in America than in India. “If you’re a writer, however, your work is always considered dispensable, you’re expected to put it aside for anyone and everyone, anything and everything. If you ever get money for it people are astonished! They think you’re so lucky! Whereas what you earn is so rarely a living wage” (291), she says. Jhumpa Lahiri feels that networking immensely helps her in forming ideas. Sharing information, contacts, endorsing each other’s works by writing blurbs, attending each other’s readings help create a writing community. Lahiri adds, “We look out for each other. We draw strength from each other.” (292)

Marina Budhos adds that, for a female writer, the story “typically takes place in the context of a family” (291). The characters’ attempts to adjust, adopt, adapt, accept and get assimilated find place in the expatriate writings of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai. Lahiri and Desai’s characters mature in their new environments and carry with them the potential for upheaval. Geography is no guarantee of security and Lahiri shows that family relationships alter at any time by swift jobs

of chance, wherever they happen to live. It has been alleged that the emigrants are often subjected to ghettoism and alienated from the 'new country'. Uncontrollable events may assail them and they might suffer from dramatic reversals like failed love affairs or simply accidents of fate. On the whole, in both Lahiri and Desai's narrative worlds, the pain and suffering of life are seamlessly blended with the relish and joy of life. Diasporic experiences unobtrusively alternate with the life lived in the homeland and its memories. Modes of living work out in the broad paradigms of flux and fixity. Using direct narrative techniques and aptly infused with subtler implications, both Lahiri and Desai craft their worlds with imagination making them deeply engaging.

The writers I examine in my thesis demonstrate the vulnerability of human relationships and family when individual characters migrate to another country. Since relationships and family are recurrent motifs in my thesis, let me give a brief overview of family in the Indian cultural context. Family is accorded central position in Indian culture. However, in an immigrant family, the second-generation immigrant often faces the 'problem' when individual rights become subservient to collective interests of the family. In contrast to European and American families, Indian families are considered to be close-knit and founded on the 'respect' that children display towards their parents. Many parents view respect as part of a network of familial rights and responsibilities in which the generations play complementary roles. Parents see themselves as having the obligation to provide materially for their children until they marry and establish households of their own. Indian children generally don't go 'flapping' after high school. Nor do Indian parents promote the sort of financial independence that

European parents try to foster in their children. Children are not encouraged to find independent sources of personal income, and in cases where the family has a business, the children of that family might have to work in the business without any pay. Parents see themselves as sacrificing a great deal for the benefit of their offspring. Reciprocally, Indian parents expect that their children will be obliged to look after them in their old age and have the same amount of respect for those who provide for them. Gwyn Williams, in the book *India in New Zealand Local Identities, Global Relations* (Williams 2010, 114), cites some surveys where second-generation immigrants think of the claim that Indian children should 'respect' their elders as nothing but a veiled way of saying that they ought to obey their parents unquestioningly. Second-generation immigrants often consider this demand for respect and deference to their authority as something which acts as an obstruction to their individual freedom, choice and independence. They believe that authority is unfairly wielded in the name of respect. The children are denied their rights as individuals. Commenting on the nature of family dynamics between migrant Indian parents and their children, Williams cites the case of an unnamed Indian male aged 18. In an interview, when asked about individual freedom, this male participant in New Zealand answers,

Pakeha parents give their children more respect. That's a very bold statement .... In the sense they're given their privacy, a lot more privacy. Indian parents tend to hold you by a string and pull you along ... They tend to try and control everything around you. A Prime example is my mum. She won't even let me choose my friends." (Williams 2010, 114)

Although this is said in the context of New Zealand, the distinction between the dynamics of an Indian family and a liberal western one is evident. The first-

generation immigrants who are less likely to be connected with the mainstream western culture of the host nation expect that each member of the family should be subordinated to the family as a whole. Their children are told to 'socialise' in a particular way, with a particular set of people. Herein lies the conflict between the generations that we find in abundance in *The Namesake*. Young people who value a free and independent self thus find themselves in conflict not only with their parents but also with the whole notion of 'Indian culture' that their parents promote. They often find that this culture is 'forced' upon them. In another survey, a participant (male aged 18) was asked to air his views. He replied that

[parents] really try and hammer Indian culture into you ... I fight quite a bit with my mum .... I tend to think it's because my mum wants me to be more like her, she wants me to become like most Indians ... Indian families ... they're very close-knit." (Williams 2010, 115)

There is a distinct gap between the expectation levels of the two generations. The first generation feels that a person's prime responsibility should be to the family, not to the self. When it comes to marriage, the cultural difference between an Indian family and an American one becomes evident. Here also the marriage negotiation takes place between the two sets of parents. Indian events abroad are often the sites of such discussions. Williams lists an advertisement that appeared in the personal column of the Wellington Indian Sports Club newsletter. It reads:

Want to find a nice husband or wife  
For your child/children. Let your kids  
play hockey!  
Come and watch while they are still  
Young and innocent. Sus 'em out now

and check out their parents at the same time.

GET INVOLVED! (Williams 2010, 116)

Indian custom expects that it is the authority of the parents to determine whom their child should marry. Herein also the generation gap comes into prominence. For many young second-generation Indian immigrants, arranged marriages deny the basic tenets of individualism, choice and freedom.

Rabindranath Tagore believed that the overseas Indian community can be compared to a banyan tree. He assumed that, like a banyan tree, Indian culture as well as social organisational patterns can be transplanted overseas. Tagore was of the opinion that the transplantation of socio-cultural patterns abroad is an unhindered exercise. However, this view does not fully adhere to reality. The nature and patterns of social organisation among overseas Indian communities are affected by numerous factors in varying degrees. Both *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are fraught with factors that affect family relationships. The novels present two distinct contexts of migration. The characters of *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* come from completely different family and socio-economic backgrounds. The thesis explores the different circumstances of the characters and how the circumstances shape the experience of individual families in the diasporic space. In doing so I take into account factors such as nostalgia and memory, inter-generational differences and political insurgency that play a key role in the progression of the narratives. In Chapter One, I discuss the different socio-economic factors that are responsible for the characters' migration. This chapter explores in detail how the characters of both novels perceive migration to the West as a tool to better their lives and family relations. I explore the roles of the respective families in the decisions to migrate. I take



into account the family responses to migration and how the decision to migrate enhances the social and cultural status. The chapter examines the feelings of disillusionment experienced by the characters. In the following chapter, I explore the various narrative devices used by Lahiri and Desai, such as memory and nostalgia, the politics of naming, generational differences and insurgency that affect family relations. Chapter Two ends with a comparison between the two novels and how family relations re-structure at the end of the respective narrative. The General Conclusion affirms the importance of family relations that provide the much needed strength to the characters in a diasporic context. It focuses on the inter-personal closeness between the different family members, which ultimately emerges triumphant in the push and pull of the diasporic space.

## **Chapter 1: Factors of migration in the two novels:**

The term 'diaspora' carries a sense of displacement. It has multiple layers of meaning. From the original meaning of large-scale migration of people due to religious persecution, the term now has come to refer to any movement of people from one land to another. This migration is often made by personal choice but at times, it can be influenced by socio-economic conditions as well. Displaced people find themselves for various reasons separated from their national territory. In my thesis, I take up two postcolonial novels namely, *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* and explore how family and relationships alter during the course of migration to another country. Both novels present two different perspectives behind the characters' migration and this chapter investigates the reasons for which the characters migrate to the US. In this chapter I examine the factors that motivate the characters to migrate in *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. In *The Namesake*, Ashima and Ashoke migrate to the US. I explore the multiple socio-economic factors that motivate the two characters to migrate to the West. The chapter also discusses the feelings of alienation, anxiety and disillusionment the characters face once they have migrated abroad.

*The Namesake* begins with Ashoke Ganguli's migration to the US to pursue his Ph.D. in fiber optics at MIT. Ashoke who comes from a Bengali middle-class family had no intention of going abroad initially. On the contrary, he believes that a good book can help a person "travel without moving an inch" (Lahiri 2003, 16). However, he changes his mind when he meets a stranger in the train on that fateful night during his travel to Jamshedpur to visit his grandparents. The

stranger whose name is Mr. Ghosh asks Ashoke to make use of his young age and travel the world. Ashoke distinctly remembers the words of Mr. Ghosh as a few hours after this meeting Ghosh dies and Ashoke is left severely injured when the train derails. By sheer chance, Ashoke survives, although he thanks Nikolai Gogol's Akaky Akakyvich for his life as he had been awake reading Gogol's "The Overcoat". Soon after he discovers that Mr. Ghosh is dead, "his mangled limbs ... draped over Ashoke's legs" (18). That night remains etched in his memory forever. He remains bed-ridden for several months because of his injuries. But as he regains his bodily strength, he decides to go abroad and pursue further studies. Initially he doesn't inform his parents about his decision because he knows that in a Bengali middle-class family like his, where parents often look up to their son, expecting that the latter would take care of them in their old age, such a decision would not be welcomed. His parents would think that Ashoke is shirking from his duties by going abroad. But Ashoke decides to move ahead and apply for a Ph.D. programme at MIT in the US.

Ashoke's career in America makes him a suitable prospective groom in Calcutta, where the Bhaduri family gets attracted to this ambitious, young Ashoke Ganguli. His marriage to Ashima Bhaduri brings the latter to the US as well. Ashima marries a man whose name she learns only after her betrothal. Ashoke, who was "slightly plump, scholarly looking but still youthful, with black thick-framed glasses and a sharp, prominent nose" (8), moves with his wife Ashima Bhaduri to Boston after his marriage. The fact that Ashoke comes to India to get married suggests that he has not severed his family relations in India altogether. His agreeing to marry a Bengali girl in Calcutta confirms his deep-

rooted ties with his family in India. Similarly, Ashima's parents' inclination to marry their daughter to a man working in the US suggests their fascination for the West. Although they very well know that the geographical distance between India and the US is huge, yet they are willing to accept the geographical distance, because for them a groom working in a developed country would greatly enhance their social prestige in Calcutta. Ashima too knows that as a young girl – she is in no rush to be a bride – she would be married off to a virtual stranger since arranged marriages are very common in the contemporary social period when the novel is set. She was studying towards her college degree and was an average girl in all respects. She is

five feet four inches, tall for a Bengali woman, ninety nine pounds. Her complexion was on the dark side of fair, but she had been compared on more than one occasion to the actress Madhabi Mukherjee. Her nails were admirably long, her fingers, like her father's, artistically slim (9).

In Indian arranged marriages, the physical features of the would-be bride are of immense importance. Lahiri's description of the physical features of Ashima suggests that the latter is physically beautiful and is much sought after in the marriage market. Similarly, a groom who is settled in the West is considered to be much sought after in the marriage market.

Ashoke's migration is for economic gain, for professional progress and permanent residence there. Ashoke has to confront social mores alien to him and negotiate through unknown social territory. It must be noted that Ashoke clearly compartmentalises the two roles that he plays — as a university professor with his own office and as a husband and father at home. He has a job that he has always dreamt of and as the perfect professional he seems unperturbed by the

cultural difference of being one of the ethnic minorities. At home, as husband and father, he easily slips into being a typical Indian male head of the family — that of the provider, master, husband and father. All this is done so easily and so naturally that it seems he is unfazed by the cultural difference that he encounters every day. The immigrant in him continues to live in two mutually exclusive worlds. At work, his origin, race or colour do not intrude or matter; at home they do not ever change or impinge on him in any way.

Moving from a university town to Cleveland on a nine-month grant too is part of this non-personal, professional life. Lahiri does not delve deep inside Ashoke's psyche. The reader never knows whether he is plagued by the questions of alienation that haunt Ashima, Gogol and Sonia. Indira Nityanandam calls Ashoke an "accommodationist" (Nityanandam 2005, 82) because she believes that the purpose of Ashoke migrating to the US is only for money, and hence, he is not troubled by questions of belonging or not belonging to the host society. At work he adopts the dress, etc. of the host country and at the same time he maintains his original culture and identity at home. As a university professor Ashoke is accepted into the academic community. He can assimilate and accommodate himself into the social fabric that is there in the university, but at home, he continues to be the typical Indian male whose domestic life is inherently Indian and to be specific, Bengali. Ashoke Ganguli belongs to the generation of Indians who view America as their ultimate destination to further their academic goals. Unlike Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss*, who is forced by socio-economic conditions to migrate, Ashoke's decision is entirely personal. His migration is

voluntary and purely for economic gain, professional progress and a materialistically satisfying life there.

In direct contrast to this is the portrayal of the character of Ashima who moves to the US because of her marriage to Ashoke. Keeping with the tradition of conventional Bengali families, Ashima accompanies her husband to a country which is totally unfamiliar to her. Lahiri deals with the marginalisation of Ashima because of Ashoke's ambitious pursuits. Unaware that she can live a life different from what is decided for her, Ashima is married to Ashoke and moves eight thousand miles away to a city characterised by severe, snowy winters. Caught between India and America, Ashima becomes 'homeless' — she can be 'at home' no where. Ashima Ganguly's journey to the US because of her marriage to Ashoke results in painful remembrance of the past. The agonies, anxieties of being caught between two cultures, nations or times catch up with Ashima. Though Ashoke realises how miserable she is in the new city, he makes no attempt to discuss it, understand her or to consider her point of view. This loneliness is further compounded when she is alone with the newborn Gogol at home. The child becomes the centre of Ashima's life and all her moments revolve around his needs. Ashima very well fits into the ordained roles of a woman, "designed by nature to bear, nurture children, act as her husband's helpmate, help him to fulfil his potential, and resign herself to her 'limitation'" (Mickelson 1979, 455). Mickelson's observation is appropriate for the character of Ashima as all through the novel, Ashima is represented as someone who is dependent on her husband for her everyday needs. She doesn't have any independent identity of her own. Her home is the only world that is known to her. The positioning of Ashima in

*The Namesake* corresponds to Gayatri Spivak's assertion that "Women are culturally perceived as really responsible for tasks associated with the private sphere, especially of the family" (Spivak 1996, 258). Ashima too, restricts herself within the confines of her family. It is only when Ashoke moves on to MIT as a professor that she finds time to do things she likes. When she is forty-eight and her children have more or less grown up, she is able to do things according to her own wishes. She gets a part time job in the local library and attempts to mingle with the community. Ashima's social circle changes slowly and she begins to discover a world that is outside her immediate family of Ashoke, Gogol and Sonia. Beauvoir had stated that "the situation of woman is that she, a free and autonomous being like all creatures, nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other" (Beauvoir 1972, 173). Ashima's existence in the novel supports Beauvoir's comment as the former does not have economic independence until she is forty-eight. She is financially dependent on Ashoke and her life revolves around the domestic role.

Ashima remains present through every important happening in the novel. Although Gogol is the protagonist, Lahiri details Ashima's role through a different socialisation process. It is only after getting the job at the library that "she has come to experience the solitude that her husband and son and daughter already know" (Lahiri 2003, 161). Before this she had no idea what independent living meant. Lahiri depicts the character of Ashima as a typical Bengali woman of the 1960s who has no professional aspirations of her own. Her only objective in life seems to be a good housewife and that is what Ashima aspires for in the initial pages of the novel. For Ashima, her family is of prime importance and she

always thinks in terms of her husband and children. She never thinks of her own professional life although she is an honours graduate of Calcutta University. Ashima is totally different from the average American woman who lives alone and “eating, driving herself to work in snow and sleet, seeing her children and grandchildren, at most, three or four times a year” (Lahiri 2003, 48). Therefore, she finds it very difficult to adjust to her surroundings in the US, as she gets limited exposure to the new country to which she migrates. On the contrary, Ashoke does not have the pangs of separation from India as he is engaged in his work, and so, finds it easier to form a social circle. In later sections, Ashima comes out of her cocooned self but that too on a very limited scale. Only at the end of the novel, Ashima’s decision to return to Calcutta and stay in India for six months can be regarded as the first major decision in her life that she has taken all by herself.

Ashima represents those “islands of ethnic minorities who continue to exist even in multi-cultural societies” (Nityanandam 2005, 106). Her middle-class family background prevents her from mixing with people from the mainstream American culture. Ashima finds the liberal cultural atmosphere in the US very alien to her upbringing. Even in the matter of dress, she continues to wear only sarees. Nowhere is she shown observing cultural practices such as Christmas and Thanksgiving that are characteristics of the mainstream culture of her adopted nation. While Ashoke remains busy in his career, Ashima spends her days recollecting her past life in Calcutta. When she is pregnant for the first time, the nostalgia for Calcutta affects her all the more. During her pregnancy and after the birth of Gogol, Ashima wants to go back to India because she acutely feels the



dearth of relatives. Usually in Indian families, the women relatives comfort and support a pregnant woman, offering her advice and company. Ashima finds it difficult to manage without her relatives around. She knows that had she been in Calcutta, she wouldn't have been alone at such times:

Nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all. It's not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow, she will survive. It's the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land. For it was one thing to be pregnant, to suffer the queasy mornings in bed, the sleepless nights, the dull throbbing in her back ... That it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, had made it more miraculous still. But she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare." (Lahiri 2003, 5-6)

She remembers that when she was boarding the aeroplane for the US, there were twenty-six members of her family at the airport to bid her goodbye. Now there is just a gaunt looking obstetrician Dr. Ashley to examine her. The doctor tells her that everything is normal, but "nothing feels normal to Ashima" (5). If she had been in India, she would have been surrounded by innumerable relatives but now "she cries as she feeds him" and goes into a depression when "there are no letters from Calcutta" (84). In contrast to Ashoke, Ashima's ties to her relations back there in Calcutta seem much stronger. She severely misses her relatives in Calcutta. Her unhappiness and loneliness are reflected in her attempts to recreate her homeland through memory and nostalgia. She does not want to sever her relationships and even at the end of the novel, she decides to divide her time between Calcutta and India.

Lahiri depicts the kind of migrant like Ashoke as "economic refugee or self-chosen exile" (Nayak 2008, 134), who willingly chooses to go abroad to better

his prospects and gain a superior economic position. Ashoke Ganguli gets a job he has always dreamt of and he continues to live in two mutually exclusive worlds. It is quite evident that Ashoke has to confront social mores totally alien to him, adjust and negotiate himself through the unknown territory and the new world but he does so with comparative ease. However, Lahiri does not give us any insight into the psyche of Ashoke. Unlike Ashoke, Ashima and even some of the minor characters are seen caught between dilemmas. Ashoke's transition into the host society seems to be a smooth one. In spite of his periodic visits to Calcutta and the sabbatical year when he spends eight months in India, he ceases to think of India as his home. The two worlds of India and America seem almost mutually exclusive to him. Ashoke rises up the academic ladder but he never analyses the merits or demerits of living in a diaspora. It is very evident that Ashoke wants to keep the two worlds apart. However, it might also be a possibility that he is reminded of the train accident whenever he tries to bring back memories of India. Ashoke's only goal is to earn money and hope for a better economic scenario. Thus, he is seen easily adopting the dress-code, cultural practices that are present in the university. The meaning of 'Ashoke' in Bengali is 'one who is without grief'. True to his name, Ashoke is never seen expressing anxiety about his existence in the US. Even Ashoke's death avoids Lahiri's scrutiny. Ashoke dies when even his immediate family is not by his side.

Contrary to the character of Ashoke, Ashima is a much more detailed character. She represents the majority of women expatriates who move to a foreign country because of their marriage, thereby, altering the dynamics of their family. Like many women of her class, Ashima is reluctant to adapt herself to the

culture of the host country. This might be a result of the fact that unlike Ashoke, Ashima does not work outside her home nor has she pursued higher studies in the host country. Ashima's economic dependence on her husband makes it extremely difficult for her to forge social ties with the outside world. Ashima's loneliness after the birth of her child Gogol is the loneliness of one in a foreign country. The only source of comfort that Ashima has is the 'Desh'<sup>1</sup> magazine that she had brought from India. A city characterised by severe, snowy winters, Boston is an inhospitable place for Ashima.

Francoise Kral compares the state of migrant women like Ashima to a snowglobe. Kral explains the snowglobe as "a closed-in world, isolated and out of reach, surrounded by glass, or rather plastic, as in a showcase" (Kral 2007, 67). Kral argues that like a snowglobe, migrant characters like Ashima have their own isolated worlds, without any sense of belonging to the host country. Ashoke does not feel the sense of loneliness and seclusion experienced by Ashima. He, on his part never tries to understand how miserable Ashima is. She goes into a depression and keeps herself engaged in household chores. Gogol becomes the centre of Ashima's life and all her time now revolves around the child. Throughout the novel Ashima does not seem to realise the inequitable distribution of power within her family structure. She effortlessly fits into her ordained roles of being a mother, a wife which suggests that she is a conformist. Ashima feels all the more lonely after the death of Ashoke and decides to leave for India. Even after three decades of residence, she is not completely at home in

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<sup>1</sup> 'Desh' is a popular Bengali magazine in the state of West Bengal, India. It covers contemporary issues and book reviews.

America. This again indicates that the first generation immigrants can never feel at home however long their residence might be in the host country.

*The Namesake* portrays realistically the experiences of the Ganguli family which is sometimes affected by a feeling of cultural alienation. In the novel, we find two kinds of diasporic alienation, namely, the literal alienation that is caused by the physical displacement as well as the alienation caused by the difference in sensibility. The first form is mainly seen in the first generation immigrants like Ashoke and Ashima whereas, the second form of alienation affects the second generation of migrants like Gogol. The fear of losing one's culture, and hence one's identity, in an alien country makes the first-generation immigrants hold on to their native group and culture whenever and wherever possible: "The families drop by one another's homes on Sunday afternoons.... They argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit Ray. The CPIM versus the Congress party"(Lahiri 2003, 38). Lahiri's portrayal of Ashima underlines the importance of certain cultural notions that Indian migrant women have to follow. Thus when Ashima becomes a widow, she removes her iron bangles which are signs of matrimony according to Hindu customs. She also erases her vermilion, which drastically changes her appearance. Ashima's feels the absence of the familiarity of Calcutta all the more in this hour of crisis. Paradoxically, this absence becomes a kind of presence because it always reminds them of their lives left behind. This multi-cultural experience leads to a fragmentation in the perception of the characters. The expatriate tries to overcome this alienation by constantly shedding cultural mores, food habits and preferences. As immigrants, Ashima's process of adjustment is more difficult than Ashoke. She finds it

extremely hard to grapple with the sense of cultural mores that her children possess. It severely affects her soul when her children take to American ways which are totally opposite to her social and cultural beliefs. When Ashima's son dates the American girl Maxine and goes to spend his vacation with the girl's parents, Ashima realises the rift in emotional sensibility that is there between her and Gogol. This process certainly involves uncertainties, dilemmas and choices.

The factors responsible behind the first-generation's migration to the US are extremely important for the analysis of the novel as their decision to move abroad is the basis on which other factors of alienation such as generational difference rest. Generational difference and clinging to socio-cultural rituals of the homeland by the first-generation characters problematise the migrants' experience and this is what I shall discuss in the second chapter of the thesis. The different histories of the characters give rise to generational problems and their filiation and affiliation to the two cultures encourage perspectival disagreement among the two generations. The second-generation migrants do not have affinity with the memories that affect their previous generation. The second chapter of the thesis explores some such factors and attempts to analyse how they are instrumental in defining family relationships.

*The Inheritance of Loss* is the second novel that I explore in my thesis. The novel has two parallel narratives — one set in Kalimpong and the other in Manhattan. Both narratives contain tales of migration. The first narrative revolves around Cho-Oyu, the judge's decrepit house where the anglophile judge reminisces about his days in England. The other narrative centres around Biju,

who has illegally migrated to New York on forged papers and now leads a life of a fugitive, always on the run for fear of being arrested. As I did with *The Namesake*, I determine the reasons behind the characters' decision to move abroad in *The Inheritance of Loss* and how they cope with the process of migration in their lives. As in *The Namesake*, primarily the reason for the migration of the characters seems to be money and a desire to better their lives. However, in addition to the money factor there is also a sense of social prestige and empowerment that residence in the US or UK gives the characters. Through this chapter, I demonstrate how each one of the characters has his or her own reason for migrating.

The judge, Jemubhai Popatlal Patel was born in 1919 in the small town of Piphit in Gujarat. The British had attempted to modernise the town by opening a school and laying rail tracks across it. Jemubhai had received his education at the local Bishop Cotton School where he is deeply impressed by the portrait of Queen Victoria. What strikes him is the fact "a woman so plain could also have been so powerful" (Desai 2006, 58). His respect and admiration for the Queen and the British in general grow stronger. Jemubhai is the first in his family to receive western education. His doing well at higher levels of the school spurs his father to send him to England for further studies. His father is a poor man but has the ambition of sending his son to England for higher studies. He does not have enough money to send Jemu to England, so he goes in vain to several moneylenders. The decision to send Jemu to England is so important for his father that he arranges Jemu's marriage with a girl before his departure. This is to ensure that Jemu gets a sufficient amount of dowry that will assist his

education in England. He is so passionate to send his son abroad that he is ready to settle for any girl provided he gets a huge amount of money. The offer comes from a rich merchant of Piphit and Jemu is married to a dark and ugly daughter of the merchant. The enormous amount of wealth and opulence in the form of dowry that young Jemu could command by flaunting his selection for Cambridge indicates the inclination of common Indians to have a western-educated bridegroom:

The dowry included cash, gold, emeralds from Venezuela, rubies from Burma, uncut kundan diamonds, a watch on watch chain, lengths of woolen cloth for her new husband to make into suits in which to travel to England, and in a crisp envelope, a ticket for passage on the SS Strathnavar from Bombay to Liverpool. (Desai 2006, 91)

Through flashback narration, Desai narrates how Jemu's father-in-law had hired retired members of a military band to play for Jemu when the latter was to board the ship SS Strathnavar bound for England. The excitement that Jemubhai's family feels on the former's departure for England is evident through the grand send-off that is arranged prior to his departure. His luggage contains culturally contradictory items, like the 'choorva', a decorated coconut<sup>2</sup> meant for tossing into the waves to bring good luck and his new Oxford English Dictionary. These items represent the two cultures that have shaped the young boy. Jemu feels humiliated when he sees the typical Indian meal his mother had prepared for him and also put a banana for him. He thinks his meal has given away his humble past and his Indian way of life to the co-passengers of his journey who presumably are Europeans. He feels angry at his mother for humiliating him, in her attempt to save him from the embarrassment that may arise from his

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<sup>2</sup> Coconut is considered to be auspicious in Hinduism. It symbolises good luck.

inability to use the fork and knife in the dining salon of the ship. Jemubhai, however, uses a knife and fork to eat his 'rotis' and 'puris'<sup>3</sup> later in life. His mother's love disgusts him and he tosses the food packet overboard. The overt show of affection fills Jemu with an embittered silence as he tries to shed his Indianness in the hope of getting adopted by British society.

In England, Jemubhai feels the isolation of being an Indian in a foreign country. He sees the the small grey houses with a sense of amazement, for the glorious picture of England that he carries in his heart now seems colourless. England for him had been a land of dreams, of glory and beauty, of wealth and happiness, but this notion is soon shattered when he arrives at Cambridge. He feels isolated and withdraws into his shell. He is discriminated against and is made fun of. When he is wrongly accused of smelling like curry by young British girls, Jemubhai takes to regular washing of himself. The impact of such experiences is so severe that he becomes obsessive about certain things in life, like his preference for faded days to sunny ones lest sunlight reveal his 'horrifying' self. These memories of subordination play havoc on the psyche of young Jemu and when he returns to India, he is a changed man. He begins to stand for English manners, rituals, attitude and the general English way of life, and by doing so, Jemubhai Patel tries to wash away his past humiliation in the hands of the British. He hopes that if he manages to be a part of the mainstream British culture by adopting their ways and practices, he would be able to shed his shame that was born out of the humiliation he had suffered as a brown-skinned

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<sup>3</sup> 'Rotis' and 'Puris' are two Indian delicacies usually eaten with curry. They can be compared to bread.



student at Cambridge. He becomes the 'brown sahib'<sup>4</sup> who wants things done with punctuality and precision much like his British masters. He begins to emulate the habits of the British — the ruling class of pre-independence India, and claims a "constant exertion of authority" (Desai 2006, 61). As an Indian Civil Service officer, the judge is now equipped with the power of the ruling class and he enjoys his show of strength when he employs a 'Brahmin'<sup>5</sup> stenographer who occupies a tiny tent next to his magnificent one. The judge feels a sense of thrill and happiness when he relegates an upper-caste person to a subordinate position. Similarly, imitating his colonial masters helps him in exercising the phantoms of humiliation he has suffered at their hands when he was an ordinary person in the town of Piphit. This penchant of the judge for British affectations is not only limited to his daily activities but is also evident in his manners and expressions. During his service tenure, the worst form of contamination he comes across is hearing the cases in Hindi. His fuss over a fixed English routine begins with the bed tea and ends with a hot water bottle, not only in winter but in all seasons in the manner of the colonisers. His fascination for hunting and hunting rifles also reflects his anglophilic nature. Even after retirement, the evening tea is more like a ritual, served with an accompaniment of pudding.

Jemubhai begins his quest for identity from a position as the 'other' to becoming a member of the British mainstream culture by way of putting on a persona that goes with the British way of life. Imitating the British gives him a

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<sup>4</sup> The word 'Sahib' in Hindi means a white man. Nowadays used to address someone with respect.

<sup>5</sup> 'Brahmin' is the upper most caste in India. Brahmins are usually priests and command the topmost position in the social hierarchy.

sense of power. His choice of the breed of dog after retirement is significant. Usually Irish-setters are not very commonly kept as pets in India. However, the judge's fascination for the breed, which is often used as a gun dog by Europeans, confirms his inclination to emulate the British. When the judge employs the cook, the latter boasts of his ability to prepare all sorts of puddings. In one breath, the cook mentions almost every kind of pudding: "Banana-fritter-pineapple-fritter ... upsidedown-raisin-upsidedown" (Desai 2006, 64). The cook's ability to "make a new pudding for each day of the year" (64) confirms his appointment in the judge's household. Jemubhai's futile efforts at trying to be like the British isolate him from his family members who, unlike the judge, could not access western education and so, cannot keep pace with the judge's love for British ways and customs. The judge is not granted the much cherished membership of the class of the British in India and is left behind as a retired anglophilic judge who fails to secure a place in either culture.

Jemubhai Patel is a living reminder of colonial days, when an English education promised to endow a boy from an Indian village with the riches of western civilisation and a secure future in the Civil Service. Taken no more seriously by the new India than by the old British rule, the judge realises that he is one of "those ridiculous Indians who couldn't rid themselves of what they had broken their souls to learn" (Desai 2006, 205). Living a useless life, he becomes a parody of an Englishman devoted only to his Irish-setter dog Mutt. He remains cooped up in his crumbling mansion Cho-Oyu. Even after retirement, he almost never leaves his home, knowing that outside its walls his power and influence are uncertain. This rootedness is further demonstrated when he is reluctant to

meet his old friend Bose in town. His small world confined within the four walls of Cho-Oyu corroborates his isolated and alienated existence and his failure to be a part of a social circle in his life.

Another character who migrates to the West is Biju. The son of a cook, Biju had always dreamt of making it big in the West. Unlike the judge who had emigrated to England, Biju's choice of country is the US. The shift in choice is significant because the judge had migrated when India was a British colony. England was the place to be at that time. However, Biju's migration takes place much later, in the 1980s when America has already emerged as the global power in terms of economic superiority. Thus, for Biju, US is the dream destination where he is prepared to go at any cost. Although Biju initially fails in his efforts, he finally manages to migrate to the US, albeit on forged papers. Biju's father, the cook, had been lured by the prospect of employment in the US for his son and had manipulated some counterfeit recommendations that had helped Biju's selection at the interview. The cook has high hopes for his son although he was not aware of the exact nature of Biju's work in the US. The nurturing of hope is evident in the letters that he sends to Biju. He regularly recommends to Biju names of boys willing to go to America. For him, the US seems to be the ultimate goal of a person's life. On the other hand, Biju too, expertly puts up this mask and pretends that he is doing fine in the US. His letters "traced a string of jobs, they said more or less the same thing each time except for the name of the establishment he was working for. His repetition provided a coziness, and the cook's repetition of his son's repetition double-knit the coziness" (Desai 2006, 17). This quotation from the novel evidently shows how working for the

Americans in America imparts a sense of pride for both father and son. The enthusiasm with which Biju writes the letters and the excitement that is generated back there in India when the cook reads them explains the migration of Biju because having a son in the US greatly enhances the prestige of the cook among his peers. For Biju and his father, migrating to the US and having a job there is the ultimate goal a person can have and so, both father and son were desperate to make this relocation. When Biju fails to secure a visa through legitimate means, the cook arranges forged papers on the basis of which his son ultimately migrates. The cook derives immense satisfaction as a father when letters of Biju arrive from the US. For him, the letters convey a success story of his son which in turn enhances the former's social prestige in Kalimpong so much so that he regularly recommends to Biju other people who are willing to migrate to the US. The cook hopes that someday, after Biju has saved enough money, he too will be able to join his son in the US. At the same time, the novelist narrates the pathetic condition in which Biju lives. The reality is completely different from what the cook believes. Throughout the narrative Biju learns how his adopted nation treats him as a second citizen: "He was surprised to see that there was a whole world in the basement kitchen of New York" (213). "Whole world" refers to people like Biju who have come from all over the world to America to pursue their dreams. Unfortunately for illegal immigrants like Biju, life becomes a living hell and instead of the luxury that they dream of, they literally become paupers and don't even have the money to return home. Biju represents the class of illegal immigrants who provide cheap labour to the various New York establishments. Tony Simoes da Silva rightly comments that "Desai exposes the materiality that underpins the presence of refugees in the

modern world” (Da Silva 2008, 62). For despite their numbers, Biju and the mostly male groups of people with whom he competes for poorly paid jobs and flea-ridden beds shared round the clock, remain invisible to most New Yorkers whose lifestyle they support.

Biju is constantly on the run, switching from one job to another, devoid of any identity and constantly subject to suspicion by the immigration authorities. He lives in squalor and his sense of place is tenuous. He drifts from job to job, never keeping a permanent address. Biju thinks that the elusive Green Card is the panacea to all his problems:

The green card the green card .... Without it he couldn't leave. To leave he wanted a green card. This was the absurdity. How he desired the triumphant After The Green card Return Home, thirsted for it — to be able to buy a ticket with the air of someone who could return if he wished, or not, if he didn't wish. (Desai 2006, 99)

He knows that as long as he is an illegal immigrant he would be exploited by unscrupulous restaurant owners like Harish-Harry who denies Biju even the basic amenities when the latter works at his restaurant. Harish-Harry very well knows that Biju cannot protest because of his illegal status as an immigrant and the former takes full advantage of this. Biju realises that if he ever manages to get the Green Card, he would be able to live his life as he wishes, without any fear or trauma and without the daily exploitation that he is subjected to in the restaurants where he works.

All through the novel, the cook nurtures his dreams for Biju through the several letters that he gets from him. In one of his letters, Biju mentions,

No need to worry. Everything is fine. The manager has offered me a full time waiter position. Uniform and food will be given by them. Angrezi

khana only, no Indian food and the owner is not from India. He is from America itself. (57)

The self-elation of Biju expressed in this statement suggests how a migrant character from a third-world<sup>6</sup> country takes pride in getting a job in America and accepts unconditional surrender to the perceived superiority of the West. The excerpt also shows the concern of Biju for his father as he does not want the latter to know the grim reality that Biju faces as an illegal immigrant in the US every day. The cook takes satisfaction in the fact that his son is cooking English food and that Biju would make enough money to secure all luxury and comforts that the cook couldn't afford in his lifetime. In contrast to his contentment, Biju realises that in the US his identity is being acknowledged only as a second-rate citizen and the privileges of legal citizenship will not be accessible to him. He recalls, "all American flag on top, all Guatemalan flag below. Plus one Indian flag when Biju arrived" (Desai 2006, 21). Biju is surprised to see that there are people from every nationality in the basement kitchen of the restaurant where he works. He finds, "perfectly first world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below" (23). The restaurant where Biju works represents the juxtaposition of two worlds. The shiny exterior covers the grimy interiors that tell the tale of the miserable life of Biju. The resentment of Biju assumes the proportion of violence when he declares that he and his co-workers should also be given equal rights and respect since they are contributing towards the American economy. A deep sense of anguish is expressed through the following

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<sup>6</sup> The terms first and third worlds are used in the thesis from an economic perspective. Third-world refers to the developing economies of South Asia such as India, Pakistan, etc. whereas, the first-world denotes western countries like the UK or the US.

lines when Biju cries out to Harish-Harry, the owner of one of the Indian restaurants where the former is employed:

Without us living like pigs. What business would you have? This is how you make your money, paying us nothing, because you know, we can't do anything, making us work day and night because we are illegal. (188)

The quoted lines reflect the pathetic condition that Biju has to encounter on a daily basis as a worker in Harish-Harry's restaurant. Biju in his exile consistently shifts his job. He finds himself in a state of perpetual exile and helplessness in trying to accommodate to the surrounding social environment. This hostility of the host society towards Biju gives birth to the psyche of resentment in Biju. Surrounded by a completely unfamiliar culture and code, Biju often undergoes mixed feelings and emotions: "Biju couldn't help but feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country, but he knew he wouldn't have forgiven his father for not trying to send him, either" (82). This effectively demonstrates the deep desire of Biju to be upwardly mobile as well as his mixed feelings of isolation and alienation in the US that make him lonely and sad.

In contrast to the anxiety and pain of Biju, the cook survives in the illusion that his "son is in New York, he is the manager of a restaurant business" (84). He glorifies the emergence of America as the most powerful nation, "the best country in the world" (85) with exclusive control on economic resources and thinks that his son is successfully working there. In the US, Biju and other characters like Saeed Saeed have no choice of their own, neither of assimilation nor of retreat. They are treated as the burden of third world countries. Desai shares their anguish in the confession: "Then of course, there were those who

lived and died in America and never saw their families, not for ten years, twenty, thirty" (199).

The cook is extremely elated when he receives Biju's letters from America and soon starts comparing himself with Mrs. Sen whose daughter is also in the US. He proudly announces,

"My son works in New York," the cook boasted to everyone he met. "He is the manager of a restaurant business. "New York. Very big city," he explained. "The cars and buildings are nothing like here. In that country, there is enough food for everybody ... One day soon, my son will take me." (84)

For the cook, America is the land of dreams where people can buy all the material happiness that they are deprived of in their home country. He thinks that Biju is earning a lot of money in the US and will soon take his father from India to the US. The cook, however, is not aware of the exact nature of Biju's work in America. Being ignorant of his son's travails and anxieties abroad, he generously recommends to him the names of some of the local boys aspiring to go to America and asked the former to help them in getting jobs. Ironically, he is blissfully unaware of the dire circumstances under which his own son works to keep body and soul together.

Mrs. Sen thinks herself privileged in having a daughter who works in America and does not forget to take a dig at her neighbour, Lola, whose daughter works in England as a BBC newsreader: "All these people who went to England are now feeling sorry" (85). For the cook, however, the difference between America and England remains vague. He is content with whatever his son has achieved, little realising that though his son and many others like him had acquired a tourist visa to go to America, they are treated as illegal migrants after the expiry of the



visa and are under stress from all sides. They can neither live honourably as immigrants nor relinquish their aspirations and come back to their native country. Biju, too, embroiled in this typical predicament has no standing and identity of his own. Like a fugitive on the run he has to switch from one job to another lest he be caught and arrested for staying longer than permitted by law. Biju has to labour very hard, which reminds him of the plight of the colonised way back in the past. He works in numerous hotels and restaurants — French, Mexican, Italian, Indian and invariably has to share a room downstairs with the other workers, some of whom, especially a Pakistani, he never gets along with:

They threw cannonball cabbages at each other .... The sound of their fight had travelled up the flight of steps and struck a clunky note, and they might upset the balance, perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below. (23)

Yet Biju has to share his living space with Muslims and Pakistanis, although he dislikes both, because he has no other option left with him. He knows very well that he might be thrown out and arrested if he resists attempts to the room being shared by others. His personal choice and opinions are made redundant in the face of oppression by the restaurant owners, who take full advantage of the weakness of characters like Biju. To add to the humiliation of Biju, the wife of the proprietor of the Italian restaurant disdainfully observes that Biju smells and for this reason, Biju has to leave his job. Biju seemed completely alien to the restaurant owner's wife:

She had hoped for poorer parts of Europe — Bulgarians perhaps, or Czechoslovakians. At least they might have something in common with them like religion or skin colour, grandfathers who ate cured sausages and looked like them. (48)

The alienation that Biju faces as an Indian in the US makes his life miserable. He is not accepted anywhere and fails to make out an honourable living in his adopted nation. The differences in physical appearance from the Europeans, food habits, religion — all isolate Biju in his search for a decent job and life. Alienation, estrangement, humiliation and bone-chilling frost contribute to the sense of utter loneliness experienced by Biju in America. His father's friend Nandu, whom he had been banking upon for all kinds of help, callously gives him the cold shoulder and dismisses him with the advice that he should go back to India. Biju soon realises the prevalence of a deep rift between the legal and the illegal immigrants and knew that unless and until his immigration is formalised and given legal sanction, he would not even be able to go back to his native land and would continue being exploited by unscrupulous restaurant owners like Harish-Harry, who are busy making money at the cost of poor Indians and nationals of other third-world countries who do not have the authorised stamp on their papers.

*The Inheritance of Loss* constantly records the characters' response to experiences when cultures are brought into conflict. Desai advocates that globalisation is not always multiculturalism, progress and modernity as put forward by many critics. Instead, it embodies the same domination upon which imperialism and colonialism were grounded. She argues through her novel that the age-old agencies of domination such as colonialism and imperialism are present even now in the form of globalisation. The historical systems of domination have simply changed their forms. Although garbed in the guise of bettering the world, the novel poses a question through characters like Biju

whether globalisation engendered economic inequality between the two worlds is ultimately good.

Biju watches the Americans with envy as they shop nearby and hopes that he, too, would one day, be able to roam around the streets of New York without the fear of being caught by the police. But there are many others like Biju who suffer similarly — people who never has the chance to be one with their families:

It *WAS* so hard and *YET* there were so many here. It was terribly, terribly hard. Millions risked death, were humiliated, hated, lost their families — *YET* there were so many here. (Desai 2006, 189)

*The Inheritance of Loss* exposes the darker side of the American dream of the poor coming from the third-world countries. Characters like Biju suffer immensely in the hands of dishonest individuals like Harish-Harry who take full advantage of the precarious existence of these hapless individuals.

This glorifying of America is also seen in other parts of the novel. Mrs. Sen's pride in the fact that her daughter works in America seems to suggest how deep-rooted this psyche can be in the minds of third-world citizens. Other minor characters' fascination for the western world can be seen in Lola and Noni's liking for Trollope, BBC, Marks and Spencer's underwear and celebrating Christmas. Lola and Noni still have a hangover of the colonial era and try to continue it with the help of foreign goods and the Britishers' way of life. Ashis Nandy explains this kind of mentality by saying that it is the result of an imperialism that has conquered the minds, selves and cultures of people who come from third world countries (Nandy 1983, 98-99). Almost all the characters in the novel cherish India's imperial history and are fascinated by the West. This is reflected in their obsession for migrating to the West. Those who cannot

migrate purchase western brands of consumer goods and take pride in that. Pixie alias Piyal Banerji is a BBC reporter and Lola, her mother never gives up the opportunity to take pride in it. Lola regularly returns from visits to her daughter in England with suitcases full of “Marmite ... Marks and Spencer underwear — the quintessence of Englishness as she understood it” (Desai 2006, 53). When Mrs. Sen’s daughter Munmun gets a job in CNN she considers her daughter as an asset to the country and good enough for her to compete with her neighbour Lola’s daughter. Lola advises her daughter Pixie, “India is a sinking ship” (47), and that she should migrate to the West for the West is where her future lies. The vegetable garden in Mon Ami has broccoli which has been procured from England. They even preserve a jam jar which has an inscription on it that read ‘By appointment to Her Majesty the Queen Jam and Marmalade Manufacturers.’ The only exception is perhaps Father Booty who makes Kalimpong his home for over four decades. Booty is a Jesuit priest who comes to India for evangelical purpose but stays back in Kalimpong even after his visa expires. When Booty is found illegally residing in India and asked to leave, he is terribly traumatised and sad. He loves India and it is Kalimpong which gives him family and friends, not the West where he originally belonged.

It is not only the rich and the so-called elite but even those who belong to the economically weaker section of the society, represented by the cook in the novel, who reel under the impact of the syndrome. The cook is disappointed to be working for Jemubhai. The disappointment is rooted in what he considers to be a comedown from his father “who had served white men only” (63). He would have been happier in serving a white master. The cook is hired by the judge

because of his proficiency in making good pudding, not any Indian delicacy. The thought of his son Biju cooking 'Angrezi khana' makes him conclude "that since his son was cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian" (17). When Biju writes letters describing the 'angrezi food' and the owner for whom he worked, the cook uses it as a weapon to impress people back home. He believes that "his son would accomplish all that Sai's parents had failed to do, all the judge had failed to do" (85). Biju's migration becomes an instrument for the otherwise marginalised cook to assert his superiority. Biju endures humiliation in the US while the cook seeks solace in an imagined socio-economic space achieved through his son's economic prosperity attained in a country much beyond his own reach. The fascination of the cook for anything western is similar to that of the judge's psyche when he had gone to England. But there is a difference between Biju and the judge's experience abroad. Biju is never attracted to the new culture of America and constantly engages himself in romanticising about India. The judge always considers his travel to England as a means to better himself. Biju resists assimilating into the new culture of the host nation, whereas, the judge, though he cannot participate in the mainstream British culture when he is a student in England, tries every possible means to emulate the British in their ways. The cook, the judge and Biju think that the West is the passport to all riches and happiness.

Migration to another country seems to be pivotal in forwarding the narrative. It re-forms the family of every character. Sai's parents emigrate to Russia to participate in a joint space programme between India and the erstwhile USSR. Their death in Russia results in Sai's migration to Kalimpong where she is looked

after by her grandfather, the judge. Gyan comes from a traditional Gorkha martial family, his cultural background completely different from that of Sai's. Gyan's own family had been subject to the changes brought about by migration to the West. His ancestors had served in the British Indian Army and fought in the Second World War. They had been killed in different parts of the world while serving the British Indian Army:

In the 1800s his ancestors had left their village in Nepal and arrived in Darjeeling, lured by promises of work on a tea plantation .... By and by along came the Imperial Army, measuring potential soldiers in villages all over the hills with a measuring tape and ruler, and they had happened upon the impressive shoulders of Gyan's great-grandfather, who had grown so strong on the milk of their buffalo that he had beaten the village sweet-seller's son in a wrestling match .... So he swore allegiance to the Crown, and off he went, the beginning of over a hundred years of family commitment to the wars of the English.... But then they sent him to Mesopotamia where Turkish bullets felled him. Gyan's grandfather was killed in Burma shakily defending the British against the Japanese. (Desai 2006, 142)

Similarly, his brother was killed in Italy when the British troops were bombed. Death of their ancestors in an alien land seems to bind the lots of both Gyan and Sai.

The novel speaks about different relations that undergo changes because of travel by the characters and so the factors of migration are important for analysis. The equation of relations and family are always subject to constant change and revision when the characters re-locate. Sai has to live with her grandfather in Kalimpong when she becomes an orphan. The judge becomes a recluse within his own family because of his excessive love for British ways and customs. Relationship dynamics that the cook and his son share between

themselves is directly related to Biju's travel to the US. The cook's pride in his son and Biju's desire to make it big in the US shape both father and son's understanding of each other. The cook's meagre earnings and his utmost hardship in sending Biju abroad point towards an illiterate man's attempts to better his lot through his son's employment. However, Biju is also concerned about his father. He does not tell his father that his visa has expired because he knows the news would disturb him. Biju's subsequent return to India affirms the relationship between him and his father and the mutual concern for each other. Similarly, Father Booty's expulsion from India shatters the friendship that had been there between him and Uncle Potty. So far, I have attempted to encapsulate the different factors that have initiated the characters to migrate to the West and how their decision to migrate has influenced family relations between the home and the host countries. In the following chapter, I demonstrate how other different factors are instrumental in alienating the characters during their stay abroad. In Chapter Two, I take into account other pertinent issues that happen to the characters in the diasporic space. These issues form a backdrop to the narrative and pull forward the course of events ultimately ensuring that the migrant's relationships and family are constantly contested by external factors of disruptions but ultimately family relationships form the much-needed support network that helps the characters to re-discover themselves both in the host and home countries.

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## **Chapter 2: Factors affecting characters in the diasporic space:**

In the previous chapter, I had touched on the different factors that compel the people to go abroad. In this chapter, I move a step forward and argue how different factors of political disturbance, naming, memory and nostalgia, and generational difference are instrumental in affecting individual relationships and family of a migrant during his or her stay abroad. The above-mentioned factors also affect relationships in the home country and therefore, it is extremely important to analyse the factors in detail and determine how relationships are positioned in the context of migrancy.

Narratives that demonstrate the fluidity and mobility of people usually transcend the control of states and national borders, and limited, linear ways of understanding. This chapter analyses the different factors that affect home and family relationships in the two postcolonial novels namely, *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The Namesake*. Both Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri have been fascinated by the idea that cultural facts and values are mutable, contested and shaped repeatedly during and after migration to a new geographical space. Andrew Smith quotes Bhabha that there is “no necessary or eternal belongingness” (Smith 2004, 248) and that cultures come to be represented by virtue of processes of iteration and translation through which their meanings are constantly figured and re-figured. “It is the ... cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space — that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (248). This continuous negotiation through a different cultural process shapes the characters in different ways as each one of them comes from varying points of histories and looks at the culture of the host nation in different ways.



Jhumpa Lahiri as a second generation Indian American writer speaks of the aesthetics of identity formation shaped by negotiating two cultures. In an interview given on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2006, Lahiri speaks of her own growing up years:

When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offsprings I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back, I see that this was generally the case. But my perception as a young girl was that I fell short at both ends, shuttling between two dimensions that had nothing to do with one another. (Das 2008, 106)

The 'lack' which Lahiri is speaking of is further reinforced by the generation gap between the two generations of immigrants. Lahiri draws from her own experiences as an immigrant to the US and realistically portrays her characters. She is herself a second-generation immigrant and believes that the first generation of immigrants is concerned with the 'enigma of arrival' in a foreign country, the specific trauma of dislocation, the painful process of acculturation and uncertain acceptance by the host society. This chapter explores in detail such differences and analyses their effect on family relationships in the novels.

Jemubhai Patel goes to Cambridge to study law in 1939. On the departing day, for the very first time, "he felt a piercing fear, not for his future, but for his past, for the foolish faith with which he had lived in Piphit" (Desai 2006, 41). He harboured an idealised love of England where "he'd expected only grandness." But this expectation of his is soon shattered when he sees "tiny gray houses in gray streets, stuck together" (38). He "hadn't realised that here, too, people could be poor and live unaesthetic lives" (38). He sees the sight of small gray houses with a sense of amazement for the glorious picture of England that he had carried

in his heart now seems colourless. England, for him, had been a land of dreams that is shattered when he reaches Cambridge. Jemubhai's lonely life is spent locked inside his room. Without any company he gradually withdraws into himself. Jemubhai immerses himself in hard work to forget his loneliness that was slowly gripping him in the alien country.

He worked twelve hours at a stretch, late into the night, and in this withdrawing, he failed to make a courageous gesture outward at a crucial moment and found, instead, that his pusillanimity and his loneliness had found fertile soil. He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow. (Desai 2006, 45)

He feels the 'secondariness' of his existence in England. He is mocked at for his skin colour. The young Jemubhai gradually becomes a stranger to himself and feels lost and humiliated. His mind begins to warp and he finds his own skin odd coloured, his own accent peculiar. He forgets how to laugh, and can barely manage to smile. Even when he does, he holds his hand over his mouth lest anyone sees his teeth. As mentioned in p.52 of this thesis, when Jemubhai is wrongly accused of smelling like curry by some young British girls, he takes to regular washing and covers himself completely. The impact of being discriminated against affects his psyche so much that Jemubhai becomes obsessive for faded days lest sunlight reveals his coloured skin to the English people. The residual traces and memories of subordination of Indians in the hands of the British affect his psyche deeply. Desai's detailing of the judge's obsession with his physical appearance demonstrates how the young Jemubhai is affected when he is discriminated against by the British on the basis of his skin colour:

He began to wash obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling, and each morning he scrubbed off the thick milky scent of sleep, the barnyard smell that wreathed him when he woke and impregnated the fabric of his pajamas. To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly. (Desai 2006, 40)

As a result of his life at Cambridge, made miserable by taunting schoolboys and condescending examiners, Jemu becomes sufficiently anglicised to appear alien when he returns to India on the verge of independence.

When Jemubhai Patel returns to India as an ICS officer, he finds his wife Nimi very simple and his own people alien. Having experienced seclusion in England, he cannot make a place for himself in his native land India. After his return, he finds himself armed with the cloak of a foreign degree that carries the coloniser's authoritarian seal. He becomes too English once he returns. The exercise of power "calmed him" (Desai 2006, 61) for Jemubhai now "relished his power over the classes that had kept his family pinned under their heels for centuries" (Desai 2006, 61). He mimics the British, eats toast for breakfast and hunts animals with a gun. He is full of self-hate because of his Indian roots as well as hate for his immediate relations, his family, community and even his wife. This behavioural tendency of the people of colonised countries to ape the rulers, as portrayed through the character of the judge, is the result of a sense of loss of self-esteem and dignity at the hands of the colonisers. Jemubhai thus restructures his psychic self and attempts to imbibe the same set of cultural values and norms that had caused him humiliation and insult. Jemubhai's attempts to mimic the British in their ways and customs can be explained by Bhabha's definition of the term 'mimicry'. Bhabha believes that "mimicry is the sign of a double articulation; a

complex strategy of reform ... which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualises power" (Bhabha 1994, 122). Jemubhai clearly wants to assume the power that is associated with the British imperialist government and he believes that imitating the British would help him achieve a power position that he or his family had never experienced before.

Jemubhai takes his wife to Bonda, the place of his first posting in India, but now she is only a means for satisfaction of sexual desires. She is a simple girl born and brought up behind curtains. Jemubhai wants his wife to be English speaking and a well-to-do lady, so he arranges a tutor for her. Nimi is too simple to learn English and other worldly ways. She can't stand on equal terms with her husband. Initially he tries to tutor Nimi in British ways and customs, but in vain. Jemubhai behaves brutally with his wife Nimi because she dresses in yellow and pink like a gaudy peasant, and leaves footprints on the western-style toilet seat. He beats her mercilessly and never allows her to go out of the house. The judge's anglophilia destroys his marriage. She is almost on the verge of losing her mental balance. His wife reminds the judge of his past Indian background that the latter wants to forget and leave behind. After the birth of their child, Jemubhai's father comes to request him to keep Nimi with him. But the money, power and western education had suppressed the emotions and feelings in the judge's heart. He fails miserably in his duties towards his wife. In Hindu custom, marriage is considered to be sacrosanct. However, the judge fails in this relationship and is so disgusted with his wife's rustic character that he kills Nimi and passes it off as an accident.

The complete change in the psyche of the judge after he returns from England after five years results in his unfamiliarity with his own home. The anglophile

judge, who has by now started to imitate the British in their ways and customs, begins to loathe his Indian relatives and their ways of life. The relatives with whom he previously had shared good relation now become strangers to him. Angered and frustrated, the judge beats his wife severely and leaves her behind her relatives' place. Left alone, she is almost on the verge of losing her mental balance. Even the judge's relationship with his father undergoes a change and this is reflected when the judge refuses to heed his father's request of not deserting Nimi. The judge is completely bereft of emotions and feelings and is ultimately shown to inherit a dual sense of culture in terms of his liking for western habits and objects although he is born in India and inherently belongs to an Indian family. His love of the British way of life affects his duties as a husband as he cannot tolerate his wife's simplicity and complete ignorance of western education and conduct that the judge is so proud of.

The judge is a total failure as a father. He does not even see the face of his daughter when she is born. The judge's daughter elopes to Russia with a Zoroastrian pilot to escape Jemubhai's lack of warmth towards her. His daughter had a loveless childhood due to her mother's untimely death. The judge's feeling towards his granddaughter is no more than what he had for his wife or daughter. After he retires, Jemubhai buys a crumbling house in Kalimpong and pours all his love on his dog Mutt. When Sai comes to live with him, he keeps her in his house with the reason that "it would be good to have an unpaid somebody in the house to help with things as the years went by" (Desai 2006, 210). There is no mention of a single incident where the judge spends a happy time in the company of his granddaughter. Both feel uneasy in each other's company. His unhappy marriage,

his repressed sexuality, his aloofness, all contribute to his being tied down between the British and Indian cultures, between two nations and their contrasting perceptions. He cannot escape from his past: “When he thought of his past, he began, mysteriously, to itch. Every bit of him filled with a burning sensation. It roiled within until he could barely stand it” (Desai 2006, 56). Desai’s use of these physical sensations to highlight the judge’s plight demonstrates Jemubhai’s discomfort with his own physical appearance. Jemubhai cannot forget the humiliation that he had faced when he was a student at Cambridge and those memories had left a deep scar on his psyche that affects his family relationships.

Jesse Patrick Ferguson defines ‘place-ness’ as a “historical presence, both personal and communal, and it often entails a sense of ownership — sometimes in the sense of private property, sometimes in the sense of belonging to a place” (Ferguson 2009, 36). I believe that Ferguson’s definition of place-ness is extremely important for analysing Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* because the novel shows how vulnerable the sense of place-ness can be in the wake of a political disturbance and economic marginalisation. Ferguson further believes that “human violence functions as a means to break down place-ness into liminal space” (Ferguson 2009, 42). Desai uses the Gorkhaland insurgency of the 1980s<sup>7</sup> to show how it restructures every individual character’s sense of ‘place’. *The*

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<sup>7</sup> Gorkhaland is the name of the proposed state in India demanded by the Nepali/Gorkhali speaking Gorkha ethnic group in Darjeeling and the Dooars in north West Bengal, India. The demand for a separate administrative unit in this region has existed since 1907, when the Hillmen's Association of Darjeeling submitted a memorandum to the Minto-Morley Reforms, demanding a separate administrative setup. Towards the middle of 1980s, the demand for a separate state developed momentum under Subhash Ghising’s party, Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). This is the movement Kiran Desai uses as a backdrop to her narrative.

*Inheritance of Loss* also revolves around a teenager Sai, the child of a Gujarati mother and Zoroastrian father who is part of an Indo-Russian space collaboration. Sai's parents are killed in an accident "under the wheels of a bus of foreigners" (Desai 2006, 30) in Moscow, leaving Sai an orphan. When Sai comes to live with her Cambridge-educated Anglophile grandfather in Kalimpong, she disturbs the self-imposed isolation of the retired judge. It is the cook who gives her the warmth that he is unable to demonstrate actively towards his son, Biju, who is an illegal immigrant in New York and does all kinds of odd jobs in restaurant kitchens over there.

Alienation is a recurrent motif in the novel and Sai's parents' death in an alien country under a busload of foreign people refurbishes it. Her surroundings completely change when she is transported from the regimented, sheltered convent boarding school to the Himalayan city of Kalimpong in northeastern India. The retired judge remains aloof from Sai's upbringing apart from providing her a tutor. He seems "more lizard than human" (36) to her. The imagery of lizard used by the novelist suggests the despicable and cold-blooded nature of the judge. He had no friends and his lack of warmth towards family relations justifies the comparison. Herself caught between diverse cultures, Sai remains a contradiction in herself. She learns the national anthem, a Latin motto and is taught that "English is better than Hindi" (33). The retired judge finds out that "the journey he had started so long ago had continued in his descendants" (230), and that there is something familiar in her, and that she has the same accents and manners as himself. Like the judge, she is a westernised Indian brought up by English nuns, "an estranged Indian living in India" (230). Both are 'estranged' in

their own homelands. Both have inherited the symptoms of transnationalism and colonial confrontations between third and first world cultures. The judge's dislike when he had to hear cases in Hindi when he was in the Indian Civil Service and Sai's familiarity with English compared to Hindi suggest that both experience this unfamiliarity with Indianness.

Absence of love or affection in the judge's household and craving for attachment take Sai nearer to Gyan and make her cling on to him for support. Ever since Sai had come to Kalimpong, she had a crowd of elderly people like the judge, the cook, Lola, Noni, Uncle Potty and Father Booty surrounding her. Gyan is a pleasant change for Sai being nearer to her age. After Gyan's arrival in her life, she feels herself to be a new individual. All the adolescent emotions, feelings and imaginations suddenly strike her. She looks at the mirror and has a vague yearning to attract Gyan towards her: "Over the days, she found herself continually obsessed with her own face" (74). She realises she is in love and is suddenly interested to know about the love affairs of others. She asks the cook about the judge and his wife. Gyan, a young man of twenty, is also attracted towards Sai. Gyan said: "You are my momo." Sai said: "No, you're mine." "Kismish," he called her to cover it up and "kaju,"<sup>8</sup> she called him (Desai 2006, 140). Their romance flourishes against the backdrop of the insurgent movement but they are so much engrossed in their love that they hardly care for it in the initial days.

The novel provides an insight into the Gorkhaland movement that owes its origins to the demand of the Gorkhas living in the district of Darjeeling in the

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<sup>8</sup> 'Kismish' and 'kaju' are Hindi words for raisins and almonds respectively.



state of West Bengal, India. The Gorkhas want to separate from West Bengal and assert themselves in a state they could claim as their own. The movement gains momentum in the late 80s. Initially, they want a separate administrative identity but the movement soon turns violent. The insurgents are suppressed by the government machinery. This disturbance causes terrible damage to the local economy, comprising the industries generated by tea, timber and tourism. Later, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council is formed which has control over the economic development programmes, education and culture of the region. Desai uses this statehood demand of the Gorkhas as a backdrop to her novel and demonstrates how insurgency can influence the dynamics of family relationships.

As Gyan joins the GNLFF insurgents, he starts to loathe Sai's western education. Their romance blooms under the shadow of the Nepalese insurgence and the demand for Gorkhaland. The insurgent Gorkhaland movement influences Gyan and he becomes an active member of the outfit. Kalimpong soon turns into a ghost town. Roads are closed and government structures burnt down by the insurgents. This political disturbance soon engulfs Kalimpong, thereby, directly and indirectly affecting the characters. Both Gyan and Sai witness a growing Nepalese insurgency that slowly begins to unravel before them the ethno-cultural conflict that they could not fully understand. Gyan initially doubts the conviction of these men and the legitimacy of their demands:

Were these men entirely committed to the importance of the procession or was there a disconnected quality to what they did? Were they taking their cues from old protest stories or from the hope of telling a new story? Did their hearts rise and fall to something true? Once they shouted, marched, was the feeling authentic? (Desai 2006, 173)

Gyan doubts the motive of the marching protestors because India had been hit by political insurgency such as the Bodoland and the Khalistan movements<sup>9</sup> a number of times in the past and the Gorkhaland movement might just be another such futile attempt before it gets quelled by the government machinery. Commenting on the Gorkhaland movement towards the end of the novel, Desai states that “this was how history moved, the slow build, the quick burn, and in an incoherence, the leaping both backward and forward .... The space between life and death, in the end, too small to measure” (312). Desai demonstrates the aftermath of turmoil caused by an attempted independence movement, sketching the trajectory of how history moved, how people relocated, and how relationships changed. When the insurgent movement begins in full swing, Gyan shifts his loyalties from Sai to the revolution. This sudden change in Gyan’s attitude towards Sai deeply hurts her and she can never really recover from this shock even at the end of the novel. Desai creates some other relationships such as the friendship between Father Booty and Uncle Potty which is affected by the insurgency. When the former has to leave India, Uncle Potty assures him that he would look after his property. Their physical separation is a direct effect of the insurgency that was burning the Himalayn town of Kalimpong.

*The Inheritance of Loss* deals with the many faces of oppression and injustices meted out through violence. Desai demonstrates how economic inequality gives rise to a political movement and how in turn it affects the life of every character in the novel. The novel begins with the robbery in Cho-Oyu, the judge’s house. The insurgents who are young boys target the judge’s crumbling

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<sup>9</sup> Both Bodoland and Khalistan insurgent movements affected the Indian states of Assam and Punjab towards the middle of 1980s.

mansion because they think that the judge is a wealthy man and more importantly, he has got guns that the insurgents can use in their demand for a separate statehood of Gorkhaland:

Nobody noticed the boys creeping across the grass, not even Mutt, until they were practically up the steps. Not that it mattered, for there were no latches to keep them out and nobody within calling distance except Uncle Potty on the other side of the 'jhora'<sup>10</sup> ravine ... They had come for the judge's hunting rifles ... they were looking for anything they could find – kukri<sup>11</sup> sickles, axes, kitchen knives, spades, any kind of firearm. (Desai 2006, 4)

But they do not know that the judge is nothing but a shadow of the past. His crumbling mansion Cho-Oyu is a metaphor of colonial decay that “soaks up water, crumbling like a mealy loaf” (Desai 2006, 106) in the rainy season. The judge himself is a living reminder of the imperial glory that had once adorned the Indian subcontinent but he is now devoid of the riches, wealth and power that he had once enjoyed.

Desai paints the insurgents in a very distinct kind of bravado: “They had come through the forest on foot, in leather jackets from the Kathmandu black market, khaki pants, bandanas – universal guerrilla fashion. One of the boys carried a gun,” although “the oldest of them looked under twenty, and at one yelp from Mutt, they screamed like a bunch of schoolgirls” (4), suggesting that these insurgents are not hardened criminals. The Gorkhaland movement soon becomes a part in everyone's life. The Nepalis of Kalimpong actively take part in the movement, thereby creating a distinct divide between the Nepalis and non-Nepalis. Lola and Noni's concern that “the Neps have been encouraged by ULFA,

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<sup>10</sup> 'Jhora' is a Nepali word that means a mountain stream.

<sup>11</sup> 'Kukri' in Nepali means dagger.

NEFA and PLA” shows the distrust that the people from the plains have for the Gorkhas.

Both Sai’s and Gyan’s families had travelled overseas and died there amidst unknown surroundings. The Gorkhaland movement leaves a deep impact on Gyan’s psyche and he is gradually influenced by the growing insurgency in the Darjeeling hills. He begins to question the unequal power politics between the Gorkhas and ‘outsiders’ like the judge, Lola, Noni and others. The insurgents had been proclaiming that Gorkhas have long been neglected by the government and it is now time for them to regain their lost wealth in the Darjeeling Himalayas that the non-Gorkhas have enjoyed so far. Gyan, a Gorkha who had so long associated himself with Sai and her social circle, now feels alienated as Sai is not a Gorkha. He feels a sense of shame which arises out of his own poverty and a sense of betrayal by Sai and her class of people who now form the upper class in Kalimpong. Gyan refuses to recognise Sai when he meets her outside Glenary’s while he is walking in a procession. The rift in their relationship is evident as Gyan gradually distances himself from Sai and her social circle.

The ethnic nationalist movement becomes an opportunity for everyone to vent their own personal anger and frustrations. The insurgents who had so long been in awe of the Cambridge-educated judge now have the opportunity to rob and humiliate him. This is evident from the robbery and the judge’s subsequent humiliation when the insurgents ask him to make tea for them. The judge who had never before ventured inside the kitchen takes it as an insult as he thinks cooking is below his dignity and it is meant to be done only by the servant class. Everyone has a free run during the period of insurgency. Mutt, the judge’s dog, is

kidnapped and Lola and Noni's property is encroached upon by the insurgents. This insult leaves a deep impression on Lola and she yearns for her husband and laments his death.

The loving relationship of Joydeep and Lola is a stark contrast to the relationship that the judge and his wife shared. Joydeep had a romantic notion of settling in the countryside and so he sells his property in Calcutta and settles in Kalimpong. He leads a happy life with his wife Lola but suddenly Joydeep dies, leaving Lola in utmost misery. After the death of Joydeep, Lola begins to live with her sister Noni. When the GNLf chief insults Lola when she goes to complain about the encroachers who had set up tents on her property, she feels the loss of her husband ardently and consoles herself by recollecting the happy days she had spent with him:

Then, in a moment, quite suddenly, she went weak. *"Your eyes are lovely, dark and deep."* He used to kiss those glistening orbs when he departed to work on his files. *"But I have promises to keep,"* First one eye then the other — *"And miles to go before I sleep —"* *"And miles to go before you sleep?"* She would make a duet — *"And miles to go before I sleep."* (Desai 2006, 246)

The memory of the past that she had spent with Joydeep makes her feel sad and she misses her late husband deeply who used to love her very much. She consoles herself by recollecting the happy days she had spent with him. This reminiscence makes Lola think that had Joydeep been alive, she wouldn't have had to face such humiliation. She realises how "false" their "ideas of retirement" were, and instead of "sweet peas and mist, cat and books" (245), Lola now has to face the humiliation of the insurgents.

Memory as a narrative tool is widely used by Desai to convey the feeling of alienation that characters face during their stay abroad. Desai uses the flashback technique for the narrative and often memory becomes the source of narration. Biju, in the US, frequently resorts to reflections from the past. He dreams of his father, grandmother and the village life that he has left behind in India. For him, recollection helps in easing the pain and hardships that he has to face on a daily basis:

Lying on his basement shelf that night, he thought of his village where he had lived with his grandmother on the money his father sent each month. The village was buried in silver grasses that were taller than a man and made a sound shuu, shuuu, as the wind turned them this way and that .... On Diwali the holy man lit lamps and put them in the branches of the peepul tree .... When he had visited his father in Kalimpong, they had sat outside in the evenings and his father had reminisced: How peaceful our village is. How good the roti tastes here! (Desai 2006, 102-103)

This remembrance eases his pain and Biju escapes from the hard reality and lonely existence that he has to live in the US. Scorned, humiliated and isolated, Biju leads a life of vulnerability being trapped in a miserable chain of underprivileged jobs. Through memories, Biju tries to re-create his homeland:

The atmosphere of Kalimpong reached Biju all the way in New York; it swelled densely on the line and he could feel the pulse of the forest, smell the humid air, the green black lushness; he could imagine all its different textures, the plumage of banana, the stark spear of the cactus, the delicate gestures of ferns; he could hear the croak *trrrr whonk, wee wee* ... the rising note welding imperceptibly with the evening. (Desai 2006, 252)

The cook too resorts to reminiscences when he falsely glorifies the judge's past life in order to enhance his own glory. Other characters like Lola and Noni find pleasure in remembering their past lives in Calcutta:

And do you recall, said Noni back to Lola, those Russians who lived next door to us in Calcutta? They'd go running out every morning and come back with mountains of food, remember? There they'd be slicing, boiling, frying mountains of potatoes and onions. And then, by evening, they'd go running to the bazaar again, hair flying, coming back crazy with excitement and even more onions and potatoes for dinner. To them India was a land of plenty. They'd never seen anything like our markets. (Desai 2006, 42)

For the characters, recollection becomes an escape from reality. They seek to create an imaginary world, a homeland of fantasy that will bring back their lost days of glory.

Relationships turn sour among the residents of the hill town because of the insurgency and all of a sudden, everything begins to appear unfamiliar. The dreams that Lola had dreamt with her husband now seem to be swiftly disappearing in the turmoil caused by the insurgency. Even Father Booty is not spared. He is arrested for photographing a butterfly but eventually, he is found to be residing illegally in India and asked to leave Kalimpong immediately. Father Booty's arrest shows the atmosphere of suspicion that gradually creeps up in the town because of the insurgency. The situation in the hill town is so tense that the government becomes hyper sensitive about the security of its installations and the Jesuit priest's getting caught with a camera in front of a bridge is enough for the police to suspect his motives. Thus, his home of forty-five years is taken away from him. Kalimpong becomes a space of unfamiliarity for him overnight and he is asked to leave India. Father Booty has to leave behind all his friends and family who had been a part of his life in all these years. He is 'unhomed' — physically, psychologically, and spatially.

The novel is set against a time of turbulence and change. The narrative shuttles between the past and the present — the past represented by the judge who is positioned against the backdrop of pre-independence India and the presently restive Kalimpong that is witnessing the Gorkhas' demand for a separate statehood. Desai's use of this narrative strategy suggests that she wants to link the judge's past experience with the present. The past represented through the judge's memories of his painful student years in a racist colonial England is equally turbulent as the presently volatile Kalimpong.

Margaret Scanlan believes that Desai wants to emphasise that "hatred and anger are the easiest emotions and violence is too automatic to resolve any complex problem" (Scanlan 2010, 271). Scanlan's observation is correct because out of the fifty-three chapters of the novel, more than eighteen chapters exclusively describe the Gorkhaland insurgency. There are occasional references in the narrative to the partition massacres and the Bengal famine as well. It can thus be easily understood how much importance Desai wants to give to the Gorkhaland insurgency and other socio-economic disturbances that have plagued India.

The socio-economic backwardness of the region, unemployment, poverty and xenophobia had given rise to the Gorkhaland movement in the 1980s that severely affected tourism, industry and normal life in Darjeeling district of India. This regional conflict about borders where

India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim, and the army did pull-ups and push-ups, maintaining their tanks with khaki paint (Desai 2006, 9)



impacts lives of the characters caught between the 'shadow lines' of political borders.

A great amount of warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan; Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there — despite, ah, despite the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders. (9)

The novel doesn't take any political side but Desai represents the poverty of Gyan's family sympathetically. She uses the movement only as a catalyst that furthers the narrative. She uses it as one of the factors that impact relationships in the novel. Apart from the geocultural complexities, the novel registers the ethnographical details of the local life, food, weather, landscape, and dialects. Dealing with the conflicting historical, cultural legacies of Kalimpong, the novel further records the ever-shifting cultural milieu in New York City. With such parallel narratives, *The Inheritance of Loss* reflects the two-world entanglement and mirrors the author's own personal transcultural negotiation of Indian and American mainstream cultures. In the novel, Desai addresses the process by which the changing world milieu has re-shaped the small town of Kalimpong and the metropolis of New York.

The novel is a narrative of fragmented characters where individual relationships undergo changes when the characters' quest for identity and power comes into play. When Gyan attempts to assert his power himself by participating in the insurgent movement, his relationship with Sai is affected. Similarly, the judge's attempts to emulate the British, who had been the ruling class during his time, in their ways and customs leads his marriage to a disaster. While Jemubhai's quest for identity is negotiated through adoption of normative

parameters of the class of the powerful, Gyan negotiates through an apparent expression of 'resistance' and directionless vengeance by taking part in the Gorkhaland movement. So when individual characters like the judge and Gyan realise that they are gradually being relegated to a state of helplessness by factors both external and internal like living in an alien culture, insurgency or class exploitation, they attempt to forge relationships anew with new surroundings and circumstances, leaving their old relationships and allegiances behind. The judge, becomes a complete stranger to his own people and more distant from his own culture, thereby triggering a re-fashioning of his personal space and family. He becomes more familiar with Western customs that he had learnt during his stay in England. The friendship between the judge and his only friend Bose is a feigned one. When Bose comes to Darjeeling to meet the judge, the meeting is not a pleasant one and the judge swears not to meet him again in the future suggesting the fluid nature of relationships. Similarly, Gyan becomes more comfortable with his newfound ideology propagated by the Gorkhaland insurgents. Other characters like Lola and Noni too behave differently when they perceive a threat to their individual existence. They begin to distrust the local Nepalis because of the insurgency, who had so long been familiar faces for the sisters. Lola and Noni re-build their own space and re-shape their identity in order to fit into a different social framework — in this case, they try to associate with the other non-Nepali characters. New alliances and relationships come out of the Gorkhaland insurgency.

Thus 'home' is always dynamic and subject to a continuous re-structuring process. As mentioned in this chapter earlier, Father Booty's forty-five year old

adopted home of Kalimpong is taken away while Biju is reabsorbed into the social fabric of the town after his return from the US. Aparajita De defines home as an “antithesis to travel” (De 2007, 196). She adds that home signifies a difference from journey and displacement, but in *The Inheritance of Loss* the contours of home are redefined irrespective of physical journeys. Desai brings forth the fluidity of home and identity in the novel. The two characters of Biju and Father Booty are unhomed and then homed again during the course of the narrative, leaving them familiarised and defamiliarised at the same time. In the words of Said, they are “filiated and affiliated” (De 2007, 190) and at the end, they are left without affiliation to any particular culture. When Biju returns from the US, he becomes an unfamiliar figure — without the glories associated with a newly arrived person from America. Biju is stripped of his clothes, belongings and without his pride. The insurgents take away all his personal belongings from him and Biju is left without his hard-earned savings or the gifts that he had brought from America. When he reaches India from the land of liberty he cannot be identified as a wealthy America-returned person and all that remains of him now is only a bare piece of cloth that Biju uses to cover his body:

Darkness fell and he sat right in the middle of the path — without his baggage, without his savings, worst of all, without his pride. Back from America with far less that he’d ever had. (Desai 2006, 317)

Biju is forced to dress in rags that “must have been carefully picked from a pile at the bazaar” (318). His shabby dress makes him hardly recognisable at all to the inhabitants of Cho-Oyu; he and the residents of the house have changed so much for each other. When Sai first sees Biju in the evening twilight, she fails to recognise him and thinks him to be a “bent-over woman dragging one leg

onerously. She must be on her way elsewhere” (324). Similarly, Father Booty’s expulsion from Kalimpong is a case in point where his home of over four decades has to be abandoned within a couple of hours. Although he now returns to his original home in Europe, his country has now become unfamiliar to him. He is more familiar with the Himalayas of Kalimpong and the people there had become extended family to him. In the time of political uncertainty and insurgency, belonging, unbelonging and home become fluid and undergo a series of reconstructions. Aparajita De underlines how Father Booty’s expulsion from Kalimpong implicitly lays bare the logic of how localities are constructed, a phenomenon she terms as “polygenesis” (De 2007, 183). De defines polygenesis as a “continual self-refashioning that characterises diasporic identity” (183). De’s definition of ‘polygenesis’ explains how the process of refashioning of home and family affects almost all the characters in the novel. Characters like Father Booty and Biju are continuously subjected to an “evolution of the self under diverse contexts” (183), where they discover that their specificities of nationhood, culture and identity are constantly challenged. Fortune seekers like Biju who move to another country on forged papers and characters like Father Booty who is from a developed country are ironically bound in a similar predicament, thereby making power positions relative. Both these characters’ migration — Biju moves to a developed nation from a developing one while Father Booty considers India as his home – suggest that not every character regards economic prosperity as the reason to migrate. This “fluid sense of home” (De 2008, 380) corrodes ‘rootedness’ and explodes the familiarity associated with ‘home’. This ‘othering’ of the ‘home country’ and of the immigrant is a dynamic process which is beyond the binaries of neat belongings and identifications. Belonging to and

identifying with a culture may not be always linear and simple. A character may find his or her 'home' in a diverse culture; a case in point is Father Booty.

McLeod suggests that "differences of gender, race, class, religion and language (as well as generational differences) make diaspora spaces dynamic and shifting, open to repeated construction and reconstruction" (McLeod 2007, 207), and thus, identity is always in a state of flux. However, through the portrayal of Father Booty, Desai demonstrates that a character may consider a different culture familiar to him. The multiple, intersecting and interrupting axes of differentiation and cohesion indicate the mutating subjectivity entailed in social relations and family. The novel blurs the distinction between the 'inside' and the 'outside'.

The incorporation of the two worlds in the narrative demonstrates an awareness of the re-bordering of cultural reality, which is necessary for a global and transnational imaginary that can no longer be fully encompassed within the old trope of national identity. Desai's novel upholds Rushdie's assertion that "our identity is at once plural and partial" (Liu 2009, 98). The characters are pitted against the "pull and push of transnational hybridising cultural force" (98). The novel emphasises the effects of multiple and contradictory cultural inheritances on characters who themselves are the products of a transforming world. *The Inheritance of Loss* seems to appreciate the assimilationist notion of multicultural diversity brought in by individuals who maintain transnational affiliations. The two-world approach adopted by the novelist highlights how the dynamics between these apparently separate locales are intertwined and interconnected and a determinant in family relationships. The emotional

territory of the novel, with ties to more than one country, creates a transforming landscape of global interaction.

The complication of 'homing' is all the more marked because Father Booty's coming to India and Biju's going to the US are for entirely different reasons. Biju's migration is because of economic compulsions, whereas Father Booty is a Jesuit priest engaged in social work in Kalimpong. Unlike Biju, Father Booty blends very well with the local people of Kalimpong and considers the place as his own. Although their individual contexts are vastly different, their cause of return is similar. Both the characters are forced out of their adopted country. Like the judge, Biju is dislocated in a hostile foreign country. His father works very hard and saves money for Biju. It is for Biju that he ignores his health. The cook always gives advice through letters to his son Biju and is concerned about his well-being:

Make sure you are saving money. Don't lend to anyone and be careful who you talk to. There are many people out there who will say one thing and do another. Liars and cheats. Remember also to take rest. Make sure you eat enough. Health is wealth. (Desai 2006, 18)

Similarly, when Biju comes to know about the political turmoil in Kalimpong, he is worried about his father. He arranges money as soon as possible and prepares himself to leave for India. He makes a phone call to his father to enquire about his wellbeing. He never lets his father know about his real condition because he knows his father would be disturbed by the news. Although Biju is discouraged by his friend who says:

America is in the process of buying up the world. Go back, you'll find they own the business .... If you stay here, your son will earn a hundred

thousand dollars for the same company he could be working for in India but making one thousand dollars. (Desai 2006, 295)

Biju does not pay heed to his advice and rushes to India. His worry for his father is evident from his decision to return. However, his return to India is accentuated by a series of mishaps. The closer he gets to home, the more unfamiliar he becomes to his own people and surroundings. He is bereft of all the material possessions that would have identified him as the America-returned son of Panna Lal, the cook. The cook had expected that his son would return from the US as a wealthy person. As discussed in Chapter 1, the cook had presented his son Biju as someone who's making it big in the US and earning lots of money there. But when Biju returns dressed in rags and without costly gifts or belongings, he is hardly recognisable. The theft of his earnings by the insurgents serves to sever his last tie to New York, effectively making it as though he had never visited the US. For the cook, Biju is unfamiliar because the latter doesn't quite fit into the expected notion of someone who's just returned from the US. Subjectivities become configured as an effect of history and the town of Kalimpong becomes the site of return for all characters except Father Booty. It is the place that unites the characters where Sai, the judge, Biju, Lola and Noni find accommodation amidst the different strata of Kalimpong society. Unlike in *The Namesake*, Desai's novel has a closed ending where the principal migrant character Biju returns permanently to India without carrying any streak of American culture or material possessions from the US. The novel ends with the affirmation of love and union of father and son where neither of them has any expectation towards the other. Desai emphasises unadulterated love that is devoid of any material expectations or possessions.

Just as the Gorkhaland insurgency forms the backdrop to *The Inheritance of Loss* and determines the dynamics of relations in the novel, the topic of naming seems to be pivotal in the plot of *The Namesake*. Naming a child is considered to be auspicious in Hindu custom and Lahiri uses this age-old custom in *The Namesake* to bring out the generational difference between characters who owe allegiance to different histories and cultures. She problematises naming and highlights how inseparably intertwined one's name is with identity. Ashoke names his son Gogol after the Russian author because he believes that he was saved from that train accident only because he was reading Gogol's *The Overcoat* and hence, awake on that fateful night. The name 'Gogol' strikes a special chord with him and when the American hospital would not discharge his son without a proper name, Ashoke decides to christen his son Gogol in memory of his favourite author. Moreover, the letter from Ashima's grandmother does not arrive from India that supposedly had contained the name selected for Ashoke and Ashima's child. The non-arrival of the letter is the first instance of a cut in the communication between two generations of a family, thereby hinting at the importance of the generation gap that is a recurrent theme in the novel. The letter failing to arrive forces Ashoke and Ashima to hurriedly choose a name for their baby boy. When Mr. Wilcox, compiler of hospital birth certificates, suggests that Ashima and Ashoke can name the boy after his grandfather, the parents are at a loss:

But this isn't possible, Ashima and Ashoke think to themselves. This tradition doesn't exist for Bengalis, naming a son after father or grandfather, a daughter after mother or grandmother. This sign of respect in America and Europe, this symbol of heritage and lineage, would be ridiculed in India. Within Bengali families, individual names



are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared.  
(Lahiri 2003, 28)

Through the description of the predicament of Ashoke and Ashima, Lahiri demonstrates the cultural divide that exists between America and India in the matter of naming a child. According to Hindu custom, a name should carry some meaning or it should resemble some quality of the child. Usually naming a child is regarded an honour and so, it is generally done by the elders in a Hindu family. Unlike Christian tradition, Hindu children are not named after their grandparents or parents. There is also the confusion over pet name and good name. Pet name indicates that name by which one is called. This is essentially a Bengali Hindu tradition and is followed in almost all households of Bengal. The good name is meant for identification and is to be recorded on all official documents.

Gogol doesn't at all like his name and the novel traces his desperate attempts to cope with a name that draws him to everybody's unwanted attention in the United States. To Gogol's parents, the Bengali practice is above all a sign of cultural belonging, a ritual that is inherently associated with infancy as well as adulthood. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, naming a child is considered to be extremely significant in a Bengali Hindu family and when someone from the family names a child, it is taken as a blessing. It is thus expected that throughout his life, Gogol should respect the name given to him by his father. But Gogol, haunted throughout his life because of the exotic name given to him by Ashoke, is constantly reminded of his belonging nowhere and that he is culturally very different from the rest of his friends. Born under the auspices of a Bengali tradition overridden by American law, Gogol bears a name which is neither

Indian nor American but Russian. The name approximates the requirements of both cultures while connecting him to none. The feeling of alienation affects him and results in a state of 'inbetweenness' for Gogol and he finds himself in a fragmented state of unhomeliness — generated by “the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation” (Gandhi 1998, 132), caught between his conservative Indian roots and the totally opposite liberal American mainstream culture. Gogol attempts to move away from his parents' world and tries to absorb himself into the mainstream American culture. His numerous affairs with women like Maxine and Ruth indicate his trying to move away from the world of his parents that is characterised by a left-behind cultural heritage in India. Gogol's decision to flee his own family by settling in New York culminates in his frequent visits to Maxine's family, to the point of wholesale immersion. He not only affiliates himself with her family, their surroundings, but also their way of living. The family of the Ratliffs is characterised by ownership, guiltless consumerism with cultural awareness and hospitality. Their dining table is spread with food ranging from polenta to French chocolate and Italian wine. They “are opinionated about things [Gogol's] parents are indifferent to: movies, exhibits at museums, good restaurants, the design of everyday things” (Lahiri 2003, 133), while being sufficiently tuned in to Asian cultures to be able to speak at length about Hindu fundamentalism, Indian carpets and miniatures as well as Buddhist stupas. The Ratliffs are both satisfied and intrigued by their exotic guest Gogol's Mediterranean looks. By sharing the life of the Ratliffs, a European-American upper-middle-class family, Gogol gets acquainted with a world that represents the polar opposite of his own.

Indian parents usually do not approve sexual relationships before marriage. However, Gogol's getting involved with American women suggests that the former wants to enter the liberal society of the Americans. He becomes a true ABCD that is an American Born Confused *Desi* or Indian. His peculiar name places an unbearable weight on him and he finds it extremely difficult to assert himself as an American although he is born in that country. Gogol wishes to change his name in the Court and he tells the people in the courtroom what "he has never dared admit to his parents. 'I hate the name Gogol,' he says. 'I've always hated it'" (Lahiri 2003, 102). This compounds the problem for him and he is constantly in conflict with his family members as well as his peers. Gogol's wish to call himself 'Nikhil' or Nick in short reflects the growing gap between him and his father who had a special liking for Nikolai Gogol and his works. For Gogol, the name is a burden that he believes should be shed at all cost. He doesn't care about the feelings or sentiments of his father.

Commenting on the topic of naming, Farha Shariff presents data collected from an interview, where second-generation South Asian Canadians speak about their 'ethnic' name. The participants, mostly from post 1965 Pakistani and Ugandan families who are well educated, upper middle class professionals like the Ganguli family, narrate their experiences that are at times, not quite pleasant. One male participant said,

Officially, I have 5 names. If you were to ask me why I have so many names, why I have two last names, or which names are on my birth certificate, I would be hard pressed to answer honestly. My first name has been the most awkward for me. The name \_\_\_\_ is not the easiest word for English-speaking Canadians to pronounce phonetically and causes me to become somewhat anxious when introducing myself to

new friends or colleagues. It can get somewhat irritating spelling your name out every time you meet someone new. (Shariff 2008, 460)

Shariff further quotes this participant who mentions the 'uniqueness' of his name. But as Lahiri mentions in *The Namesake*, names are of great importance in South Asian culture and "individual names are sacred, inviolable" (Lahiri 2003, 28). The participants in the interview explain their awkwardness and anxiety with how their names are received by their dominant white peer groups, similar to what Gogol faces in *The Namesake*. One participant explains his embarrassment with his name when he went through the interview process for medical school, and in the process, the name became "a barrier" (Shariff 2008, 461). These excerpts from the interview do indicate how names have an intimate connection with identity in relation to the Western gaze of the dominant white peer and social groups.

Coming back to *The Namesake*, as "Nikhil", Gogol opens up a checking account; he says "Me llamo Nikhil" (105) in his Spanish class; as "Nikhil", he first tastes liquor and loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles. However, his decision to officially record his new name furthers his distance from his family and family affections. For Gogol, his odd name means not only alienation but also something that he has to constantly explain to the outside world. However, after the death of Ashoke, Gogol realises the importance of his name to his father. He understands how important the name had been for Ashoke because the latter had always regarded the Russian author Nikolai Gogol to be his saviour when Ashoke nearly died in the train accident in 1961 when he was on his way to meet his grandparents. Gogol begins to see his name and relationship with his father in a new light. Finally a bridge is built between Ashoke and his son, and the latter

is able to realise that he is “embellished by both cultures. He does not have to be one or the other; in fact he is made up of both. With this new understanding, Gogol is no longer ashamed of himself or the way he has lived” (Kung 2009, 133). Gogol understands the transnational, trans-generational significance of his name. He now knows that his name carries his father’s being — shaped by his father’s love for literature and respect for Nikolai Gogol. Gogol begins to understand his father’s emotional reason behind choosing that particular name. For him now, the name carries his father’s legacy as well as the legacy of a Bengali Hindu household where naming a child is considered to be auspicious. The name “Gogol” now crosses geographical boundaries and assumes an encompassing significance for the younger Ganguli. Gogol realises that he is a transnational, embraced by two cultures that have shaped his identity.

Like *The Inheritance of Loss*, memory and nostalgia play an important role for the first and second -generation migrants in *The Namesake* as well. The narrative is an active engagement between two cultures — Indian and American that, in turn, reflects how the western American culture produces disenchantment in the minds of the expatriate Indians, and how they find themselves crushed under the burden of alienation and rootlessness. Life is viewed as a nostalgic recollection through the eyes of characters like Ashima and Ashoke. They live in memory to a great extent although it is not that they cannot acculturate. As the memory of the homeland they had left in the past shapes them constantly, they have an obvious lack of motivation for acculturation. Since the degree of acculturation is higher among the second-generation immigrants than that of the first generation, sometimes the discovery of the history, geography, custom, rites and rituals of

their parental homeland causes a kind of bewilderment, amazement and wonder among the later generations. The second-generation immigrants referred to as the 1.5 generation by Shahnawaz Begum (Das 2008, 107) suffer from existential crisis. They cannot appreciate the cultural nuances of the earlier generations and gradually distance themselves from them as they assimilate into the mainstream culture. However, they cannot fully segregate themselves from their ancestral culture as well, and inherit from their parents what Lahiri calls 'a sense of loss' (Das 2008, 107).

The familial memories that Lahiri invokes are symptomatic of the complex human situation that the characters are stuck in. In the novel, Ashima is stuck in her attempts of reassessing the past — prior to her arrival in the US. Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* had said, "Shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities" (Rushdie 1992, 12). Although the quoted sentence dates back to more than a decade before the publication of *The Namesake*, it holds perfectly true for a new immigrant like Ashima who seeks solace from memory and nostalgia. Her trying to frame a space of familiarity through remembrances assumes greater significance because her own children cannot identify with such reminiscences. Since the two generations of the Ganguli family have two different sets of histories, memory and nostalgia mean differently for each generation. With every detail of the experiences of both first and second generation of Indian immigrants, the novel deals with emotional struggles and

broken communication between Ashoke and Ashima on the one hand and Gogol on the other.

Ashoke's immigration to America is purely for economic gain and it is imperative that he and Ashima negotiate their way through a new culture and a new world. Indira Nityanandam suggests the word "transculturation" (Nityanandam 2005, 81) to denote the Ganguli family's experience of "dwelling in more than one culture" (81). Nityanandam believes that 'transculturation' is more "empowering than the term hybridity" (81) and the novel is indeed replete with experiences gained from different cultures. This transcultural effect is present both in Ashima and Gogol who, at the end of the narrative, end up being part of both cultures and nations, those of India and America.

Avtar Brah defines 'home' as "a mythic place of desire" (Brah 1996, 192) in an immigrant's imagination. Ashima desires her past with nostalgia and considers the present American experience as an alienating one. Initially for Ashima, migration to the US had meant "alienation and the pains of exile" (Lahiri 2010, 130). She is always nostalgic for her home and spends her leisure, reading Bengali poems, stories and articles. She "longs for Calcutta through her tears, her reminiscences, and by desperately clutching on to the few souvenirs she has of her previous life" (Lahiri 2010, 130). She attempts to reconstruct her collective past and re-establish a communion with her life back in Calcutta:

Ashima looks up from a tattered copy of 'Desh' magazine that she'd brought to read on her plane ride to Boston and still cannot bring herself to throw away. The printed pages of Bengali type, slightly rough to the touch, are a perpetual comfort to her. She's read each of the short stories and poems and articles a dozen times. There is a pen-and-ink drawing on page eleven by her father, an illustrator for the magazine: a

view of the North Calcutta skyline sketched from the roof of their flat one foggy January morning. She had stood behind her father as he'd drawn it, watching as he crouched over his easel, a cigarette dangling from his lips, his shoulders wrapped in a black Kashmiri shawl. (Lahiri 2003, 6)

Ashima is terrified to think that she has to raise Gogol in an unfamiliar country. "It's not so much the pain, which she knows, she will survive. It's the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land" (Lahiri 2003, 6). As she thinks of her relatives back in India after Gogol's birth, she says to Ashoke, "I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It's not right. I want to go back" (33). The restlessness that Ashima faces in America is characteristic of the other Bengali characters depicted in the novel. This is evident from the gatherings mentioned in the novel that the Bengalis have every weekend. In these gatherings, they discuss Bengali arts, cinema, literature and politics:

They all come from Calcutta, and for this reason alone they are friends. Most of them live within walking distance of one another in Cambridge. The husbands are teachers, researchers, doctors, engineers. The wives, homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice .... The families drop by one another's homes on Sunday afternoons. They drink tea with sugar and evaporated milk .... They sit in circles on the floor, singing songs by Nazrul and Tagore, passing a thick yellow clothbound book of lyrics among them as Dilip Nandy plays the harmonium. They argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit Ray. The CPIM versus the Congress party. North Calcutta versus South. For hours they argue about the politics of America, a country in which none of them is eligible to vote. (Lahiri 2003, 38)

They try to fill the emotional vacuum that they face in the alien country by reminiscing about their past life in India. In the words of Amitav Ghosh, "We are sometimes told that the 'real' bond between India and its diaspora lies in the 'immemorial realities' of caste and kinship" (Ghosh 1989, 75). True to Ghosh's words, the first-generation immigrant characters experience an attachment to



their Indian past, to their Indian culture, rituals and festivals like the Durga Puja.<sup>12</sup> They religiously follow Hindu ceremonies like the ‘annaprasana’<sup>13</sup> (also known as the rice ceremony), the first formal ceremony when the child is given solid food to eat. In this context, Cohen comments that the diasporic community has “an inescapable link with their past migration history” (Cohen 1997, ix), which Rushdie defines as “cultural baggage” or “transplantation” (Rushdie 1992, 20). Khachig Tololyan terms this as a “challenge” to “normative homogeneity ... not just by immigration but also by various forms of cultural practice and knowledge production” (Tololyan 1996, 4). He further states that

diasporan communities actively maintain a collective memory that is a foundational element of their distinct identity .... Diasporan communities care about maintaining communication with each other. Individuals living in various diasporised communities stay in touch with kinfolk and with family and with often quite formalized obligation and friendship networks in the homeland. (14)

In *The Namesake*, the first-generation immigrant characters continue to practise their Indian beliefs, traditions, customs and values. James Clifford defines diaspora as “travelling and hybridising in new global condition” (Clifford 1994, 304). The “diasporic forms of longing and memory are shared by a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations” (306). Clifford adds that “dispersed peoples, once separated from homelands by vast oceans and political barriers, increasingly find themselves in border relations with the old country thanks to a to-and-fro made possible by modern technology” (306). Ashoke and Ashima too try to maintain such a relation with India by observing Bengali

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<sup>12</sup> Durga Puja is the biggest festival of Bengalis. Spread over a period of five days, this autumn festival celebrates the victory of good over evil.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Annaprasana’ is the Hindu ceremony when a new-born child is first given rice to eat.

customs and rituals. However, their children Gogol and Sonia cannot identify with such practices. The cultural difference between the two generations of the immigrants becomes the “perspectival problem of temporal and spatial distance” (Bhabha 1994, 179). On the occasion of Gogol’s ‘annaprasana’,

Gogol is dressed as an infant Bengali groom, in a pale yellow pajama-punjabi from his grandmother in Calcutta. The fragrance of cumin seeds, sent in the package along with the pajamas, lingers in the weave. A headpiece that Ashima cut out of paper, decorated with pieces of aluminium foil, is tied around Gogol’s head with a string ... His tiny forehead has been decorated with considerable struggle with sandalwood paste to form six miniature beige moons floating above his brows. His eyes have been darkened with a touch of kohl ... Ashima regrets that the plate on which rice is heaped is melamine, not silver or brass or at the very least stainless-steel. The final bowl contains payesh, a warm rice pudding Ashima will prepare for him to eat on each of his birthdays as a child, as an adult even, alongside a slice of bakery cake. (Lahiri 2003, 39)

This elaborate ritual reflects Ashima and Ashoke’s attempts to preserve their culture in their otherwise unfamiliar cultural surroundings. Even Gogol, as a second-generation Bengali born in America, is taught to address the elders in Bengali as ‘mashi’, ‘mesho’<sup>14</sup>, etc. However, the second-generation immigrant characters in the novel do not have such strong ties to their Indian past. Gogol and his sister Sonia prefer to celebrate Christmas and Halloween and are ill at ease when they have to visit Calcutta. For them, the house on Pemberton Road is more familiar than the streets of Calcutta. Gogol himself does not belong to the first generation Bengali immigrants, yet at the same time, he resists fitting into the accepted and prevalent norms and practices of Western culture. He is not able to take cultural assumptions for granted and therefore finds it difficult to ‘blend’ into the dominant society of mainstream Americans. In this context,

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Mashi’ in Bengali means aunt while ‘mesho’ means uncle.

Shariff comments that many second-generation immigrants feel the need to explore their ethnic identities as young adults once they are slightly detached from family culture that is dominated by values of the homeland. Shariff further explains that because of a Eurocentric school education, the second-generation immigrants further feel alienated when they fall short of cultural expectations, issuing both from their parents as well as their white peer groups (Shariff 2008, 465). Lahiri explains her aim in portraying Gogol as a broken and fragmented character in *The Namesake*, "I just wanted to write something focusing on the experiences of the Bengali-American kid" (Das 2008, 126-27). Gogol experiences belonging 'nowhere' and the feeling of 'inbetweenness', as he straddles two cultures and suffers from the loss of roots and resulting social dislocation.

When Gogol and Sonia visit Calcutta for the first time "they stand out in their bright, expensive sneakers, American haircuts, backpacks slung over one shoulder" (Lahiri 2003, 82). They look completely different from the children of their same age in Calcutta. Lahiri clearly demonstrates the difference between "diverse and mutually antagonistic national histories" (Gandhi 1998, 126) of the two generations. This generational difference can also be observed in occasions like Gogol's fourteenth birthday. Friends of Gogol and Gogol's parents are invited, where the two generations have their own distinct social circles that can be identified by their cultural affiliations. Moushumi who is of Gogol's age and the daughter of immigrant parents, "sits cross-legged on the floor, in glasses" (Lahiri 2003, 73) reading *Pride and Prejudice* while the other children watch television during the party. Moushumi's aloofness from the crowd at the party reflects her inability to mix with the other people present there, not even with

the children of her age. Since Moushumi is from England and carries a prominent English accent in her speech, she stands out distinctly at the party. Her cultural uniqueness in that crowd that comprised Americans and Bengali immigrants like Gogol's parents prevents her from blending with others. When the Gangulis visit Calcutta on a vacation, Ashoke devotes his time to delivering lectures at Jadavpur University while Ashima spends her time shopping in New Market:

She wanders freely around a city in which Gogol, in spite of his many visits, has no sense of direction. Within three months Sonia has read each of her Laura Ingalls Wilder books a dozen times. Gogol occasionally opens up one of his textbooks, bloated from the heat. Though he's brought his sneakers with him, hoping to keep up with cross-country training, it is impossible, on these cracked, congested, chock-a-block streets, to run. The one day he tries, Uma Maima, watching from the rooftop, sends a servant to follow him so that Gogol doesn't get lost. (Lahiri 2003, 83)

Gogol however feels bored and he has practically nothing to do in the unknown city and unfamiliar surroundings. He and Sonia try to immerse themselves in their books and in the process have as little interaction as possible with their Bengali relatives who are based in Calcutta. For Gogol's parents, India and specifically Calcutta is 'desh' which means homeland in Bengali. But as Lahiri mentions in her narrative, "Gogol never thinks of India as 'desh'<sup>15</sup>. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India" (118). On the occasion of Gogol's marriage with Moushumi, Gogol and Moushumi's parents insist that the marriage be held according to Indian customs. Arranged marriages are still very common in India and Gogol's marriage with Moushumi indicates his inbetweenness between the two cultures. Gogol's agreeing to marry Moushumi, who also happens to be his mother's choice demonstrates Gogol's lack of any fixed attachment to a

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<sup>15</sup> 'Desh' in Bengali means homeland.

particular culture. More specifically, Gogol's uneasiness in wearing Ashoke's suit indicates that he feels both undeserving and overshadowed by the memory of his father. He also fantasises images of self-extinction in which he disconnects from the present ceremony and pictures himself passively as attending Moushumi's marriage to Graham, the man she nearly married two years before. Gogol's fixations on Ashoke and Graham reflects his inability to detach from the past. It also emphasises an inclination on his part to indulge in fictions, constructing himself as inferior and powerless. Contrary to how she presents Gogol, Lahiri presents the character of Moushumi in a dynamic way. Moushumi refuses to adopt Gogol's surname, "not even with a hyphen" (Lahiri 2003, 114), betrays her unwillingness to evolve a new set of identities through an affiliation with her husband.

Although Gogol or Moushumi does not want an Indian wedding, they remain silent because they both agree that it is better to give in to their parents' expectations. They would have wanted the wedding party to be held in the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, Metropolitan Club or the Boat House in Central Park — venues that Gogol and Moushumi's American friends had chosen for their weddings. But Gogol and Moushumi's parents decide on Double Tree hotel in New Jersey, which is close to the suburb where Moushumi's parents live. Gogol and Moushumi's acceptance of the venue chosen by their parents show that they have internalised familial and communal pressures to such an extent that they resign themselves to observing all the customs and artefacts of a typical Indian wedding in spite of their hybrid cultural heritage. In marrying Moushumi, Gogol is aware that he is fulfilling "a collective deep-seated desire because they're both

Bengali” (Lahiri 2003, 224). Their marriage suggests that Lahiri is not entirely ready to submit that her characters are fully entitled Americans. Much like conventional Indian weddings, which are quite an elaborate affair, close to three hundred people are invited for the occasion, and the marriage is solemnised according to an hour long Hindu ceremony. The shenai<sup>16</sup> plays in the background and offerings are made to pictures of both Gogol and Moushumi’s grandparents and Ashoke before the wedding. It must be noted that a pyre is essential for an authentic Hindu wedding but it couldn’t be lit because of the hotel’s regulations. According to Hindu tradition, the groom and his bride must walk around the pyre seven times with their dresses knotted together while proclaiming their seven promises of love to each other. The fire symbolises the ultimate witness that seals their union as husband and wife. In the novel, Gogol and Moushumi are forced to walk around an unlit pyre which therefore signifies the futility of their union.

The second-generation immigrants’ trauma links up with such a crisis of identity, and obstructs in the development of effective relationship between self and place. When Gogol and Sonia visit Calcutta as children they do not feel Calcutta to be their home for they have grown up in Boston. However, they soon develop an attachment for the place and the people after they come to the familiar Pemberton Road from their vacation: “After a single trip to the supermarket, the refrigerator and the cupboards fill with familiar labels: Skippy, Hood, Bumble Bee, Lake O’ Lakes” (87). Ashoke and Ashima, however, feel different: “Though they are home they are disconcerted by the space, by the

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<sup>16</sup> The shenai is an aerophonic musical instrument that is an inherent part of any Bengali Hindu wedding.

uncompromising silence that surrounds them. They still feel somehow in transit, still disconnected from their lives” (87). They cannot feel fully comfortable when they return to the US. Amitav Ghosh, although in a completely different context, had said, that the “new world had no room for the words that lived in (their) imagination” (Ghosh 1989, 76). This seems true for Ashoke and Ashima who find themselves somehow disjointed from the host nation. Mansing G. Kadam in his article “*The Namesake: A Mosaic of Marginality, Alienation, Nostalgia and Beyond*” quotes from *The Today* that “*The Namesake* is more than a book about a name; it is about finding an identity in a country that will treat you as an alien even if you were born there. But more than that, it’s about rediscovering your roots” (Kadam 2008, 124). In a similar tone, S. Rajgopalan considers *The Namesake* as a novel that is “resonant in its exploration of what is acquired and lost by immigrants and their children in pursuit of the American dream” (Kadam 2008, 125). The quest for the lost heritage and trying to find a familiar space in an unknown country by two generations in their own ways seem to be the pivot around which the characters revolve.

All the members of the Ganguli family undergo changes in their social relationships and family. While the first-generation immigrants like Ashoke and Ashima find themselves culturally isolated in the US, Gogol gradually realises his tangled and confused identity. This is reflected in his disconcertingly contrasted and contradictory experiences in his personal and private life. He has had, before he married, affairs with several American girls, notably Ruth and Maxine; he finds it curious, if not a deprivation, that love began for his parents with or rather after their wedding day. Gogol’s metamorphosis is triggered by the death of

Ashoke. Earlier he had been living an American life but after his father's death he understands the values of his family. He follows the Hindu rituals like tonsuring his head.<sup>17</sup> When Maxine tries to comfort Gogol after Ashoke's death, Gogol refuses Maxine's company and replies that he doesn't want to escape from his Indian cultural background. Gogol does not find the comfort in Maxine's company or from her family that he previously used to find. He realises that Maxine would not be able to understand his loss because she is from a different cultural background, and hence it would be difficult for her to appreciate the void that Gogol now faces after the death of his father.

Lahiri presents the character of Moushumi as very dynamic. True to her name which means 'season' in Bengali, Moushumi undergoes change in her attitude towards Gogol. She does not want to be tied to a context, nor does she want to adopt the identity of her country of origin. She comes into the life of Gogol, has an arranged marriage with him, and then leaves him completely shattered when she starts to have an affair with Dimitri, her first love. Her marriage with Gogol breaks when Dimitri appears in her life for the second time in a most unexpected turn of events:

She shuts the door, sits at her desk. The envelope is addressed to a professor of Comparative Literature who teaches German as well as French. She opens the envelope. Inside she finds a cover letter and a resume. For a minute she simply stares at the name centered at the top of the resume, laser-printed in an elegant font. She remembers the name of course. The name alone, when she'd first learned it, had been enough to seduce her. Dimitri Desjardins. (Lahiri 2003, 256)

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<sup>17</sup> Tonsuring one's head is a Hindu custom which a son must perform after the death of his father or mother. The tonsured hair is seen as an offering to the Gods for the departed soul's peace.



This sudden appearance of Dimitri in the life of Moushumi affects both Moushumi and Gogol. After divorce, Moushumi goes to live with Dimitri, her first acquaintance whom she had met in a bus and plans to leave for Paris. She decides to be a part of a third culture — that of the French and believes that Paris would provide her the stability and identity that she had longed for so long:

Immersing herself in a third language, a third culture, had been her refuge — she approached French, unlike things American or Indian, without guilt, or misgiving, or expectation of any kind. It was easier to turn her back on the two countries that could claim her in favour of one that had no claim whatsoever. (214)

Gogol again experiences the flux and lack of permanence in his relationships that has been a constant companion in his life. Moushumi's decision to migrate to France, a third adopted country, reflects her character who wants to reinvent herself in Paris, with which she has no personal connection. Her adopted third space provides her empowerment and the opportunity to explore new options. Gogol undergoes a similar experience, but to a lesser degree, by changing his name to Nikhil from Gogol. This change of name ensures that Gogol is starting a new journey of rediscovering his heritage and identity. Significantly, the name 'Nikhil' in Bengali means 'all encompassing' and Gogol's journey of rediscovery goes beyond the trajectory of a singular culture.

The characters of *The Namesake* undergo various forms of emotional and psychological turmoil which are vastly affected by past experiences. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Lahiri uses memory as an effective tool to carry forward the narrative. Ashima, Ashoke, Gogol and even Moushumi experience an acute sense of loss, pain and nostalgia for the past. The Ganguli family yearns for their lost roots in India, for their native people and culture,

whereas Moushumi yearns for the stirrings of her first love when she had met Dimitri years ago in the final month of her high school days. It is on a bus journey that Dimitri and Moushumi become physically intimate and long after this encounter Moushumi nurtures the memory of first love and suffers the pang of its unfulfillment. This sense of unfulfillment is so strong for her that it immediately comes alive as soon as she sees Dimitri for the second time. Moushumi, although belonging to the same culture as Ashima's, is entirely different from the latter. Sushila Rathore notes that "for Ashima, everything related to her husband is valuable or symbolises her husband but for Moushumi the things related to Gogol are just commodities carrying no more connotation than what they stand for" (Rathore 2006, 159). Generational-difference between Ashima and Moushumi comes to the fore when it comes to the institution of marriage. Ashima considers her marriage as something sacrosanct but Moushumi does not hesitate when she starts her affair with Dimitri and later divorces Gogol.

Ashima undergoes a series of changes in her relations and family. After her arrival, she hardly mingles with the local society and keeps herself busy with household chores and raising her children. When Ashoke moves to the University of Ohio leaving Ashima behind in Massachusetts, she takes up a job at the local library to keep herself engaged. She is understandably shocked to see the cultural rift between herself and her two children that brings to light the generational difference between them. When she receives the news of Ashoke's death, everything changes for her. For the first time in her life, she doesn't feel the urge to go back to Calcutta. She now considers the US as the country where

her late husband had tried to realise his dreams. It is in this country that Ashima attains motherhood, has a family of her own. She realises that there is something that connects her to the US — the country that she had initially spurned for its unfamiliarity to her. Eventually when she sells the house on Pemberton Road, she decides to spend her remaining life staying in the US for six months and the rest in India every year. True to her name which, translated into English would mean 'one without borders', Ashima transcends borders and starts living in both countries. She becomes a part of the shifting ethnoscape of global sojourners: a true cosmopolitan traveller. Thirty-three years of stay in the US has changed her a lot. Ashima remembers her initial days of isolation, the feeling of fear and unfamiliarity she had felt when she landed in the US in 1967. But now she is lot more confident and the fact that she is alone in her journey does not worry her. She has become familiar with herself that is shaped by both India and America:

For the first time since her flight to meet her husband in Cambridge, in the winter of 1967, she will make the journey on her own. The prospect no longer terrifies her. She has learned to do things on her own, and though she still wears saris, still puts her long hair in a bun, she is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta. She will return to India with an American passport. In her wallet will remain her Massachusetts driver's license, her social security card. She will return to a world where she will not single-handedly throw parties for dozens of people. She will not have to go to the trouble of making yogurt from half-and-half and 'sandesh' from ricotta cheese. (Lahiri 2003, 276)

For thirty-three years she had missed her life in India.

Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties. She will miss living with her daughter ... going into Cambridge together to see old movies at the Brattle .... She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. (Lahiri 2003, 279)

Ashima realises her attachment to her adopted country had grown over the years. Lahiri demonstrates that after the death of Ashoke, Ashima's family and her social circle change. Her family will now comprise of her younger brother and his wife:

It is a solitary, somewhat premature version of the future she and her husband had planned when he was alive. In Calcutta, Ashima will live with her younger brother, Rana, and his wife, and their two grown, as yet unmarried daughters, in a spacious flat in Salt Lake. There she will have a room, the first in her life intended for her exclusive use. (Lahiri 2003, 275)

Ashima will now be without borders, a resident of everywhere, of both nations. Her ideal world is shattered to pieces but she realises that she is left without affiliation to any particular culture. Like Gogol, she becomes a namesake as well, without any borders or boundaries. In spite of her feeling of displacement, marginality, and a crisis of identity, this decision of hers is a way of adapting to a new social circle. The narration, shared by two generations of the Ganguli family, indicates that even the older generation of immigrants is beginning to see America "not as a newly adopted homeland, but as an option" (Friedman 2008, 2). Friedman's observation corroborates Ashima's decision to stay part time in the US. Ashima does not feel bound to stay in America, nor does she feel nostalgically driven to return to India. She prefers to divide her time between the two countries. One of the literary strategies that Lahiri uses in *The Namesake* is the consistent use of the present tense verb thereby indicating the presence of possibilities beyond the confines of the narrative. The novel is not close-ended and there is every chance that Ashima and Gogol will discover further how their space of familiarity develops continuously even after the end of the narrative.

Gogol, too undergoes changes in his outlook and perspective. In many respects, the sudden death of Gogol's father marks a turning point in the narrative. In fact, Ashoke's death shatters Gogol's sense of identity to such an extent that it brings about a complete renegotiation of his previous identifications. His father's demise revives in Gogol familial and communal expectations of what his life should be. It prompts him to disaffiliate himself from Maxine as he travels on his own to Cleveland in order to identify his father's body at the morgue and to empty Ashoke's apartment. Through his refusal to take Maxine's advice and check into a hotel, not only does Gogol pay a tribute to his father's memory, but he also metaphorically reasserts his filiation by occupying his father's territory: "He does not want to inhabit an anonymous room. As long as he is here, he doesn't want to leave his father's apartment empty" (Lahiri 2003, 177). However, Gogol's belated commitment to his own lineage remains fraught with ambiguity. He lets his relationship with the American girl Maxine drop, not because of his mother Ashima's reservations about it but because he arrives at a more complex and richer understanding of his heritage and cultural belonging. He also confronts the devastatingly ironic contradiction with fortitude when his subsequent marriage, this time with a Bengali-American girl Moushumi, ends up in divorce. "All those trips to Calcutta he'd once resented — how could they have been enough? They were not enough" (281). He realises the futility of his aloofness from his family members and their culture and rituals. He had all along maintained a distance from his parents and their fragmented lives. He had been under the impression that he was an American in every way. But now he realises that "there was nothing" (281), the futility of trying to keep a distance from his family and the values that his parents

had so long cherished and tried to nurture in him. He has the unsettled and unfixed feeling that his parents felt on their arrival in America. A sense of failure and shame now pursues Gogol as he slowly tries to gather the bits and pieces of his life and history. With Ashima's departure for India, Gogol is effectively without a home. Ashoke's death, Ashima's decision to leave for India and Sonia's forthcoming marriage make Gogol think that "his family's life feels like a string of accidents, unforeseen, unintended, one incident begetting another. It had started with his father's train wreck ... later inspiring him to make a new life on the other side of the world" (286-87). Gogol realises that all these incidents have shaped his life and "determined who he is" (287) — shaped by varying cultural influences. Gogol's discovery of *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol* at the age of thirty-two, when they are about to sell the Pemberton Road house brings him back to the phase of life that he had long forgotten: "The spine cracks faintly when he opens it to the title page" (288) and he remembers that this was the same book that his father had gifted him on his birthday in the year 1982 on the occasion of his fourteenth birthday. At that point of time, he had shelved the book but for him now, the book assumes a special significance when he reads his father's handwriting in red ball point ink, "the letters rising gradually, optimistically, on the diagonal toward the upper right-hand corner of the page" (288). The handwriting of his father on the title page "reminds him of the checks his father used to give him all through college, and for years afterward, to help him along" (289), and Gogol is filled with a sense of nostalgia. He is reminded of the affection that Ashoke showered on him, which he had never reciprocated. The chance retrieval of the book of short stories signals the healing of a broken sense of self. Gogol's life comes full circle as he starts reading his father's gift. Yet,

the shift of tense in the last lines of the narrative suggests that it now conjugates itself in the future. He comes out stronger knowing fully well that his roots are nourished by two distinct nations. True to his good name Nikhil which means 'one who is entire, encompassing all' in Bengali, Gogol understands that his filiation is not exclusive, but rather, he is nourished by multiple cultural influences. He also sees the name on the book that he had so long detested and tried so hard to get rid of. The author with the same name had saved his father from imminent death in the train accident and, now, Gogol reaches the stage of metamorphosis when he comes to terms with his family heritage and culture. "As the hours of the evening pass he will grow distracted, anxious to return to his room, to be alone, to read the book he had once forsaken" (290), and thereby, start a new journey to seek his identity and appreciate once again the relation with his father.

Gogol moves forward from the space of inbetweenness and liminality to some kind of steady ground, and emerges towards the end of the novel as a cultural survivor, intent to do away with his hyphenated existence. He realises that his father's death and Ashima's decision to leave for India mean that the name 'Gogol' that had been so lovingly given to him by Ashoke would now cease to exist. The once most hated part of his life would be history now. Yet, he does not feel happy for the name now signifies his father's memory for him. Like Ashima, his family too changes because now he won't have his mother beside him. He will start missing his innumerable aunts and uncles who had become family to him — who used to come on every social gathering hosted by Ashoke

and Ashima. Gogol realises the void left behind by the death of his father and Ashima's imminent departure.

The givers and keepers of Gogol's name are far from him now. One dead. Another, a widow, on the verge of a different sort of departure, in order to dwell, as his father does, in a separate world. She will call him, once a week, on the phone. She will learn to send e-mail, she says. Once or twice a week, he will hear "Gogol" over the wires, see it typed on a screen. As for all the people in the house, all the mashis and meshos to whom he is still, and will always be, Gogol — now that his mother is moving away, how often will he see them? Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all. (Lahiri 2003, 289)

Gogol sees his name in a new light and understands his filial relation once again.

Of Gogol's predicament, *The Namesake* offers an open-ended resolution. At the end of the narrative, Gogol cannot extricate himself from the desperate search for his origin. However, his divorce enables him to put his parents' achievement into proper perspective and causes him to marvel at their ability to raise two children in the US while affiliating themselves with an alien culture "in spite of what was missing, with a stamina he fears he does not possess himself" (Lahiri 2003, 281). Gogol realises that Ashima has managed to appropriate the alien customs of the US for the sake of her children. He understands that she has translated and transformed customs on her own terms, reinventing herself as an 'interpreter of cultures'. This emergent facet of both his maternal and diasporic heritage seems to trigger off Gogol's new mobility of mind, for he is now able to revisit and reinterpret his own past in the light of his family accidental history: "In so many ways, his family's life feels like a string of accidents, unforeseen, unintended, one accident begetting another .... And yet these events have formed



Gogol, shaped him, determined who he is” (Lahiri 2003, 115). After Ashoke’s death, Gogol travels one last time to the Pemberton Road house and reassesses his bond to his family through the recollection of the many journeys between New York and Pemberton Road. Ashima too, on her part, recollects her many journeys between India and the US and realises that “she still does not feel fully at home within these walls on Pemberton Road, she knows that this is home nevertheless — the world for which she is responsible” (Lahiri 2003, 280). Through the simultaneous loss and definition of their place of origins, both Gogol and Ashima map out an imaginary “geography of the self” (Munos 2008, 115) that in turn, enables them to reterritorialise themselves and negotiate new subject positions. Aparajita De defines this continuous re-fashioning of identities as “polygenesis” (De 2007, 183). This continuous “lack of specificities” (183) signals the breakdown of cultural boundaries and hints towards a more assimilating culture. Gogol and Ashima experience a constant “evolution of the self under diverse contexts” (183). These ever evolving possibilities in the family dynamics of both Gogol and Ashima situate them in a constant state of flux that ultimately leads both the characters to recognise and realise the importance of family ties and heritage that are shaped by multiple affiliations to cultural codes.

Displacement and marginality in Sonia’s case, however, trigger a much lower sense of alienation and nostalgia. Lahiri does not fully develop the character of Sonia to demonstrate marginalia on her part. Even then, she seems gradually to assimilate the bits and pieces of American culture without much setback and trouble. She lives on her own in San Francisco, works for an environmental agency and studies for her Law School Admission Test. However, when she hears

the news of the demise of her father, she flies back from San Francisco to be with Ashima. She stays with her mother and works as a paralegal, hoping to apply to law schools nearby. It is Sonia who takes care of her widowed mother. Unlike Moushumi, she seems to have few relationships. Like her own mother, she has a sense of duty. Like traditional Indian women, Sonia marries her boyfriend Ben — a half Chinese boy and they are happy in their own world. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Lahiri does not develop fully the character of Sonia. However, the narrative does demonstrate that Sonia does not experience that feeling of alienation which Gogol does. One of the reasons maybe her name which is more common with the mainstream American culture than her brother's. Although the name Sonia bears a Russian link, just like her brother's, yet the name is commonly used by westerners to name their children. She assimilates fully into the host American society and leads a content life.

Through her characters, Jhumpa Lahiri shows the homelessness, rootlessness and absence of any singular culture in the expatriate's life and relationships. The difficulty in reconciling cross-cultural selves and bridging divided identities affect relationships and family in general. Fissures find a fertile ground in the Ganguli family when the two generations cannot communicate with each other and the distance between Gogol and Ashoke increases. Gogol's subsequent rediscovery of his own self and identity helps him believe in his roots and cultural heritage once again. Nigamananda Das quotes Lahiri from an interview where the novelist says, "I am aware that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am so much more American than they are. In fact, it is still very hard to think of myself as an American" (Das

2008, 177). Lahiri's own experience as a second-generation immigrant is reflected through her realistic portrayal of Gogol. As Rushdie mentions in his *Imaginary Homelands*, "the writer who is out-of-country ... may experience this loss in an intensified form" (Rushdie 1992, 12). The fact of being 'elsewhere' generates discontinuity and this is reflected in the characters of both the novels. Indian diasporic writers like Desai and Lahiri are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective. Rushdie, although in a different context, had said many years before the publication of *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* that Indian writers who live abroad, "are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society" (Rushdie 1992, 19). Radhakrishnan corroborates Rushdie and comments, "belonging nowhere and everywhere at the same time, the diasporic subject may well attempt to proclaim a heterogeneous 'elsewhere' as its actual epistemological home" (Radhakrishnan 2007, 173). Both Lahiri and Desai explore the possibilities and problems engendered by the experience of being 'elsewhere'. Natalie Friedman observes that Lahiri's characters do not merit the label 'hybrid' tagged to them. Friedman maintains that "had this novel been published ten years ago, it may have been read as an examination of hybridity, an exploration of what Homi Bhabha saw as the outcome of global diaspora and migration" (Friedman 2008, 4). Friedman argues that Bhabha's use of words like 'disavowal', 'estrangle', 'denied' suggests violence and that the "blending of cultures needs to be attended by attack, war, and domination" (Friedman 2008, 4). *The Namesake*, on the contrary, is more assimilatory in tone and emphasises that cultural relativism is beneficial for the migrant characters. The novel seems to celebrate the journeys of the characters. Through Ashima and Gogol, Lahiri underscores an assimilatory undertone in the narrative. Both

Gogol and Ashima emerge stronger and undergo a process of self-realisation where they realise they are without borders and embellished by two different cultures. The ending of *The Namesake* suggests that neither the first-generation nor the second-generation immigrants become disillusioned with America because America is not the end point of their travels. The US becomes a stop on the voyage to discover a more fulfilling career, a better life or a more interesting lover, and this voyage of discovery is not unidirectional or even bidirectional. It is global and seems to continue even after the narrative has ended. Lahiri even mentions that Gogol will be having a new job as an architect where he will be “producing his own designs” (Lahiri 2003, 289), and there is a further possibility of Gogol becoming an associate of the firm. Hence, *The Namesake* definitely ends on a positive note signalling future promises in both personal and professional lives of the characters.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *The Namesake* ends with Gogol’s discovery of *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol* that was gifted by his father on his fourteenth birthday. Gogol realises a renewed bond with his father when he sees his father’s handwriting on the front endpaper of the book. The letters “rising gradually, optimistically” (Lahiri 2003, 288) inspires a ray of hope in Gogol’s life that is otherwise marked by a series of failures on the personal level. Just as the overcoat provides emotional security and warmth to Akaky Akakievich, Ashoke still provides that sense of warmth and emotional security to Gogol although he is physically no more. The ending of *The Namesake* re-establishes the bond between father and son, thereby affirming the restoration of family relationships that were somehow affected when Ashoke was alive.

Like Lahiri, Desai creates characters who are positioned within the turns of subcontinental history and ultimately ends the novel with a positive note. The novel demonstrates the effect of geocultural complexities arising out of subcontinental history on characters and the subsequent affirmation of family relations. The culturally dynamic melting pot of the Kalimpong society becomes the site of reunion between Biju and the cook. Although the narrative shuttles back and forth between the two contrasting worlds of Manhattan and Kalimpong, one marked by “trains passing by in a devilish screaming, their wheels sparked firework showers” (Desai 2006, 147) and the other being continuously thrust into a vortex of geopolitical disturbance of Gorkhaland insurgency, Desai emphasises future positive possibilities in the lives of her characters. The tormented past of the characters and the uncertain present in the context of illegal immigration to the US and the Gorkhaland agitation of the 80s bring out the historical and geographical problematics and their effects on family relationships. However, by showing the reunion of Biju with his father, Desai affirms the strength of filial relations. Biju’s meeting with his father amidst the turbulent Gorkhaland insurgency in the backdrop reinforces the bond of love that is there between father and son. The ending of the novel heralds a positive beginning of father-son relationship where neither of them has any expectation towards the other. Unadulterated love against the backdrop of the golden Kanchenjunga seems to be the ultimate message coming from the novelist. Like Lahiri, Desai too hints towards positive possibilities in the lives of her characters. Sai’s mistaking Biju as Gyan and her thinking to herself that she will forgive him point towards a possibility of reunion between Sai and Gyan. Even the possibility

of Mutt's return is hinted at the last page of the novel when Sai thinks the figure to be someone who has come to return Jemubhai's only companion.

There is however a difference between *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. The former deals with characters who ultimately decide to be a part of two countries whereas the latter ends with the permanent return of the protagonist to India. But both Lahiri and Desai emphasise the importance of family relations as the source of emotional stamina. Both the novelists endorse the bond of love without expectations that ultimately emerges triumphant during and after the process of migration by the characters.

## General Conclusion

A closed national culture is hardly seen in postcolonial literary studies. As people move, the cultural centre also moves, not in any specific direction, but in a diffusing outward spread. Mass migration generates new forms of communication and recognition of 'other' places and in consideration of this, it becomes important to acknowledge the presence of diasporic identities within the national texture of a country. The kaleidoscopic quality of the world geography, its conditional elasticity and flexibility, leave the contemporary subject at a loss, on shaky ground and struggling to find his or her bearings in a world where new territorialities have emerged at the crossroads because of increased mobility. Both Lahiri and Desai's characters participate in the cultural politics of diasporic difference and in the process, they contest the challenges thrown in by migrating to a foreign country and an alien culture. So far in this thesis, I have demonstrated how different factors encourage migration and how the characters negotiate various other agencies of disruption during their stay abroad. Both authors use family as a vital unit that undergoes transformation both during and after migration. It is therefore essential to recognise the dynamic potential inherent in the use of family as a positive source of support and a means of mutual assistance to the migrant characters.

Although the two novels end in completely different ways — one ending with the permanent return of the protagonist to his homeland whereas the other ends with the protagonist agreeing to remain in India for half a year and the other half in the US — the element of similarity that binds the novels is the importance of family relationships that emerge triumphant in the diasporic space. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri's emphasis on the importance of family — both immediate and extended is quite marked. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the Ganguli family forges ties with fellow Bengalis when they first arrive in the US. The local Bengalis act as the support network to the Gangulis,

especially Ashima who feels completely alienated and forlorn amidst the unknown surroundings of the host country. Their practising together Bengali customs and rituals form a strong sense of relation among Ashoke, Ashima and the other Bengali migrant characters to the extent that the other Bengalis who are migrants themselves almost become an extended family to the Gangulis.

As shown in Chapter Two, the characters of Gogol and Ashima undergo a process of self-realisation towards the end of the narrative. Gogol's discovery of the book of short stories gifted to him by his father, Ashima's decision to return to Calcutta and stay with her brother's family for six months somewhere highlight the importance of family relationships in the novel. The very fact that Ashima does not wish to permanently return to Calcutta suggests that she has developed ties with the host country — a country that had seemed alien to her for so long. The formation of her ties, probably through her children Gogol and Sonia who are now settled in the US undermine the affirmation of family relationships by the novelist. Similarly her decision to stay part time in Calcutta with her brother's family suggests that she is not ready to forget her past and family back in Calcutta. She is willing to navigate the two countries and explore newer possibilities in her family space that now spans two countries. As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, Jhumpa Lahiri, in her consistent use of the present tense verb, emphasises an open-endedness in her narrative. I think this literary strategy of Lahiri shows her inclination to hint towards further possibilities in the context of re-creating family space for the characters. For Ashima, Sonia and Gogol, migration ultimately becomes empowering that shapes their individual characters in a positive way. Without



becoming a prey to essentialist positions, *The Namesake* subverts attempts to frame a hegemonic condition of inscribing a singular identity on the structure of family. The Ganguli family thus restructures even at the end of the novel with Ashima shifting to her brother's place in Calcutta, Gogol, while living in the US, trying to trace his roots that have origins in India and Sonia marrying Ben, a half Chinese young man. All these characters' familial affiliations spread beyond political borders and boundaries.

Similarly Gogol's beginning to read the book of short stories gifted to him by his father eighteen years ago emphasises the reaffirmation of the relation between father and son. The flood of memories that Gogol experiences when he sees his father's handwriting "rising gradually, optimistically, on the diagonal toward the upper right-hand corner of the page" (Lahiri 2003, 288) suggests a glimmer of hope in Gogol's personal life, scarred by a series of failures. His father's "tranquil hand" (Lahiri 2003, 288) reminds him of the numerous pay-checks Ashoke used to give him all through college to help him along. The fact that Gogol is reminded of the pay-checks indicate the positioning of Ashoke as someone who had provided economic security to his family. Even after his death, Ashoke continues to provide emotional security to Gogol. The name that Gogol had detested so long now seems precious to him because it reminds him of his father — "that was the first thing his father had given him" (Lahiri 2003, 289). Much like the overcoat of Nikolai Gogol's Akaky Akakievich, Ashoke provides the warmth and emotional security to Gogol even after his death. Thus I believe Lahiri does seem to say

that it is family relationships that provide the necessary emotional stamina to characters stuck in the painful vortex of diaspora.

Like Lahiri, Desai too upholds the importance of family relationships in the context of migrancy and diaspora. Although *The Inheritance of Loss* ends on a slightly different note from *The Namesake* in the sense that the protagonist Biju returns permanently from the US to India, Desai does show indications that she too emphasises family relationships as a source of mutual assistance and support. The union of the cook and Biju against the backdrop of the golden Kanchenjunga re-establishes the bond between father and son. The concluding comments of Desai that “truth was apparent” or the “luminous light” (Desai 2006, 324) that made the five peaks of Kanchenjunga turn golden suggest that the novel ends with a sense of hope in the form of the union. Biju’s return from the US without any visible signs of wealth that could identify him as an America-returned person indicates that Desai is trying to project unadulterated love of family relationships as the sole factor that binds human beings together. The message of love without any material expectations that Desai seems to uphold is also suggested in the last page of the novel where Sai thinks Biju to be Gyan, her lost love. She mutters to herself, “I will love you after all” and then, she thinks that someone might have found Mutt and “she’s right here, alive and well! Plumper than ever!” (Desai 2006, 324). These expressions hint at the positive suggestions with which Desai wants to end the novel. The words ‘love’, ‘alive’, ‘well’, ‘plumper’ indicate happiness and fulfilment, which, in turn, suggest the return and restoration of relationships that had been lost in the wake

of migrancy and political turmoil. The eagerness of the cook and the childlike enthusiasm of the father-son duo when they see each other are suggested in expressions like the “two figures leaping at each other as the gate swung open” (Desai 2006, 324).

On the basis of my reading of the two novels, I propose that both novels advocate the importance of inter-personal dynamics of family relationships as a source of sustenance for characters who migrate abroad. It is family as a unit that helps the characters to journey from marginalisation to integration. While Lahiri defines family as something organic and not absolute, an institution that has the potential to grow and develop beyond the confines of the narrative, Desai brings her novel to a close with the union of Biju and his father thereby signaling the assertion of filial love and relationship that rise “above the parting clouds” (Desai 2006, 324) just like the golden peak of Kanchenjunga.

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