

Diaspora and Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*: A Feminist Analysis

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Abstract

Women in Jhumpa Lahiri's works are often found isolated in a diasporic world. They fall into a complicated situation when they begin their life in a new country. They are mostly identified as complex, intelligent, and questioning women who are not happy with the status quo and turn rebels against the established order. Lahiri presents women's subjugation, motherhood, quest for identity, cultural and generational conflicts, marital tension, and the lack of communication between people in Unaccustomed Earth. Indian women immigrants in America are caught between the Indian traditions they left behind and the different alien world that they have to face. They are subjugated under patriarchy and are forced to adopt diasporic culture. In a new diasporic culture, they form a new identity – their daughters, who represent the second generation, experience the same hurdles as their mothers. This paper seeks to explore the status of Indian immigrant women's identity in America, the identity crisis of their daughters, and the uncertainty of American women.

Keywords: feminism, diaspora, double subjugation, motherhood, subaltern

Unaccustomed Earth is Jhumpa Lahiri's third book and second short story collection in which the author portrays the lives of different categories of immigrant women who face a diasporic world and search for identity. Women from the first generation of immigrants go to America after their marriage and endure conflicts between traditional Indian values and the modern western lifestyle. Their Indo-American daughters are American citizens by birth who adjust with the host culture, but the immigrants' deep attachment with "home" make them sad and nostalgic. Salman Rushdie asserts, "Exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being muted into pillars of salts" (*Imaginary Homelands* 10). Immigrants or expatriates weep for their lost home and look back for their past memories. At the same time, they silently tolerate all hurdles in the new land. Lahiri shows the male characters in a leader-like position both among the first and the second generations, and the women experience patriarchal domination. Women in the diaspora face crises like culture shock, displacement, rootlessness, sense of unsettling and in-betweenness, conflict in the notion of "home," nostalgia, and identity crisis. The diversity of cultures creates new identities that change in the new situations. And within these situations, diasporic, American-Indian, and American women must often raise their voice against patriarchal systems.

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, the immigrant women include Ruma's mother, Bagchi, Aparna, Sudha's mother, Shibani, and Kaushik's mother, stepmother, and stepsisters who face challenges to adjust with the new cultures. They immigrate to the US as the first generation after marriage and try to change their identities from Indian to Indian-American. They struggle against diverse

cultures and a patriarchal society. They keep an idealized memory of their homeland, aspire to transit Indian culture to their daughters and form a new cultural fashion with the notions of "hybridity." As a result, to preserve traditions, they attempt to disseminate Indian culture to the second generation who have assimilated with American culture. Some of them are afflicted with the trauma of national, ethnic, cultural, and gender identities.

The second generation identifies itself more with the Western community. Ruma, Usha, Sudha, and Hema represent the second generation who put up with patriarchal norms and are caught between the culture imposed by their parents and American culture. American women Megan and Deborah also face patriarchy and try to adjust with Indian culture as their husbands are Indians. Women's identities are in a process of transition, transformation, and reposition. In his essay titled "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall illustrates identity "as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (110). Identity is an incomplete production and is in a process of formation. America, a place of diversity and hybridity, transforms identities of immigrant women.

Feminism and diaspora share a common goal of challenging the forms of oppression. Diaspora derives from the Greek word *diaspeiro*. Hall explains, "Diaspora refers to the scattering and dispersal of people who will never literally be able to return to the place from which they came" (qtd. in Woodward 63). Due to globalization, different groups of people scatter and immigrate to a "Promised Land" hoping for better opportunities. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri shows the anxieties of such immigrant women. These women have come to the US with their husbands and, often, they find themselves isolated in the new culture as well as within their marriage. Their daughters, the second generation women, also, in turn, endure the oppression of patriarchy and the conflict between Indian and American culture.

Women in the different stories of *Unaccustomed Earth* struggle to survive in the strange surroundings they find themselves in and are suppressed even within their family by male partners. Males and females are identified as different only biologically, but have similar roles to play in modern society. Unfortunately, we see the opposite picture, and Simone de Beauvoir's remark is relevant here, "Males and females are two types of individuals that are differentiated within a species for the function of reproduction; they can be defined correlatively" (35). Males and females can work together and lead their lives correlatively. But in the stories of *Unaccustomed Earth*, Indian men cannot change the traditional outlook of patriarchy that they inherited from their forefathers. They treat their wives as inferior – women are sentenced to patriarchal oppression, and they are unable to find a way out of its asphyxiating labyrinths. Unconditional surrender of Indian women is a vital part of the feminine psyche. Lahiri addresses women's supreme sacrifices for family and their sufferings due to patriarchy, and for phobia of pregnancy and loneliness. They reconstruct their individualities and reassert their activities to discover their identities through silence, fight, compromise, acculturation, and assimilation.

America is a multicultural country and people experience cross-cultural crises due to the clash between cultures. Homi K. Bhabha points out, "The enunciation of cultural difference

problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address” (51). In diaspora, cultural difference makes divisions between past and present, tradition and modernity. A wide gap between “Self” and “Other” suggests a hybrid version of identity. In the title story, “Unaccustomed Earth,” Lahiri portrays female characters such as Ruma’s mother, Ruma, and Bagchi. The writer shows maladjustment between Ruma’s parents, and between their present and memory. Ruma’s mother immigrates to America after marriage, carries her Indian culture with her, and partially adopts the new culture. While her identity changes, she is compelled to live in America with her husband.

Ruma’s mother’s homesickness and memories of home and relatives make her nostalgic. Nostalgia adds to the agony of immigrant women as Rushdie claims, “The broken glass is not merely a mirror of nostalgia. It is also a useful tool with which to work in the present” (12). Nostalgia is like a broken mirror which is irreparable, but it helps women adjust with the present. Instead of returning home, Ruma’s mother carries more than one identity and tries to speak more than one language. Social and cultural matters are relevant to analyze the psyche of Indian women in the US. They cannot enjoy equal status as they are subjugated outside and at home. Ruma’s mother unconditionally depends on her husband in America. Mary Wollstonecraft asserts in chapter xi of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, “Women would not then marry for a support, as men accept the places under government, and neglect the implied duties” (184). Women would never marry if they would know that their husband would govern and neglect them. Ruma’s mother psychologically and economically depends on her husband who is busy with his work. Her husband is indifferent to her psychological crises, and she spends time doing household chores and remains confined within.

An American by birth, Ruma lives with her American husband, Adam, and child, Akash. In light of diasporic and feminist perspectives, Ruma’s identity as a woman, both Indian-origin and American, mother and daughter, wife and professional, affects her overall sense of identity and womanhood. Second-generation immigrants share their views and their feminist choices in the context of their Indian identity. Indian identity blends into other social identities. Amartya Sen notes in *The Argumentative Indian*, “As is frequently the case with emigrants in general, the Indian diaspora is also keen on taking pride – some self-respect and dignity – in the culture and traditions of their original homeland. This frequently takes the form of some kind of ‘national’ or ‘civilizational’ appreciation of being Indian in origin” (73). Indian identity is important not only for Indians who are living in India but also for those who have immigrated to other countries.

A sense of Indian identity reminds Indian women of their past and lost home. Ruma’s mother unintentionally adopts American culture and tries to practice her own cultural values simultaneously. She feels threatened by her ethnic identity and the culture of the “Other.” She recollects her past by cooking Indian foods like *dal*, *chorchori*, *beguni*, *mishti*, *syropy*, and so forth. She never raises her voice against her husband who represents patriarchy and never appreciates his wife, never giving her time. Indian traditional norm has chained Ruma’s mother at home. Ruma’s experiences as the “Other” under American culture and patriarchal

society are terrible too. She demonstrates disparity between traditional Indian expectations of a female and the simultaneous pressure of the suburban American lifestyle. Her husband's work lets her family settle in Seattle. She is determined to rise above her mother's position but "moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household" brings her to the same exact place because "this was Ruma's life, now" (Lahiri 11). She is isolated and plays the role of mother, wife, and daughter. Before marriage, she was a doll in her father's house, and after marriage she becomes a doll of her husband as Henrik Ibsen had shown through Nora in *A Doll's House*. Nora considers herself a doll of her father and her husband's house. Similarly, Ruma selflessly sacrifices her life to soothe, to flatter, and to give comfort to family.

Interconnection between feminism and diaspora focuses on women's subordination firstly by patriarchy and secondly by adopted culture. Women of the second generation are unable to understand the first generation's psychological crises. Ruma's mother's fascination in following the mother culture and language does not encourage Ruma. Her mother strongly opposes her daughter's decision of choosing Adam, but later she decides to let her marry him – it is a sign of adoption of American culture. Oppressed by her dominating husband, Ruma suffers due to marked differences between her culture and that of her husband's. Ruma is financially dependent on her husband and has no freedom. She is convinced by Adam to leave her job and to engage herself in the family. Virginia Woolf writes, "The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting" (62). As far as the legacy of patriarchy is concerned, men oppose the independence of women. Adam opposes Ruma's freedom, and her identity is determined by her husband. Maladjustment occurs as "she and Adam were separate people leading separate lives" (Lahiri 26). They are separated culturally and psychologically. Said marks the differences between East and West in his famous book *Culture and Imperialism*, "studying the relationship between the 'West' and its dominated cultural 'others' is not just a way of understanding an unequal relationship between unequal interlocutors, but also a point of entry into studying the formation and meaning of Western cultural practices themselves" (230). There is both a geographical and a cultural distinction between East and West. Adam perceives himself as superior, firstly as a man and secondly as American, and Ruma is placed as the "Other."

Lahiri portrays another female character named Bagchi who immigrates to America after her husband's death and faces numerous challenges in the new place. She adopts American culture, leads a lonely life, and remains unmarried forever. She, a modern Indian-American, leaves India to get rid of her inferior position as a widow. Her identity is in the process of being made and remade. She gradually assimilates with diverse cultures to achieve freedom, travels to different places with Ruma's father, and likes to lead a lonely life. When Ruma's father wants to marry Bagchi, she refuses. Lahiri writes, "She had loved her husband of two years more than he had loved his wife of nearly forty" (Lahiri 30). Bagchi with her confidence, infinite zest for life, her dreams of the future, emerges as a *new woman* who does not like to surrender her individuality. Ruma's father's love for her mother decreases after her death whereas Bagchi's love for her husband never falters. Ruma's mother is a victim of patriarchy and cross-culture.

Diasporic crises emerge as a direct result of the clash between different cultures. The second story, “Hell-Heaven” deals with three female characters: Aparna, Usha, and Deborah. Aparna searches for identity in America as a wife, an Indian, and as a mother. Her daughter, Usha is just a teenager and her ideas and ideologies contradict with her mother’s. Aparna faces inequality at home and outside after her marriage with Shyamal. Feminism determines a process to change the discrimination between men and women. As an Indian woman, Aparna accepts the arranged marriage for a secure life because, as Beauvoir writes, “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society” (445). Marriage is a social celebration, and in a patriarchal society, women do not have any choice regarding marriage. Therefore, women are oppressed after marriage by the male-dominated society.

Aparna’s cross-cultural experiences may be explored from a feminist standpoint. Shyamal marries Aparna to “placate his parents” (Lahiri 65) and settles in Central Square, America to explore his own future. The writer portrays the extent of women’s oppression within marriage in which the wife is uncared for and unnoticed by the husband. Aparna becomes a victim of marital rape. As Wollstonecraft points out, “Man, taking her body, the mind is left to rust; so that while physical love enervates man, as being his favourite recreation, he will endeavour to enslave woman” (98). In patriarchy, men fulfill their desire and do not give importance to the psyche of their wives. They treat physical love as recreation and like to turn women into slaves. Aparna’s husband is unwilling to understand her desire for space and autonomy, because to him physical desire is more significant. Beauvoir rightly observes, “woman is subjugated. Man in his sovereignty indulges himself in sexual caprices” (85). Convinced that she cannot enjoy independence in her conjugal life, Aparna begins to share everything with Pranab, an immigrant student. She enjoys Pranab’s company more than her husband’s – her husband dominates her and remains indifferent. As part of a transnational society, Aparna shares her depression with Shyamal. Instead of placating her, Shyamal says, “If you are so unhappy, go back to Calcutta” (Lahiri 76). This shows the futility of Aparna’s existence in his life, but one positive side is that she speaks and expresses her lonesome position.

Pregnancy is a trying time for all women, but in a diasporic situation, the tension heightens. Aparna becomes pregnant for the fifth time since Usha’s birth, but Shyamal is not concerned. Such a pattern of living brings more frustration and resentment to her life. Beauvoir, in this regard, speaks about marriage, “Marriage is not only an honourable career and one less tiring than many others: it alone permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same time to find sexual fulfillment as loved one and mother” (352). In patriarchy, marriage brings honor and social status to a woman. This is strengthened when she can fulfill the demands of her husband and family. In Aparna’s case, it is the opposite – her identity is marked with isolation, insecurity and sexual exploitation.

Usha grows up in America, mixes with different men freely, and feels irritated when her mother reminds her of her Indian identity. Aparna cannot accept the culture of free mixing of man and woman at a young age. Later, she reconciles with American culture when she realizes that Usha “was not only her daughter but a child of America as well” (Lahiri 82). She accepts Usha’s dating with many American men and welcomes them in their house. Here Hall’s assertion

is relevant, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 120). Identity always changes and transforms into a new form in diaspora culture. Aparna is compelled to adopt a hybrid identity through assimilation with American culture. Due to the synthesis of Indian and American identities, Usha cannot stand the situation easily when her heart is broken by a man. Aparna's psychological clash with the American Deborah is obvious. Usha is drawn to Deborah as both are Americans and speak English fluently. But Aparna is an outsider as she is not an American, nor can she speak English like them. The connection between mother and daughter, thus, is hampered.

These women in America then are like Edward Said's "Other," who struggle to create new identities. Said contributes much on the issue of East-West relationships and diversities in *Orientalism*. He writes, "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (40). During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Indians are treated as inferior when they are in contact with Western culture. Deborah, an American woman, gets married with an Indian named Pranab, but their relationship is maladjusted. Pranab follows Indian culture and Deborah follows American culture. Deborah's affair with Pranab signifies confrontation between the native self and the immigrant Other. Deborah's fascination with Indian culture after engaging with Pranab indicates the native Self's interest to know the immigrant Other. Marriage between Pranab and Deborah is doomed from the outset. After their engagement, Deborah learns some Bengali expressions like "khub bhalo" and "accha" (Lahiri 68), learns to eat spicy food. This suggests surrendering to patriarchy and losing individuality with the adoption of Indian culture. Her American identity cannot stop her from being subjugated by patriarchy. Pranab is irrational and childlike, and he falls in love with another Bengali woman and divorces Deborah after twenty-three years of marriage. But she does not break like other traditional women, but rather gives importance to individuality and resumes her normal, everyday life.

In the third story "A Choice of Accommodations," Lahiri describes interracial marriage, compromises, and adjustments between Amit and Megan. Amit, in-between two cultures, psychologically craves his parents' love during his student life in Langford. To enjoy a more privileged life, his parents return to India, leaving Amit alone in Langford. Amit's mother has short hair and wears trousers, wearing saris only for special occasions. She gives more importance to Amit's future career than motherhood. Motherhood is one of the causes for oppression of women from both generations – mothers sacrifice their own choices for their children. But sometimes they reject traditional ways of life to rediscover a new identity. The postcolonial feminist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak shows her feminist concerns for the Othering process in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" when she says that female subjects are subalterns silenced by dominant discourses. This question of Spivak motivates women to speak and to deal with their subalternity and identity crisis. Megan, as an American, represents modern woman. Amit's choice of Megan is unexpected to his parents and Megan feels insecure in their relationship. Here, Lahiri shows maladjustment between Indian and American cultures. Megan misunderstands the relationship between Amit and Pam, Amit's school friend, whom they meet at a marriage ceremony, suggesting how a woman feels inferior in a patriarchal society.

Amit drags Megan to an unknown place to join Pam's marriage ceremony. Pam's preference for traditional family life surprises Amit. Megan says, "You don't know. A lot of women do things that are out of character on their wedding day. Even women like Pam" (88). However, not only Pam, but many modern women also prefer marriage. Pam's modern identity cannot change her biological position. Wollstonecraft asserts, "A king is always a king and a woman is always a woman" (73). A woman's identity as woman is the same universally, and Pam cannot establish an entirely unique identity as she is aware of how she is being defined as a woman, whose group identity has been determined by a dominant male culture. Even modern women cannot remain unmarried and move freely in a patriarchal society. Though Pam spent time with many male friends in her student life, her marriage is fixed with a married man with children. As a mother, she faces challenges in adjusting with new relationships but strives to give love and affection like a real mother. Megan argues that many women become *subaltern* after their marriage. Lahiri shows that even in the US, women cannot escape subjugation. Men have historically exercised enormous power over women's bodies. Western education does not change Amit's Indian identity. He feels that he is superior to Megan as he says, "Do you really think you can survive a whole evening without leaving my side?" Megan throws a note of challenge as "I can if you can" (Lahiri 93). Through this challenge, Lahiri shows the beginning of the break down of Amit and Megan's relationship.

In the story, "Only Goodness," Sudha's mother, Sudha, and Elena are important women characters. Sudha's Indian mother, who is busy cooking, washing, and cleaning, depends entirely on her husband. She feels lonely at home and is unable to adjust with American culture. She feels unlucky when Rahul, her son, becomes addicted to drugs. Sudha's parents rely mostly on Sudha who understands their psychological condition. Rahul does not have any sense of responsibility, and he feels that his mother does nothing. He thinks that his mother does not have any quality except for marrying his father. Though he was born in the US, he cannot get away from thinking traditionally. He insults his mother and thinks that men are superior. Beauvoir's words, "He is a male!" (35) are fitting here. Man consciously feels proud of their male identity. Rahul, thus, observes his father's power over his mother as a man and carries this idea in his mind.

Motherhood is defeated through assimilation with American culture. Sudha has chosen Rodger, and like her mother, she is devoted to domestic work. Her relationship with her husband also questions her adjustment as she is Indian. Rahul's mother's over-involvement with Sudha makes Rahul believe that she is not concerned at all about her son. He becomes frustrated and chooses a foreign woman Elena, an older girlfriend, who is of his mother's age, to be his wife. His father's voice is more severe than his mother's when he chooses an aged foreigner with a child as his life partner. His father comments, "This woman is practically old enough to be your mother" (Lahiri 155). Lahiri portrays that even an American woman is not safe from the insults of patriarchy. In this regard, his mother does not play any role as she is a "domesticated woman" (Rubin 770) and is dominated by her husband. During Sudha's pregnancy, she remembers her Rahul's childhood and feels lonely. After the birth of her son Neel, Sudha works outside from morning till evening but she knows that two hours of the

day are not enough for her son. Though Sudha is from the second generation, she celebrates Indian culture through ceremonies like the *annaprasan* and teaching Neel to call her parents *dada* and *didi*.

"Nobody's Business" is an entirely different story from the others in the collection. The main female character is Sang, short for Sangeeta, who lives with Paul and Heather. Sang never feels troubled by her immigrant identity. She prefers English, and her Bengali sounds strange. Paul, an American graduate student at the center, pines for his Bengali-American roommate Sang, a graduate school dropout, who entertains no romantic feelings for him. Sang's perception of her modern identity sets her across the barriers of culture. She mixes with many men, the kind of life unusual to Indians. After the death of her parents, she goes through a critical phase in her life, and so she visits her sister in London. She carries an extreme sense of individualism and tries to follow American culture. Sang rejects polite advances of "prospective grooms" from the global Bengali singles circuit and considers herself engaged to a selfish, foul-tempered Egyptian named Farouk who has broken her heart by having an affair with another woman. After a confrontation with Farouk, Sang returns to London with a broken heart. Lahiri's immigrant women and women of Indian origin are subalterns, but they sometimes can speak and confront with patriarchal society as well as the adopted culture.

Lahiri's final three stories in part two of *Unaccustomed Earth* mark a search for memory by Kaushik and Hema, representatives of the second generation. Lahiri discovers that generational conflicts, waves of admiration, competition, and criticism flow between two families. There is also a fight for connection and control between Hema and Kaushik as both children and adults. In "Once in a Lifetime," Kaushik Choudhuri and his parents leave Cambridge to return to India in 1974. The Choudhuris return to Massachusetts after seven years and Hema's parents are perplexed to find that Bombay made them more American than Cambridge did. In this story, Hema's mother, Shibani, is busy with household work, but Kaushik's mother, Parul, is not used to cooking, washing, or cleaning. Shibani is home-centered and Parul likes to drink, gossip, and smoke. Shibani complains that Parul "did not help clean up after dinner, how she went to bed whenever it suited her and slept close to lunchtime" (Lahiri 245). Both originated from Calcutta but Shibani is like traditional Indian women and Parul like Western women. In Cambridge, both are "equally lonely" (225) as immigrant women suffer from loneliness. They are forced to live in and mix with multi-cultures and "negotiate and translate" ... "between the cultures" (Bhabha 17) and struggle within themselves. But immigrants turn to memories of their homeland, which sustain them.

Shibani is tortured by American culture where small children do not sleep with their parents. Parul's migration in different cultural spaces helps her realize her perfect individuality irrespective of geographical locations. She is a different type of "new woman" who is conscious of her self-dignity. When Hema sees Parul smoking, she smiles, "One cigarette a day can't kill me, can it?" (Lahiri 244). Parul smokes like men and adopts the new culture. Kaushik's family is cordially welcomed in Hema's house. Shibani believes in patriarchy and says, "Kaushik must practically be a man by now. He needs his privacy" (228). Shibani thinks that Kaushik needs a room to himself and wants to give Hema's room to him. Hema, however, protests, "This is

my room” (234). Hema’s fight with Kaushik on possession indicates her consciousness about her right as a human being. Virginia Woolf emphasizes in *A Room of One’s Own* that women’s privacy is important too, that a woman should have a room to think and to write. In other words, just as Kaushik may need privacy, so does Hema.

In “Year’s End,” Parul’s death changes Kaushik’s life as his father remarries to escape loneliness. Kaushik’s father’s marriage to Chitra with two daughters is shocking to him and his resentment of Chitra and her daughters becomes inevitable. Chitra is half Kaushik’s father’s age, and she does the household work. Second marriages are also another dimension of patriarchal society. Kaushik’s father’s second marriage makes him lonelier and an alien in his own house. Kaushik’s stepmother and two stepsisters Piu and Rupa represent the first generation diaspora. Living in America from his very early childhood, Kaushik has already adopted American culture, and they are old-fashioned to him – he mentions this several times. Sometimes they are reluctant to change the native culture and to adopt the host culture. Chitra tells Kaushik to call her *Mamoni* though she does not have any right to apply motherhood over him. He feels that her way of serving other is old-fashioned and his lashing out seems fitting in Lahiri’s world.

In “Going Ashore,” Hema spends a few months in Rome before entering into an arranged marriage with a parent-approved Hindu Punjabi man named Navin. Hema runs into Kaushik, a world-roving war photographer, and their deep connection is irresistible. Yet she chooses to marry in the traditional Indian way. Navin’s traditionalism and respect for her impress her, “it touched her to be treated, at thirty-seven, like a teenaged girl” (297). What she does not see is that she is being treated like a little girl, perhaps incapable of looking after herself. So, despite being a second generation immigrant, Hema perpetuates both traditionalism and patriarchy.

Three major influential postcolonial theorists, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, are concerned with postcolonial cultural identity crisis, cultural hybridity, and subalternity. Bhabha and Spivak consider the task to be deconstructive. Their key critical terms are “hybridity,” “liminality,” “stereotype,” “mimicry” and “subaltern.” Women are in a tongue-tied paralytic position about their own identities at home and outside in their diasporic world. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, America as a dreamland builds new identities for third world women who marry Indian-American men. Traditional canons have been rightfully deconstructed according to the situation. The concept of gender difference is not wholly determined by biology as Beauvoir claims, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (295). Men are identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative, and women are treated as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional.

McLeod claims succeeding generations’ sense of identities “borne from living in a diaspora community will be influenced by the ‘past migration history’ of their parents and grandparents” (207). “Diaspora identity” lets immigrants share emotions both for the old country and the new one. Their succeeding generations are greatly influenced by past memories of their forefathers. Indian women like Ruma’s mother, Usha’s mother, Sudha’s mother, Hema’s mother, Piu and Rupa’s mother, and Kaushik’s mother do not enjoy a respectable status in America. They struggle to liberate themselves and to form a new identity. In the divergent culture, they

are the “silent” victims of different forms of oppression by men. Lahiri’s Indian and Indian-origin women in *Unaccustomed Earth* are psychologically absorbed in creating identities, and they “have been living normal lives and adjusting to everyday America quietly but feelingly” (Alam 368). Feminism discovers that women under patriarchy are inferior; power is in the hands of men. “A feminist reader is enlisted,” Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore argue, “in the process of changing the gender relations which prevail in our society” (qtd. in McLeod 173). Though feminists reject the inequality between men and women, women are treated as ignorant, poor, uneducated, traditional, victimized, and family-oriented.

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri shows three categories of women: women who immigrate after marriage, second generation women, and American women. Women of all these categories undergo challenges imposed by patriarchy and by the culture of the new country. They cannot keep fixed identities. According to Bhabha, “*hybridity* is the rejection of a single or unified identity, and preference of multiple cultural locations and identities” (qtd. in Nayar 179). To Bhabha, *hybridity* is an idea where cultural differences come into contact and conflict. Notions of “*hybridity*” are relevant in exploring Lahiri’s stories in *Unaccustomed Earth*. Immigrant women are in-between many cultures, and they seem to lead isolated lives. They have to face the conflicts of cultures and struggle against their male partners at home; second generation women fight patriarchy as well, and even American women have to face traditional systems. Women’s identities change across generations in diaspora amid the many challenges.

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