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## ***‘Indian Sensibility’ as an “Imaginary Homelands” in Select Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri***

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### **Abstract**

Rushdie writes; “Writers in my position, 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 mutated into pillars of salt” (Rushdie, 2010, p. 10). Salman Rushdie’s insight into the predicament of diasporic writers reveals that the emigrant writers are always haunted by some sense of loss because of their physical alienation from the country. They use their writings as powerful medium to give vent to their urge to reclaim their nationality. But as the consequence of their tireless efforts, what they create is not the actual nation but a fictitious one. The corner stone of this article is based on the problem of Indian Diasporic writers in creating “Indian sensibility” which according to Rushdie is resulted in creating a fictional land, or imaginary homelands, India’s of the mind. “Sensibility” is defined as “the ability to experience and understand deep feelings” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary) and so ‘Indian Sensibility’ consists of the ability to experience Indian heritage and has the deep feelings for it in all the possible ways. The Indian Immigrants hold that their ‘Indian Sensibility’ is blended with their mind and heart and this sensibility is reflected in the form of culture, language, Indian Heritage, Celebrations and Festivals and Family system. There are also certain expatriate painful experiences and cultural dilemmas amidst the immigrants and as a result, there is loneliness that ultimately leads to their ‘Indian Sensibility’ when they think of their freedom and rights in their homeland. Uprooting from the homeland and re rooting in another land is something unnatural and it is very difficult to forget the past in the homeland. This is the claim of the immigrants living in the foreign countries. The immigrants cannot but think of their homeland and in a way, the Indian Immigrants have the long-distance nationalism. Though there is an assimilation of other culture

on the part of the Indian immigrants, they, with their best, try to keep up their own with them. They strand in the middle path of the two cultures leading to acculturation. This hybridity of culture as well as the human being is not but unavoidable. Though they are far off from their homeland, they feel the taste of Indian culture, Indian language, Indian Heritage, Indian Celebrations and Festivals and Indian Family System on which the whole article is structured. The Indian immigrants claim that they still cling to the cultural beliefs, practices, and norms of the homeland without doubt but their children are not able to follow them and stick to the norms and practices of the host land too. In this way, their ‘Indian Sensibility’ is not real.

Key words: Indian Sensibility, Re-rooting, Expatriate, Hybridity, Acculturation, Assimilation

Long-distance nationalism, Social Victimage, Intercommunal.

### Introduction

“Sensibility” is defined as “the ability to experience and understand deep feelings” and so ‘Indian Sensibility’ consists of the ability to experience Indian heritage and has the deep feelings for it in all the possible ways. The etymological analysis of the term ‘Sensibility’ refers to the capability of being perceived by physical senses. It has its origin from late 14c., and it also means “ability to sense or perceive” from Old French word “sensibilite” which has its root in Latin “sensibilitatem” from which, at last, the English word “Sensibility” is derived (Online Etymology Dictionary).

“Indianness can be described as the author’s feeling of being an Indian, whether he lives in India or lives abroad” (Pramila, 2015, p. 327). ‘Indian Sensibility’ is still defined in this way;

The sum total of the sociocultural patterns of India, the deep-seated politico-spiritual beliefs, philosophical ideals - spiritual, social, economic and political - that constitute the very mind of India, which categorically is different from the rest of the world and are reflected in the fast growing body of literature which is unseen by the Indians (Pramila, 2015, p. 327).

Moreover, ‘Indian Sensibility’ is described as national belonging that may underlie Indian-ness (Shukla, 2003, p. 9). Here, belongingness to ones’ own nation inspires ‘Indian Sensibility’. Normally the expatriate writers undergo the pain of homelessness, alienation, and loss of belongingness in this process and this leads to the reflection of “Indian Sensibility” in the mind of any Indian. The immigrant writers, “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 mutated into pillars of salt” (Rushdie, 2010, p. 10). Lahiri herself reflects that she “struggles in between” (Stoican, 2018, p. 235) the two worlds implying that she is not able to forget or leave her own country or its memory and at the same time she is caught in the clutches of American life style. This division is found because of the dominant role played by the receiving society as the testing mode against her

‘Indian Sensibility’. Experiencing the unavoidable division in the lives of the immigrants, she still makes her characters “evinced a penetrating awareness of life’s dreadful possibilities” (Bollinger, 2014, p. 497). Indian identity found in “the outdoor kitchen, to the building of homes, the planting of hibiscus hedges, fruit trees and vegetables” (Mishra, 2020, p. 59) points out the “Indian Sensibility” and in a way Indian presence reflects ‘Indian Sensibility’. In this way, ‘Indian Sensibility’ signifies the Indian immigrant’s feeling of being an Indian, whether he lives in India or anywhere in the world and it reflects his cultural, socio-political, psychological and religious background in the host land.

‘Indian Sensibility’ of Diaspora is created socially, culturally, religiously and even fictitiously at the same time. It implies that the immigrant immerses into the ‘Indian Sensibility’ which is imaginary. Beyond the diasporic premises, Lahiri also very effectively presents the human predicaments that make the Indian Immigrants remember their homeland due to their ‘Indian Sensibility’ in her stories. Here the unique identity of ‘Indian Sensibility’ of Lahiri is mirrored while exploring her select novels. When a person is out of his homeland, he realizes a kind of an unknown dominating force within himself and ultimately he feels that his own (Indian) identity is somehow lost. It happens due to certain circumstances that are unaccustomed in the new place. It is surely very difficult to identify the originality of any one’s homeland in the new land where he feels alienated from his own rights possibly. This sense of alienation affects the first and even the second-generation immigrants very severely in many ways because they alone are still clinging to Indian aspects in memory. The psychological dislocation also is created in the minds of the immigrants and it causes their future generation to have a similar sense of alienation too. In this crucial situation, they automatically carry the thoughts and the memories of their own origin, its advantages and disadvantages and create their own homeland only in their mind and this creation of homeland is just imaginary. In this way, the Indian immigrants construct their ‘Indian Sensibility’ with their imagination, being not able to cope up with the new system, and lead imaginary

lives in the foreign countries. The very Indian cultural phenomenon is found in the parenthood of the Indian immigrants in America. The sense of belongingness to home is attached to the soul of every migrant individual and this sense is instigated by the nostalgic memories of the homeland. Lahiri too exposes that "Indian Sensibility" is inevitably experienced by the Indian Immigrants especially in the fields of culture, language, Indian Heritage, Festivals and celebrations, family system and etc. The following factors decide the connectivity of the immigrants to the soil.

'Indian Sensibility', 'Indian Sensibility' is used in the Diaspora point of view. The term 'Indian Sensibility' in the context of the diaspora typically refers to the cultural, social, and emotional connection that the individuals of Indian origin maintain with their heritage, even while living outside of India. It encompasses traditions, values, language, cuisine, arts, and religious practices that are deeply rooted in Indian culture. For members of the Indian diaspora, the concept of 'Indian Sensibility' often plays a significant role in shaping their identity and sense of belonging, in spite of their geographical location. It can manifest in various ways, such as celebrating Indian festivals, maintaining connections with all the family members in India, participating in cultural events, and preserving cultural traditions through generations. Furthermore, 'Indian Sensibility' influences diaspora communities' interactions with their host countries, contributing to cultural exchange and diversity. This sensibility serves as a bridge between their Indian heritage and the multicultural environments in which they dwell, enriching both their personal lives and the societies they inhabit.

### **Authenticity of 'Indian Sensibility'**

The authenticity of 'Indian Sensibility', in the lives of the Indian immigrants, is questioned due to their uncertain life style in the host land. Lahiri's characters are estranged in the conflict to balance two different worlds and show the complexities and existentialist dilemmas of immigrants in an alien land. At this moment, their sensibility is of course imaginary and fictitious because the immigrants are not able to hold their 'Indian Sensibility' high

due to the opponent culture and Lahiri also emphasizes the need for a transnational identity to overcome the blues. "Adaptation to the culture of the host country helps the immigrants to assimilate with the culture and traditions of the nation he has immigrated to" (Mayekar, 2020, p. 4052). Therefore, her characters constantly juggle these two worlds, creating their own comfort-zones in the "Third Space" that transcends national and cultural boundaries and thus the authenticity of 'Indian Sensibility' is with big question mark.

Concept of "Imaginary Homelands" "Our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India of the mind" (Rushdie, 2010, p. 10). When an immigrant goes out of his native land, then it means that his host land is far superior to his own homeland and if he again claims to hold his homeland, then it is not real but purely imaginary.

### **'Homeland'**

'Homeland' is the key concept of the analysis of this paper and it is proposed by Rushdie through his work Imaginary Homelands. Salman Rushdie's concept of 'Homeland' as found in his work "Imaginary Homelands" is indeed a key concept in the analysis of diasporic literature and cultural identity. Rushdie expresses the complex relationship between individuals and the notion of home, particularly in the context of migration, displacement, and cultural hybridity. The concept of 'homeland' transcends the boundaries of nation-states. It implies not only a geographical place but also a symbolic space of cultural belonging, memory, and imagination. Rushdie's notion of homeland explores the simultaneous existence of multiple 'homelands' for individuals who experience different cultures, languages, and identities. His idea challenges conventional notions of fixed identity and belonging. His work emphasizes the importance of embracing and celebrating cultural diversity while also facing the complexities and challenges of navigating multiple identities. In this process, the individuals negotiate their sense of self in relation to different cultural, social,

and historical contexts.

### **Difference in the Degree of Homeland Concept in Generational Gaps**

There is a vast difference among the various generations of the immigrants. When the first generation of the immigrants holds the traditions and norms of their own country very strictly, the second one partly follows it but it is for the sake of their parents. The third and other generations deviate fully from the path of the first generation. As found in *The Namesake*, "Letters arrive from her parents, from her husband's parents, from aunts and uncles and cousins and friends, from everyone," and it shows that Ashoke and Ashima have the highest degree of homeland concept. In this way, the first-generation immigrants claim that they have more of 'Indian Sensibility' and the second generation becomes less in the degree of homeland concept and it is seen in the same novel when Gogol gives importance to America than India. "Gogol never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India" (NS, 2003, p. 118).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The ideas of Lahiri about 'Indian sensibility' – culture, history, society, familial relationship, belief system, politics - will be fictitious creation over these writers who urge to reclaim their lost relationship with the mother land. The fact is that the immigrants have been uprooted from their original land but at the same time they want to have their connection in some way or the other by dealing in their writing about the culture, history, language, politics, mythology and tradition of the mother land since they are not able to establish their identity in the other soil.

### **Survey of Literature**

Asl, in his article, "Circulation of the Discourse of American Nationalism through Allegiance to Consumer Citizenship in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*", depicts a tantalizing prospect of the much coveted American way of life through the sumptuous lifestyle of Gogol's American girlfriend, Maxine Ratliff and her middle-aged parents, Gerald and Lydia and this idea portrays the Indian immigrants' lifestyle towards American way.

Asl, & Abdullah, in the article, "Practices of (neoliberal) governmentality: Racial and gendered gaze in Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction, explains how the Indian immigrants face sufferings in the form gender and race and this makes the immigrants to think of their homeland.

Asl, & Abdullah, in the article "Nihilation of femininity in the battle of looks: A Sartrean reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter"", reveals that Indian femininity is looked upon as the lower kind of the human beings and this situation induces the Indian immigrants to think of their nation.

Bahri, in her article, "Aliens, Aliases, Surrogates and Familiars: The Family in Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Stories", justifies how alienation, plurally conceived, figures in the experience of migrants, producing the relay between heimlich/unheimlich experiences and moreover, in the socio- cultural context of globalisation, how does transnational migration challenge conventional notions of Indian families.

Bollinger, in his article, "The Danger of Re-reading: Disastrous Endings in Paul Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*," speaks of the familial trauma of children like Neel's near-drowning that takes on epic proportions in his mother's eyes on the unaccustomed earth.

Bess, in the article, "Jhumpa Lahiri's Hema and Kaushik an Anatomy of Loneliness, a Transforamtion of Tragedy," expresses that the Indian immigrants feel lonely in the foreign country without their kith and kins and automatically their 'Indian Sensibility' is aroused in this situation.

Damai, in the article, "The Spectral Art of Storytelling: disease, Displacement and Death in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*", remembers the homeland where there is smooth living in comparison with the unaccustomed land.

Garg, in the article, "Interpreting a Culinary Montage: Food in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*", speaks of the Indian meal which reminds of their homeland.

Harehdasht, in the article, "Heirs of Ambivalence: The Study of the Identity Crisis of the Second-Generation Indian Americans in

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*", witnesses that the second generation Indian immigrants create their own identity so that they may be respected by the Americans somehow though it is not true.

Hasnan, Aisyah and Mohamad Rashidi Mohd Pakri, in the article "Transnational Identity in Unaccustomed Earth: A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Short Fiction", claim that there is a transnational identity for the Indian immigrants and they are not easily attached to their homeland.

Karthikadevi C.G. and Kannan's "Cultural Conflicts in Chitra Banerjee's Arranged Marriage", hold that there are cultural conflicts when the Indian immigrants live with the local culture and they are unable to follow their own culture and the conflict arises.

Lau, L., in the article, "Making the difference: The differing presentations and representations of South Asia in the contemporary fiction of home and diasporic South Asian women writers", speaks of the difficulties found in the diasporic South Asian women writers since they have their 'Indian Sensibility'.

Malik, Surbhi, in the article, "Homelessness as Metaphor and Metonym: Transatlantic Geopolitics in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction and Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss," justifies that when the Indian immigrants once settle in the foreign country, then they feel homeless and lose their 'Indian Sensibility'.

Marwah, A., in the article, "Transnational transactions and the Indian woman: Interrogating Jhumpa Lahiri's universalism", speaks of Indian women's difficulties as they are considered as the weaker section of the society and they also become prey to the dominant culture of the foreign land.

Nair, C. T., in the article, "Politics of in-between spaces: Diasporic travails in Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction", expresses that there are always clashes between the Indian immigrants and the local people and at last they lean towards their culture.

Nath's "Examining the Fractured Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Mistress of Spices," identifies that the Indian identity is fractured because of the local identity and the Indian immigrants lose their own identity.

Paudyal, Binod's "Reimagining Transnational Identities in Lahiri's The Namesake," addresses the issue of losing the own identity on the part of the Indian immigrants and embracing the identity of the settled one.

Pour, Moussa Pourya Aslms & Abdullah, Nurul Farhana Low's "Circulation of the Discourse of American Nationalism through Allegiance to Consumer Citizenship in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake," deals with dominant culture of America and the Indian immigrants' lives based on their culture.

In this way, all these works speak about 'Indian Sensibility,' the fractured identity and other aspects of diaspora but have failed to identify that 'Indian Sensibility' is just an "Imaginary Homelands".

### **Select Novels Discussed**

*Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *The Unaccustomed Earth* are the select novels of Lahiri to be discussed in this paper. Shoba, Shukumar, Shoba, Mr. Pirzada, Lilia, Laxmi, Dev, Mrs. Dixit, Mrs. Sen and Sanjeev are the characters who are involved in 'Indian Sensibility' in *Interpreter of Maladies*. Ashoke, Ashima, Dilip Nandi, Monu, Mithu, Sonia and Gogol are the characters in *The Namesake* and are directly and indirectly involve in the 'Indian Sensibility'. Ruma, Akash, Ruma's Father, Romi (younger brother of Ruma), Mrs Bagchi (Meenakshi), Usha (Narrator), Pranab Chakraborty, Shyamal Da (Usha's Father), Aparna (Usha's mother), Amit, Megan, Monika (Daughter of Amit), Maya, Rahul, Sudha, Sang, Dr. Choudhuri, Chitra, Kaushik, Navin and Hema are the characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* and they show their 'Indian Sensibility' through their habits and customs.

### **Factors Deciding the Connectivity to the Soil**

#### **1.Culture**

One of the important factors connecting the soil is culture par excellence. "Man's instinct allows him to be haunted by cultural traditions" (Nair, 2017, p. 78). Lahiri's characters are woven around her immigrant experiences which portray that there is a cultural divide between America and India basically. Most of the immigrants still remain very much Indian normally and not British or American anyway

due to their cultural link with their origin. Nair discusses about the importance of 'Indian Sensibility' for homeland. In Nair's film, the identity of diasporic subjects is determined in all the ways by nostalgia for an original and authentic homeland. "Lahiri's specific East-coast-dwelling, middle-to-upper-class, Hindu, Indian Bengalis are transformed in Nair's film into, more generally, Indian" (Chakraborty, 2014, p. 611). The first and the second generation of the immigrants almost carry the peripheral culture of the homeland that is their own Indian culture and the third one and their followers, the mainstream of the host land that dominates the immigrants in all the possible ways though they have the knowledge about their own identity. The first-generation diaspora migration creates alienation and nostalgia for the past and rootlessness since they still cling to the cultural beliefs, practices, dressing, food habit and norms of the homeland. This sense of 'Indian sensibility' and other kinds of "intercommunal and interpersonal relations developed" (Mishra, 2007, p. 80) as found in the words of Mishra in the lives of the Indian immigrants. Even the food habit plays its role since it is part and parcel of the culture. "Food is another carrier of culture" (Das, 2021, p. 2).

Lahiri here touches another aspect of culture of India and shows the "Indian Sensibility" through her short story, "The Third and Final Continent" of Interpreter of Maladies. "When Mala reached America, her husband looking at her covering the head as the symbol of Indian culture, says, "There is no need to cover your head," I said" (IM, 1999, p. 192). The short story, "Unaccustomed Earth" again points out another instance of Indian culture citing the example of Usha's mother; as "her mother had never cut corners; even in Pennsylvania she had run her household as if to satisfy a mother-in-law's fastidious eye" (IM, 1999, p. 22). Basically, the Indian immigrants vividly show their identities through their own natural shape, colour, appearances and day today activities though there is a little bit of change in their own culture somehow or the other. They are "organizing cultural events, festivals, and social gatherings. These organizations play a vital role in preserving and promoting Indian culture and heritage" (Puri, 2023, p. 1442).

Lahiri herself remembers her past and her 'Indian Sensibility' peeps through her writing. "Jhumpa Lahiri is one among many talented writers who, herself being subject to the displacement and to the internal tension for belongingness, has been able to dramatize the ups and downs of living a life in oscillation" (Hossein, 2018, p. 112). The very 'Indian Sensibility' is explored by her in her culture, especially, of the ornaments of the Bengali women as it is found in the same story.

When the expatriate writer experiences the pain of homelessness, alienation and a sense of belongingness, then automatically the old memories go on hovering on his mind and blood. Even the culture of naming the children in the foreign land is different from the homeland and ultimately the sensibility about India sprouts as found in the work *The Namesake*, and it states, "a practice of Bengali nomenclature grants, to every single person, two names" (NS, 2003, p. 25). This novel still strengthens this idea stating that Gogol's parents tell him that they each have two names, too, as do all their Bengali friends in America, and all their relatives in Calcutta. The culture stresses that the name of the Bengali person is to carry the cultural meaning of it. For their daughter, good name and pet name are one and the same. Ashima tries her best to transmit in Gogol the convention of the culture of Bengal by teaching him the Bengali rhymes, names of Gods and Goddesses and prevalent Bengali tradition of calling every child by two names.

Still, the Indian immigrants claim that they keep up their own culture through dress also and in a way Indian culture is held high. Even when Gogol is in the third grade, his parents send him to Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday, held in the home of one of

their friends. The 'Indian Sensibility' urges them to follow the Indian culture very typically. Ashima warns her children not to look at the cemetery which is considered to be the forbidden area according to the Indian culture. This idea is injected in the minds of the children of Indian immigrants even when they are young and Gogol is old enough to know that

he himself will be burned, not buried, because he knows that he belongs to Indian culture and this is the idea pertaining to Indian culture. Lahiri's specification of date and time reinforces that what the reader is about to read is no ordinary fiction but a micro historical document that acts out in a "realist" modality to expose the Indian diaspora's private and public life experience (Asl, 2017, p. 59).

Even Gogol slowly learns that the culture of his origin demands him to follow it at any cost. When Ashoke passes away the whole family systematically observes the Indian way of rituals. Even the basic day today activity goes along with Indian culture and the 'Indian Sensibility' is reflected in every unit of their lives. For an instance, "the amounts are for one hundred and one dollars, two hundred and one dollars, occasionally three hundred and one dollars, as Bengalis consider it inauspicious to give round figures" (NS, 2003, p. 222). In following their own culture, Lahiri's female characters face continuous conflicts in terms of assimilation into another culture as well as in their constant negotiation of the past and present. It leads to "the sign of racialized violence and the symptom of social victimage" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 3). In this way, Lahiri portrays that the Indian immigrants claim that they are somehow rooted in their homeland; the memories of the past are internalized; a new space is recreated and a relationship too is renewed within their culture though they are residing in the unknown country with the unknown culture. "This new world, however, and logically enough, is unnatural to the traditional male protagonist" (Asl, 2020, p. 6).

## 2. Language

"Verbal discourse is a social phenomenon" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 259). The migrants maintain their language, customs, values, norms, life styles, tools, technologies, products, organizations and institutions of their homeland in the unaccustomed earth and keep up their Indian spirit throughout their lives in the foreign country though it is very difficult to maintain. Especially, language becomes the medium for the "Indian Sensibility" to show its face. Ashima uses her own language for preparing the invitation though she lives in America. "The migrants maintain the lan-

guage, customs, values, norms, tools, technologies, products, organizations and institutions of their homeland in the unaccustomed earth" (Mhalunkar, 2013, p. 2).

Lahiri shows the attempt of Laxmi who, in the short story, "Sexy" of Interpreter of Maladies, takes initiatives to use her own language in all the ways possible in that country, though living with American language. "She could hear Laxmi clearly, her sentences peppered every now and then with an Indian Word" (IM, 1999, p. 84). The first-generation immigrants never want to abandon their language even in the foreign land and so they take certain efforts to teach their future generations the Bengali language. Ruma's mother shows a great love for her language in spite of all the curdles and struggles in the foreign country. In naming the children also, the names of Bengali language are used by the Indian immigrants and Mr. Nandi leans over and calls the baby, "Buro" the Bengali word for "old manas" found in the novel The Namesake (NS, 2003, p. 26) and he calls his mother "Ma," his father "Baba" (NS, 2003, p. 40-41) and these are the mere reflections of 'Indian Sensibility' exactly. Miranda, all of a sudden, "shows considerable interest in Indian foods, Bengali language, and culture, caused by her affair with Dev, a Bengali" (Karim, 1967, p. 207).

Ashoke is very proud of his own language and expresses it with joy when Mrs. Lipid questions him of whether Gogol follows English. Moreover, he adds his own language with English in the novel, The Namesake, "Of course he follows," Ashoke says. "My son is perfectly bilingual" (NS, 2003, p. 58). Though the second-generation immigrants show hesitation to use their own language, for the sake of their parents who are very strict with their language, they make use of it now and then and among them some have the taste for it later. Generally, immigrants take effort to linguistically bind themselves with their original homeland in all the possible ways. The novel The Namesake portrays that Ashima's attraction towards a tattered copy of desh magazine in the foreign hospital indicates her temporary relief in the far-off country. Ashima doesn't feel comfortable with any other language but Bengali as Lahiri stresses, "Communication or

the lack of it often leads her characters to feel emotionally isolated which in turn leads them to suffer from cultural displacement” (Rath, 2017, p. 336).

### 3.National Heritage

“The immigrant experience is complicated as a sensitive immigrant finds himself or herself perpetually at a transit station fraught with memories of the original home which are struggling with the realities of the new world” (Dubey, 2002, p. 22). Sometimes, ‘Indian Sensibility’ is revealed in the place of importance where “the ‘Indianness’ of Main Street, captured in Indian sweets, also signals diasporic difference from within” (Mishra, 2020, p. 156). Lahiri gets back to her homeland through her writings and somehow becomes the flag bearer of the society. “A few years ago I revisited Bombay, which is my lost city, after an absence of something like half my life” (Rushdie, 2010, p. 9). Lahiri mentions about the characters of immigrants such as her own parents, the people who were born in England and America as the immigrants and the problems and dilemmas of settling down in the new land with the background of ‘Indian Sensibility’. If one tries to talk of ‘Indian Sensibility’ and its age long culture, there is no one to ignore the charm of National Epics and its heritage. Through all the annals of myth and legends used by the Indian immigrants, ‘Indian Sensibility’ finds its place in the vigour and vitality of the blood of the immigrants. Lahiri upholds ‘Indian Sensibility’ in a high manner in her work, *Interpreter of Maladies*, through her characters. Though Shukumar is settled in the foreign country, he somehow involves in the Indian heritage through his selection of the topic related to his own homeland. The remarkable and wonderful identities of India are pointed out in the most of the works of Lahiri. Though Gogol doesn’t have affection over India in the beginning, as the Indian immigrant of second generation, later he feels about it. “One day he attends a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English” (NS, 2003, p. 118) and starts to have a taste for it. In the same way, Shukumar, in the short story, “Interpreter of Maladies” studies its history from course books as if it were any other subject with an

interest and eagerness. “He wished now that he had his own childhood story of India” (IM, 1999, p. 12). It shows that he carries the idea about his nation with him and many have this mental presence of India with them though their physical presence of it is somewhere like Shukumar.

When there is news and message about India, the immigrants’ concern is on their nation and it is very clear in the short story, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” of *Interpreter of Maladies* when Lilia describes the pitiable situation of Mr. Pirzada who missed his wife and children in Bangladesh and is left as an immigrant and the role played by the Indian government to relieve the burden of its people. Lahiri in the short story, “Interpreter of Maladies” makes use of her character, Mr. Das too to speak of the pride of India by mentioning about it in the travel. Moreover, Indian goddess Kali is described in an elaborate way which symbolizes the Indian spiritual aspect that is hidden in the blood of the Indian Immigrants. Indian movies and the actors and actresses bear the sense of Indian aspects in many angles as found in the works of Lahiri. When Miranda and Dev, in the short story, “Sexy” have a dialogue and Dev speaks of his wife who “resembled an actress in Bombay named Madhuri Dixit” (IM, 1999, p. 98). Seeking to the root of the homeland is revealed here when such Indian ideas and symbols are portrayed in her works. Since Ashima feels that she has lost the most of her life in India, she doesn’t want it to be wasted still; “The past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity” (Rushdie, 2010, p. 12).

It’s very clear that the Indian immigrants are the consumers and of the Indian products though they are away from the Indian soil and consumption itself since they are of Indian soil. They always carry the thought about India with them and though they live outside India, they consider India as ever home. “Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables” (IM, 1999, p. 116). Even in choosing restaurant the immigrants opt for Indian one due to their sensibility. “It is his favorite Indian restaurant on the other



side of the Charles” (IM, 1999, p. 138). For their entertainment, they are attached to the Indian products, of course. ‘Indian Sensibility’ of the immigrants is understood as the Indian immigrants possess a cassette of classical Indian music he’d bought for Gogol months ago, after a concert at Kresge, still sealed in its wrapper” (NS, 2003, pp. 77-78).

A small unit of aspects of India is also spoken by and large by the Indian immigrants and in this way, they claim that India lives in the minds of the Indian immigrants. The Indian minds are always accustomed to only the Indian ways and they are all of India’s of the mind.

“The old memories keep on hovering in his mind and the new land and unfriendly surrounding leads to the feeling of frustration and depression” (Karthikadevi, 2015, p. 120).

Safety in India is felt by many Indian immigrants and this is also taken into account as the great heritage of India when they find that they are trapped by the insecurity of the foreign country in many ways. Indian affinity leads automatically to ‘Indian Sensibility’ and it is very well explained in this short story. “Being the only two Bengalis in the tour group, naturally the father of Ruma and Mrs. Bagchi struck up a conversation” (UE, 2009, p. 9). And this short story continues to mention the pride of India where the safety for the Indians is confirmed in India and it is remembered by the Indian immigrants when they face certain crucial situations in America. “Rahul’s mother blamed the police... probably stopped him just for being Indian” (UE, 2009, pp. 142-143). All these problems in the foreign country make the immigrants remember the past where there was once safety and happy life but it is no more here in the host land.

The Indian immigrants consider the marriages and their life partners who are from their homeland as the great heritage and so they are very much particular about choosing their brides from India itself. As shown in The Namesake, “like Ashoke, the bachelors fly back to Calcutta one by one, returning with wives” (NS, 2003, p. 38). Even the sensibility for India in Ashima is inducing her to stick to Indian aspects alone. Even the immigrants are

not satisfied with certain things they observe in the foreign country since they have a liking towards Indian goods and heritage. His parents differentiate America from India and assert the highness and pride of India, their homeland but at the same time they accept their fate that is not going to be changed as long as they are living in America where they are to go as it dictates and directs and they add that they “live in a country where a president is called Jimmy” (NS, 2003, p. 77). In order to build the Indian atmosphere, the Indian immigrants gather together and share their Indian feelings with each other and it is pinpointed in this novel. “Gogol, why aren’t you a member of the Indian association here?” Amit asks later (NS, 2003, p. 119). Day today activities that are taking place in India at present are shared among the Indian immigrants and thus they all grow in ‘Indian Sensibility’. “Eventually the talk turns to India. Gerald asks questions about the recent rise of Hindu fundamentalism, a topic Gogol knows little about” (NS, 2003, p. 134) in this novel. The Indian immigrants are, “here to maintain an identity, not to transform it.” (Mishra, 2007, p. 186).

#### **4.Festivals and Celebrations**

In Interpreter of Maladies, Lahiri points out that solidarity and unity among the immigrants is necessary, both for individuals and societies as it leads one to understand others and their feelings and ultimately this aspect leads to ‘Indian Sensibility’. Lack of unity leads her characters to confusion and gradually to an isolation as well as cultural displacement. Immigrants become divided between the customs and culture of their native land and adopted land and sometimes feel that they are alone in the new world. Mrs. Sen does not find the American life comfortable and her separation from her family leads her to the isolation and now she is not happy in America. Her alienation increases, because she is not even able to communicate successfully with her husband and the gap between them has increased slowly and surprisingly. Her husband does not bother her feeling of isolation but is interested only in his personal and office work. When the accident takes place, her condition becomes still worse and she becomes more isolated due to this. Considering all

these issues, the Indian immigrants try to have celebrations and festivals among themselves in order to share their solidarity and strengthen their unity and ultimately to avoid the isolation found in America. Lahiri cites many instances of this kind in her works, especially in *The Namesake*. Though the immigrants are not able to gather as many people as in India for any celebration, they invite other immigrants of their own nation in the place of their relatives and show their sensibility. On the other hand, during the performance of this ritual, the absence of the family members overshadows Ashima which denotes her longing to create the Indian, especially of Bengali atmosphere in the new unknown country. "The first formal ceremony of their lives centers on the consumption of solid food. Gogol is dressed as an infant Bengali groom, in a pale-yellow pajama Punjabi from his grandmother in Calcutta" (NS, 2003, pp. 38-39). Since the ethnic food and costume act as the symbols of one's ethnic identity Ashoke and Ashima's preference to the Indian Bengali food like rice, dal, samosa etc., points out their shared root. "Ashima's maintenance of wearing traditional sari than any other western dresses convey the preservation of the old ancestral culture that is typically Indian. The "Indian Sensibility" refers to Persaud's novel where "Jharay acts as a means of propitiating spirits and of releasing them from bodies" (Mishra, 2004, p. 59) and this reflects the Indian concept of Religion. Apart from celebrations and festivals, they naturally are attracted towards the Indian community residing in America itself. "They had gone one weekend to visit Bengali friends who lived in Queens" (UE, 2009, p. 126).

The second aspect of celebrations and festivals of the Indian immigrants is the celebrations in India itself. They not only cling to the celebrations and festivals here in America but also in their homeland. Ashima and Sonia "have gone to India for three weeks, to attend a cousin's wedding" (NS, 2003, p. 120) without any hesitation. They didn't bother the expenses or time consumption because of their affinity to their homeland. In the novel, Ashima's sense of being at home is connected to the original homeland, i.e., India. As Unaccustomed Earth indicates, "Shukumar never enjoyed his visits to Delhi, his broken Bengali of

no use in that city, it made him miss Calcutta, where all his relatives lived, where he was used to going" (UE, 2009, p. 96). Such a sense of nostalgia is created in the mind of Shukumar later in his life.

### 5. Family system

'Indian Sensibility' in family system is very well related to love, sacrifice, nostalgia, loss, food, distance and mental agony and so on. The continuous thought is hovering upon the most of the Indian immigrants and their lives every day. Specially, those who have a very thick bond with their relatives remember their homeland often. "Frequent visits home remains a common factor among every immigrant" (Kharyal, 2022, p. 478). In the short story, "Mrs. Sen's" in *Interpreter of Maladies*, Mrs. Sen plays a cassette with which she recognizes certain voices of her relatives and mentions about them such as "My third uncle, my cousin, my father, my grandfather." One speaker sang a song. Another recited a poem. The final voice on the tape belonged to Mrs. Sen's mother. She portrays that the Indian way of attitude towards the children based on gender is linked to the culture of India.

Affinity among the families in homeland and host land is strengthened by so much of criteria and the family places the greater role in performing the family duties in connection with Indian culture. It is also very important to note that memory of the relatives in India is given

importance and "Ashoke takes photographs of every room, Gogol standing somewhere in the frame, to send to relatives in India" (NS, 2003, p. 51). The loss of her relatives in the foreign country is very much felt by Ashima. Lahiri makes the comparison between the sensibility of Gogol for the homeland and of his parents as she points out that his parents "have longed, all these years, for the people they love in India for the first time in his life" (NS, 2003, p. 117). Still, the knot between the immigrants and their relatives in India is highlighted in this novel symbolizing the relationship of Ashima with Indian people. Lack of family atmosphere creates a mental agony in the lives of the immigrants. When Ashima doesn't experience the warmth of her relatives especially during her child birth she feels very miserable.

Even she goes to the next extreme of going back to India when she faces the worst condition of the host land without knowing what to do in the unknown land and thus their families face troubles and tribulations.

In the family set up, most of the activities pertaining to the 'Indian sensibility' take place. Particularly, the parents strictly follow the Indian culture and custom with which their children are to go along and thus they keep the whole family attuned to 'Indian Sensibility'. Pranab Kaku's parents "were horrified by the thought of their only son marrying an American woman" (UE, 2009, p. 71) in the short story, "Hell-Heaven" in *Unaccustomed Earth*. They are very particular that they are to go in line with all the Indian ways so that there will not be with any confusion in their families. In the short story, "A Choice of Accommodations" in *Unaccustomed Earth*, the regulation in the family is very well defined as Amit's parents "had not even met Megan. He was aware of what an insult it was to them. For all liberal Western ways, he knew they wanted him to marry a Bengali girl, raised and educated as he had been" (UE, 2009, p. 112). "Receiving news of fresh fish from the local merchants is the only thing that makes her as happy as receiving mail from India. Food preparation is linked not only to Mrs. Sen's subjectivity, but also her ethnic identity and her ability to forge a connection with others" (Williams, 2014, p. 74).

The girl children were very carefully watched and shaped by their parents of Indian immigrants in their families. In the short story, "Hell-Heaven", the narrator, Usha explains this idea in this way: Regarding the dress code also, the parents preferred to one related to the culture of India. Usha again pinpoints the reaction of her mother when she wears the foreign dress. She says, "Deborah gave me a pair of her jeans and a thick sweater and some sneakers, I noticed my mother lift her eyes from her teacup and stare at me" (UE, 2009, p. 80). Homesickness is another problem that is created in the mind of the immigrants due to the separation from the family.

### **'Indian Sensibility' as "Imaginary Homelands" – Why?**

'Indian Sensibility' is not real and insignifi-

cant to the second generation because they don't have the real love or concern for their homeland since they are born and brought up in the foreign country but at the same time, they celebrate Indian festivals, wear Indian dress and have Indian meal just to have spiritual satisfaction and only the feeling of deep rootedness. Being the member of the second generation, "Lahiri feels that she does not belong anywhere" (Hasnan & Pakri, 2021, p. 440). With this feeling, they claim that they have 'Indian Sensibility' and so it is just imaginary.

### **Analysis**

"Imaginary Homelands" is applied to Lahiri's works in the way of keeping up the Indian practices such as culture, language, Indian Heritage, Religious celebrations and family system. In this way, their 'Indian Sensibility' is fabricated so that they may have a hold in the homeland. This kind of practice is the only means of claiming their 'Indian Sensibility'.

### **Summation**

"Lahiri gives her perfect voice to express the felt experience of the Indian immigrants in whom she identifies 'disappearance of the real' as found in the words of Lyotard" (Barry, 2018, p. 93) since their lives are more of imaginary but still, they are to prove their 'Indian Sensibility'. Due to the effect of global migration and cross-cultural networks the first-generation immigrants try to be attached with the indigenous land through the recapitulation and the feeling of nostalgia and memory and it is mainly due to the uncomfortable and unaccustomed situation found in the host land. And the second generations too somehow build a connection with the unknown land. The second generations usually adhere and are attached to their birth land because they learn only something about their native land through their parents, the first immigrants. At the same time, the national identities get eroded and replaced by the hybrid identities and it leads both the first and the second-generation immigrants to a wavering mind and life. In this contemporary age, all these issues like global migration, the intersection between the different territories, impure identity, alienation from the homeland and cross-cultural ele-

ments seem to make them attached to their homeland but in reality, it is imaginary as here pointed out, “migrants choose to remain in their “fantasy structures of homeland” instead of considering the process of assimilation” (Mishra, 2007, p. 17). Since there are “fluidity of cultural identity, bilingualism, and the role of narratives as productive and emancipatory forces in helping Diasporas change their position from victimisation to consciousness” (Sadeghi, 2021,

p. 80) among the Indian immigrants, one can hold that ‘Indian Sensibility’ is just imaginary.

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