ETHNOSCAPES: JHUMPA LAHIRI AND AMBIVALENCE IN DIASPORA EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This research seeks to address and examine the significance of spaces of ethnicity in Jhumpa Lahiri's narratives from a cultural perspective. The objective is to explicate different perceptions and representations from the concept of diaspora in the Indian community in the United States. This has been done by studying the responses of two different generations of the Indian immigrants to the cultural space of the host society. It is shown that the concept of diaspora takes ambivalent dimensions and signifies contradictory meanings within the ethnic Indian community. The researcher indicates that it is firstly the site of absolute differences when it comes to the cultural interactions between earlier generation of immigrants and the mainstream society. Besides, it is the locus of articulation of differences when it requires the responses of younger generation of immigrants to both the heritage and the prevailing culture of New England.

Key words: *Lahiri, ethnoscapes, diaspora, resistance, articulation, contingency*

1. INTRODUCTION

The cultural-spatial term of ethnoscapes was initially introduced to the intellectual spheres by Arjun Appadurai, whom Terhi Rantanen (2006, p. 7) deservedly calls "a man behind scapes" for his chain terms suffixed by "–scapes". Appadurai coins the term to refer to the global flow of culture and its position within the emerging spaces. The articulated term of ethno+scapes, selected to study the spaces of ethnicity in Lahiri's works, is also aptly associated with the depictions from Janus. According to Jana Braziel and Anita Mannur (2003, p. 9), Janus is "the figure from the Greek pantheon whose gaze is simultaneously directed both forward and backward … the figure at once looks to the future and the past. Indeed this is a seductive metaphor for the immigrant" diaspora. This deity is suggestive of the guard of states of thresholds, endings and beginnings, hindrance and allowance, differences and similarities, in-betweenness and transitions at the same time. The metaphor will serve as the methodology to advance with the discussion on the ambivalent representations from Indian diaspora in New England.

Lahiri's stories, rich with diverse moments in immigrants' lives, are representative of her Bengali characters' different approaches to deal with the host culture. In the present study, the researcher has spotlighted two major moments of resistance and articulation in the ethnic community of Bengali immigrants in America. With resistance, the study will shed a light on the relations between the incomers and mainstream culture. The discussion is to advance under two subtopics of Producing Things in Space, to deal with counter-productivity of old Bengali spaces in the new context, and Imagined Communities with its emphasis on imagined Mother India and its imaginary cultural boundaries. As for articulation, which focuses on the relations within the Bengali diaspora in New England, the topic falls under two headings of Spaces of Difference and Spaces of Difference and Contingency. The researcher will discuss that space of articulation in Lahiri's works is simultaneity of breaks from tradition and inevitability of revisits to the roots. To begin the study on the ethnic spaces, the researcher would raise a question: what will happen if the gaze of Janus is merely inclined to one direction, to the absolute past?

2. SPACES OF RESISTANCE

What will happen when some of Lahiri's immigrant characters cannot or do not want to look forward or to the future for some reasons? In the article by Smita Jha (2008, p. 39), it is argued that for the first generation of immigrants in Lahiri's fiction, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense

of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for the lost world are more explicit and distressing than for their children. The first generation of immigrants finds their surroundings less friendly for the values that they are very much persistent to protect. Homely motifs play significant roles in expressing identity and developing spaces of resistance to the influence of prevailing culture. Struggle is dramatized and represented through rituals and discourse of Indianness, which brings familiar visages closer to their ordinary lives virtually synonymous to survival. The proponents of traditional values seek to protect their cultural specificities from any impact of change and developments in the new space. In Lahiri's novel, the ideological space of Indianness is sanctified and its values are inscribed in the cultural symbols. Taking advantage of their cultural values, the newcomers, firstly, reproduce the lines of heritage in the new space and then naturalize their social standing.

2.1. Producing Things in Space

In Lahiri's fiction, some immigrant characters are ardent consumers of ancestral values. They hold on the truths of old spaces and are persistent to be recognized by the host culture. In the interview: 'A Conversation with Jhumpa Lahiri' (2000), she confirms that Indian immigrants, particularly those of the first settlers, hold tightly on the inherited past and do a lot to move beyond being mere signs in the stranger's soil. Lahiri's works, in part, deal with the theme of diaspora and the search for a home for the first generation (Nityanandam, 2005, p. 5**)** through their active engagement in their own cultural practices. Lahiri, also, confesses that her parents lived for those things that meant a shelter or a home for them. She says, in 'My Two Lives' (2006, p. 104), that for her parents "home was not our home in Rhode Island but Calcutta, where they were raised. I was aware that the things they lived for … the Nazrul song they listened to on reel-to-reel, the family they missed, the clothes my mother wore that were not available in any mall" in Rhode Island were precious. As a means of resistance to the cultural contingency and social assimilation in the western society, we are invited to learn that local cultural values play significant roles for this diasporic generation in re-producing their own living spaces in the American soil and calling it home.

In a number of instances in Lahiri's works, the Indian immigrants pronounce their conflict through the cultural sign of names and naming. They struggle to secure this symbol from any impact of modification and displacement so that their individuality could be recognized. Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 410) calls the urge as privatizing and ownership of space and a development of the socio-cultural state. The issue remains a source of challenge to the specific layer of Indian immigrant community as their offspring are named in Indian or in the names favored. However, as Amardeep Singh (2004) points out, the challenge is not unwelcome event for the first generation of incomers since "names mean so much as they tend to operate as didactic and mnemonic (as an aid in remembering) devices for entire populations." This is perhaps the reason why *The Namesake* has been exclusively dedicated to the issue of naming. In the novel, after Ashima gives birth to a baby boy, the authorities in the hospital urge the parents to choose a name for the newborn; otherwise, they will not be allowed to leave. For Ashima and Ashoke, however, the issue is not that simple. Choosing a formal name for a child, in Indian culture, demands a ritualistic and ceremonial process, which contradicts that of the Americans who are "obsessed with abbreviation, and [who] would truncate" and shorten the names (Lahiri, 2003, p. 56).

As for names, they [Ashima and her husband] decided to let Ashima's grandmother, who is past eighty now, who has named each of her six great-grandchildren in the world, do the honors. When her grandmother learned of Ashima's pregnancy, she was particularly thrilled at the prospect of naming the family's first sahib. And so, Ashima and Ashoke have agreed to put off the decision of what to name the baby until a letter comes, ignoring the forms from the hospital about filling for a birth certificate. Ashima's grandmother has mailed the letter herself, walking with her cane to the post office, her first trip out of the house in a decade. The letter contains one name for a girl, one for a boy. Ashima's grandmother has revealed them to no one. Though the letter was sent a month ago, in July, it has yet to arrive. Ashima and Ashoke are not terribly concerned…. Names can wait. In India, parents take their time. It wasn't unusual for years to pass before the right name, the best possible name, was determined. (2003, p. 25)

This unique cultural attachment "allows Bengali families to spend a good deal of time and deliberation before deciding their child's name" (ibid). To picture the significance of the names for the couple, Lahiri comes up with other examples. Before the child's birth, when Ashima's water breaks and she calls out to her husband, she does not call him by his name because of "propriety's sake" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 2). Ashima says: "It's not the type of thing Bengali wives do ... a husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over" (ibid). Instead of calling Ashoke by his name, she utters an interrogative sentence "… which translates roughly as 'Are you listening to me?'" (ibid). Even years after Ashoke's death, Ashima is disinclined, or obliged not, to pronounce his husband's name in public. Also, as with the encoded letter of Ruma's father in Bengali language (Lahiri, 2008, p. 58), names in foreign land are the tools to provide the spaces of secret love, private shelter, intimacy, imaginary and reliable attachment. Quyen To Ma, (2009, p. 2) states that the secrecy of this cultural shelter is a prevalent enclave for the ethnic immigrants, which provides a safe haven and aids in the preservation of a cultural identity. Such privacy, the immigrants think, should not be revealed and should be diligently protected in the face of cultural assault.

Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991, pp. 416-7) argument that the members of a society "cannot be recognized as subjects, unless they produce a space", it would be understandable why this much struggle is exercised to secure cultural norms within the immigrant community of the Bengalis in a foreign land. Aware of its significance, the immigrants struggle to reestablish spaces exclusively Indian and crowd it with the symbols significantly from home. Otherwise, they are worried New England geography would be a confinement for the vitality of their cultural existence and will remain a hostile foreign space. Debarati Bandyopadhyay (2009, p. 107), discussing the borders of culture in Lahiri's fiction, writes: "Roots, origin, family bonds induce expatriate, immigrant non-resident Indians to return again and again to the point from where they were away." Returning and revisits to the points of reference entails the reproduction of familiar outlines in the unfamiliar space. In her dissertation, To Ma expounds at large on the diligent efforts of ethnic immigrants who industriously work to seal their cultural borders in America. She explains that "It is easy to understand why one may see voluntary segregation as a form of preservation" (2009, p. 2) of ethnic and cultural identity.

Isolating one from the ambience and cutting off communications with the neighborhood has its roots in the abstraction of space which Nick Hugget (1999, p. 22) dubs as "matter-independent", and Lefebvre (1991, p. 412) argues as relation-independent spaces. Hugget and Lefebvre's argument can be translated as the spaces which do not exist outside the mind and do not bear any sign of pragmatism. From these spaces, Bengali immigrants abstract some basic axioms specific to the culture of their motherland and deduce the truth that "everything is there" in Calcutta (Lahiri, 2000, p. 113). The values that they ascribe to each cultural concept and hold tightly onto deprive the incomers of any communications with the corresponding items of the host culture. Both the host and the guest cultures are affected, to different extends, by such an absolute differentiation and rift. Therefore, and in order for the truth of their traditional space to be perpetuated and the isolated space of homogeneity to be reproduced, some immigrants in Lahiri's works have to resist any relations. Such a deterministic view, with its emphasis on the pre-given abstract postulates, undermines dialogic approaches within the space.

Abstraction and isolation further entail that the advocators of the space of absolute differences have to remain foreigners. This is perhaps the major malady that Lahiri's certain characters suffer from in her fiction. For instance, the chronicler in 'Only Goodness' says that when in unaccustomed soil differences are not negotiated, the immigrants to that world will remain perpetual strangers. In the case of Sudha's parents, the narrator reveals that "Suddenly they were stuck [in unaccustomed earth], her parents aware that they faced a life sentence of being foreign…. Sudha regarded her parents' separation from India as an ailment that ebbed and flowed like a cancer" (Lahiri, 2008, p. 138). In the American soil, cultural symbols of Bengali immigrant as the abstract spatial components remain perpetually "mere signs" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 417) impotent of significant voice and meaning production in an encounter with the cultural symbols of the dominant space. Instead of producing pragmatic spaces of relations, communication, negotiation, consensus and, above all, changes in the

existing states of affairs in the new geography, Bengali immigrants of earlier generation merely produce symbols of resistance or merely "things in [the mainstream] space" (ibid).

2.2. Imagined Communities

In his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson displays a different kind of resistance by the communities which are objectively living in sporadic geographies but imaginatively are producing cohered spaces. In the same way, diasporic space in some of Lahiri's collections is imagined since there are moments that her characters display deep feeling of belonging to some people whom they do not live with or whom they do not even know, "… yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion," (Anderson, 1991, p. 49). Lahiri maps these imagined spaces by taking advantage of cultural metaphors which have the power to transgress the denotative meanings inscribed in their common use. For her, food rituals besides other cultural activities function as a linking metaphor to this imagined space and display concerns of a community of immigrants in the face of the perils of assimilation in the cultural space of alien soil. Via "food metaphor" and culinary practices, the women, mostly from earlier immigrant generation, link themselves to the spaces imaginary and perceive themselves a part or a member. Asha Choubey (1999) shows that, for the Bengali immigrants,

When away from home the food from one's land brings as much pleasure as mother's voice on overseas calls. Food provides a link it induces a sense of belonging in an otherwise alien world. Food serves as a key to binding. In a strange land familiar items of food are as welcome as familiar faces. Just as music or art breeds familiarity, food also serves as a medium of link. Food is an important part of cultural exchange and bonding as such its importance in the study of diaspora cannot be undermined.

Associating Choubey's discussion on local cultural metaphors with the imagined spaces of Anderson, it can be claimed that familiar cultural items, in an alien world, activate the imagination of the familiar faces, familiar voices and common aspirations. Anderson calls this moment a "comradeship" (1991, p. 7) and Lahiri refers to it as "the visages of all Bengali friends" (2003, p. 38). Lahiri's short story of 'When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine' is an example of how the plain motif serves as a bondage to the imagined frontiers of Indianness. Lilia, a ten-year-old Indian-American girl living with her immigrant parents in the States, narrates that her family had a regular dinner guest at their home from Dacca in 1971. Mr. Pirzada, had left his wife and seven daughters in Bangladesh for some research in America and because of the war between Pakistan and India he did not hear from them in six months. Lilia recalls that her parents fed him and other visiting faces from Indian peninsula with familiar food items. Although, in some cases, there were even territorial disputes between the visitors and the host family, they spoke the same language, shared the same customs and looked similar in many ways. In the soil of America, they all seemed to be advocates of common values which put them under the rubric of Mother India.

Lilia calls this imaginary space a shadow of the "real" space, saying that "I imagined Mr. Prizada's daughters rising from sleep, trying ribbons in their hair, anticipating breakfast, preparing for school. Our meals, our actions were only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged" (2000, p. 31). For Mr. Pirzada, dinner time was a crucial moment which he enthusiastically waited for and earnestly held onto.

Before eating, Mr. Pirzada always did a curious thing. He took out a plain silver watch without a band, which he kept in his breast pocket, held it briefly to one of his tufted ears, and wound it with three swift flicks of his thumb and forefinger. Unlike the watch on his wrist, the pocket watch, he had explained to me, was set to the local time in Dacca, eleven hours ahead. For the duration of the meal the watch rested on his folded paper napkin on the coffee table. (Lahiri, 2000, p. 30)

Through her characters, Lahiri wants to echo common aspirations that, even with the rise of mass migration and global movements, cultural identities and attachments still call for serious differences. Mealtime buys the immigrant Indians and the Bengalis enough time and provides them with enough space to recall and chat about whoever or whatever was left behind. Lilia says that "When I saw it that

night, as he [Mr. Pirzada] wound it on the coffee table, an uneasiness possessed me; life I realized, was being lived in Dacca [at home] first", eleven hours earlier (ibid). In the same way, when "The [Bengali] wives, homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice", Ashima helps them "make halwa" (2003, p. 38). The families drop by her house; they "drink tea with sugar and evaporated milk and eat shrimp cutlets fried in saucepans. 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 Nandi plays the harmonium. They argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satayajit Ray. The CPIM versus the Congress party. North Calcutta versus South" (ibid). Passionate rituals provide feelings of warmth and proximity which cannot be traded for other amusements in New England. It is the imagination of collective values that warms up their hearts and fills their inside and outside with joy.

Besides, Gogol's annaparsan or his rice ceremony brings the same sense of pleasure and collective desire when Ashima and Ashoke perfectly organize the ritual for visiting Bengali friends. In the exclusively Indian ceremony, the way a friend, the imaginary "honorary uncle", plays the role of actual uncle, the way the infant is dressed, decorated and fragranced, using the material "from his grandmother in Calcutta", and the way that food is prepared and fed weave the wondering nomads together to celebrate common values (Lahiri, 2003, p. 40). Like the Gangulis and their community, Mrs. Sen makes little effort to get along with her new environment. Her stubborn devotion to the cultural tradition and heritage pictures her as an icon of resistance to any gestures of assimilation. Mrs. Sen like other newly, but ironically, settled Bengali immigrants feels culturally alienated in the absence of her Calcutta relatives, friends and the people with whom she feels grave intimacy via cuisine and the corresponding rituals. Fish is typically Bengali food by which she manifests her passion for the Bengali community. Choubey (1999) expounds in details the significance of a culture-specific food item for a Bengali housewife:

The arrival of fish at the local store [in the stranger soil] is greeted as a piece of news from home and she is always [much] eager to hold it, to cook it and to serve it to Mr. Sen. … Fish becomes the leitmotif in the story. Mrs. Sen's existence as also her survival in an alien land revolves around and depends upon this food item. When she gets it she is happy, and when it is absent from her kitchen for a long time, she sulks like a child. For Mrs. Sen fish becomes her home, her state, her neighborhood, her friend and her family. Fish gives her a sense of proximity to her people.

Like fish as a "leitmotif" in Lahiri's 'Mrs. Sen's, which gives her a sense of proximity to her people, special shape of the chopping knife also functions to construct an imaginary home, imaginary neighborhood and imaginary community in which she finds her existence. While working with knife, Mrs. Sen talks to Eliot about everything familiar to her and about all her memory from India, and she is greatly filled with joy. Cross-legged and occasionally with the legs splayed, surrounded with waiting-for-chop food items and immersed in her thoughts, Mrs. Sen cheerfully says that she brought it from "home" (ibid). At home, the concept which is so immediate to her memory, she says that

Whenever there is a wedding in the family … or a large celebration of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in enormous circles on the roof of the building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night…. It is impossible to fall asleep those nights, listening to their chatter…. Here in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence. (Lahiri, 2000, p. 115)

Mrs. Sen's example and her inner talks to the familiar visages open serious challenges to the discourse of Americanization. Ann Hulbert (2008), reviewing Lahiri's immigrant characters in her article, draws upon the anxiety of assimilation and the divides that follow. Hulbert comments:

In her fiction, learning to not build walls around ourselves doesn't begin to cover the challenges that await her characters. They are wanderers navigating elusive borders, bumping up against barriers and testing ties, uneasily wondering if they will hold or not. That doesn't prevent Lahiri … or plenty of others in these impressive stories—from finding "kinship and beauty in unexpected places." But it

inspires a perpetual vigilance and an awareness that, even as the globe shrinks, vast distances will never disappear.

Displaced imaginations of the Bengali immigrants "command profound emotional legitimacy" (Anderson, 1991, p. 48), "regardless of the actual inequality" (1991, p. 50) and differences among the members of the imagined communities, and creates deep resemblances as well as "a deep horizontal comradeship" (1991, p. 7). These common grounds, in due course, help control the boundaries of its community and the ideology of Indianness. Helen Davis (2004, p. 186) states that commonalities also serve as the instruments to monitor and police "the straying brothers and sisters who don't know what they ought to be doing" in the strangers' soil. Common cultural background, cherished by Indian diaspora, forces to unite all the broken imagery into a cohered center and serve to self-contain the space. For earlier generation of Bengali immigrants, inherited values alongside other cultural symbols, not only delineate "imaginary coherence to a broken and fragmented sense of identity" (Davis, 2004, p. 186), but they also serve to exclude. Indianness, as a grand space, is a project which closes space on itself. It is the project, which in Stuart Hall's eyes, includes and excludes and seeks to put all the Bengali immigrants under the banner of self by reclamation of narratives from the past. This concentric space isolates itself from the milieu and, by means of the sanctified axiomatic truths, inherited or constructed, emphasizes the abstractions (Hugget, 1999, p. 22).

In 'What is this 'black' in Black Popular Culture?", Hall argues that these essentialized spaces and orthodoxies of space-as-authentic of any kind crowded with cultural things and loaded with de-historicized values do not represent the differences inside (1993, p. 478). In her later works, however, Lahiri shifts her narratives' concerns to the issues of the second generation of immigrants who are, mainly, dealing with differences and contingencies within the grand space of Indianness. They attempt to produce appropriated spaces, articulating the space of resistant centers with that of the emerging peripheries.

3. SPACES OF ARTICULATION

For being [an immigrant and] a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy- a perpetual wait [to settle], a constant burden [to get rid of], a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. (Lahiri, 2003, pp 49-50)

Ashima's muses echo discordance within the frontiers of the ideological implications of diaspora. Standing in periphery, the offspring of Bengali settlers incessantly intervene to disapprove of the claims for the uniformity and steadiness of the so-called diasporic space. They intervene to reveal the impracticality of the claims for absolute concepts of permanence, essence and authenticity. Most of Lahiri's second generation immigrants pragmatically raise new questions to undermine the truth of the old centers. They favor accentuality of margin over the dominant voice of center and provisionality of presence over the permanence of past. In the meantime, as Hall's exploration on popular culture reveal, they are cognizant of the impossibility of defying the impact of the latter. According to Hall, cultural space is a medium in process and it is a site of multiple positions which are actively at work to secure differences. At the same time, in keeping with his line, those positions are pushing for negotiation of differences in order to produce novel articulated spaces. In what follows, the researcher would, firstly, discuss inconsistencies within the classical discourse of diaspora in mature works of Lahiri. It will be displayed, followingly, that the space of emerging ethnic Bengali immigrants is the locus of articulation, simultaneity of difference and contingency.

3.1. Spaces of Difference

The children of immigrants struggle to walk out of the boundaries of ideology. Gogol's initial move in *The Namesake* displays his breaks with the tradition. In the interview titled "A Conversation with Jhumpa Lahiri" (2000), she explains that upon completing school, Gogol makes a move to fit into the

American society. Gogol's decisive move comes as he thinks that his name is strange and foreign among young Americans; it is limiting and does not fit the circumstances for which young Americans have dreams. The narrator in *The Namesake* pictures his inner thoughts:

At times his name, an entity shapeless and weightless, manages nevertheless to distress him physically, like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced permanently to wear. At times he wishes he could disguise it, shorten it somehow…. Other boys his age have begun to court girls already, asking them to go to the movies or the pizza parlor, but he cannot imagine saying, 'Hi, it's Gogol' under romantic circumstances. He cannot imagine this at all. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 76)

Gogol says that he can never imagine that his name has driven him to isolation (ibid). When he starts his university program at Yale, he appears before a judge to officially change his name to Nikhil. His critical decision of adopting a new name enables him to share the privileges of alien world to his own advantage, which otherwise was impossible. Everything changes and everything becomes suddenly new for him. He starts to live in a new state (Lahiri, 2003, p. 104) and

now that he's Nikhil it's easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas. With relief, he types his name at the top of his freshman papers. He reads the telephone massages his suitemates leave for Nikhil on assorted scraps in their room…. It is as Nikhil, that, first semester, he grows a goatee starts smoking Camel Lights at parties…. It is as Nikhil that he takes Metro-North into Manhattan one weekend with Jonathan and gets himself a fake ID that allows him to be served liquor in New Haven bars. It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles with a girl wearing a plaid woolen skirt and combat boots and mustard tights. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 105)

Later, when his name is shortened to Nick by his American friends and is further appropriated by them, he even feels at home in new space. After her sister's name Sonali was also reduced to Sonia, Lahiri states that, it made them the citizens of the world (Lahiri, 2003, p. 62). Gogol crosses the borders of limited community and transgresses the bounds of absolute collectivities which are "structured around ideas of nationality, race …" (Procter, 2004, p. 109). Gogol's moves in making decisions and creating differences with heritage are significant in that the discourse of Bengali diaspora which claims for originality and is committed to the solidarity of space cannot remain intact and innocent. Hall points out in 'New Ethnicities' that by the translations made from one historical moment to the next and by the transgressions made from one generation to another, it is impossible for the centers of essentialist thought and absolute mind to hold (1988, p. 445). The innocence and authenticity of the old spaces are subject to the internal disparities, Lahiri's younger generations further reveal.

In 'Unaccustomed Earth', the gap between generations is further explored by the arrival of the grandfather to Akash's home. The first impression the grandfather receives from his encounter with the grandson is that "The more the children [of the immigrants] grew, the less they had seemed to resemble either parent- they spoke differently, dressed differently, seemed foreign in every way, from the texture of their hair to the shapes of their feet and hands" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 54). The grandfather finds it unexpected to meet the grandson with all the differences, in terms of cultural behavior, only after a short period of separation. Astonished by the scene, he is musing "Oddly, it was his grandson, who was only half-Bengali to begin with, who did not even have a Bengali surname, with whom he [once] felt direct biological connection, a sense of himself reconstituted in another" (ibid). Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue that thinking of "fiction of cultures" in terms of "discrete spaces becomes implausible [even] for those who inhabit the [imaginary] borderlands" (1992, p. 7). The grandfather's experience about the urgencies in the lives of younger generation and his positive response to the emerging differences in the diasporic Indian community is an antidote to closing space on oneself.

As another cultural emblem to express identity, marriage and rites around it is a real force in Lahiri's works. It is so important a fact for the Bengalis that they could not think of sharing a life with a non-Indian person. It is an "unspoken law" for the children of Bengali immigrants to avoid dating an American boy or to avoid thinking about marrying to an American girl (Lahiri, 2008, p. 75) However, Lahiri displays that the children of immigrants defy the calls and the codes. There are examples that

the bachelor Indians, studying or working in the United States, move to India to marry an Indian fellow; however, they end up in different lives with the non-Indians when back to America. In 'Hell-Heaven', Mrs. Boudi warns against flirting with "enemy" (Lahiri, 2008, p. 75), but Pranab's marriage to an American girl drives her to the brinks of suicide. Besides, Ruma's mother, in 'Unaccustomed Earth', "does everything in her power to talk Ruma out of marrying Adam, saying that he would divorce her, that in the end he would want an American girl" (Lahiri, 2008, p. 26). However, she is deaf to her mother's outrage when she says that "You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian [and] that is the bottom line." (ibid) Defiant and rebellious, as the most of the immigrant children appear to be, Ruma keeps it as "a secret from parents until the day she announced that she was engaged" (ibid) to Adam.

By the ruptures that Gogol, Ruma, Akash and other Bengali children make with the grand narratives of tradition, and by the challenges that they pose to the claims of originality, the discourse of Indianness and roots are merely depicted as imaginary. We are displayed with the fictional spaces that can be neither easily restored nor can in any simple sense be merely recovered (Davis, 2004, p. 186). India, as an imagined community, seems not to be a home for those expatriates who think they may return home unchanged. It cannot be restored in the pure sense since the core and the cohered center of the "hegemonic moment is conflictual within and dialectual" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 18). By his analytic study of abstract and relational spaces, Lefebvre mean to state that "Abstract space carries within itself the seeds of new kind of space" (1991, p 52). He decides "I shall call [the] new space differential space" (ibid). Based on his elaboration, not only are there differences among the immigrants, but there are different methods to wander away from the centralized discourse of Indianness. What is more significant in this struggle is the seriousness of challenges against the trends to anchorage, to closure, to the integrity of the discourse of diaspora and to the homogeneity of the imagined nation. Like Lefebvre, Hall is also dissatisfied with any moves to close the space.

In Hall's eyes, imposing such closure on the communities and constructing unified identities of black, white, American or Indian is "a myth", Davis writes in *Understanding Stuart Hall* (2004, p. 180). Hall is quoted as saying that "since discourse is the space where meaning is generated and disseminated, it makes no sense to go in quest of authentic black [or Indian] experience," (Davis, 2004, p 182) in its pure and innocent sense. Further, "identity slips through our fingers, evading absolute enclosures," (Davis, 2004, p. 181), but when we stop talking to mean something, we make an "arbitrary closure" (Davis, 2004, p. 179). This temporary closure which is the result of unceasing interference by the bystanders can, also, be interpreted as using punctuations to stop the endless flow of the discourse of Mother land in Lahiri's works. Parasitic interference of periphery, vis-à-vis continuous appropriation of heritage, disrupts the comfort of center. In Lahiri, younger Bengali generation makes such interventions in the course of rewriting narratives to disturb the anchored discourse of totality and ever-present sense of signification. Although earlier Indian immigrants seem to "have space under their control, yet, it escapes in part from those who want to make use of it" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 29).

The break made by the new generation of Bengali immigrants enables them to articulate new identities and new opportunities to move away from non-productive consumer strategies. This enables them to produce other spaces in a bid to survive in the new world. Lahiri's representation from ethnicity is suggestive of the pointlessness of the exclusive claims to "private ownership of space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 410), originality of identity and the idea of innocent subject. Within the discourse of Indianness and claims for imaginary nation, a number of immigrant subjects are incessantly at work to weaken the stereotypical representations, to cross its already-drawn geometrical borders, to produce differences and then to articulate those differences. This is represented by Lahiri's mature works extravagantly. Davis quotes Hall as arguing that "working within this idea of ethnicity as a point of entry into discourse, as an enunciation, allows representation that engages with difference rather than trying to suppress it" (2004, p. 184). Recognizing differences is a critical step for a consensus and for working over those dissimilarities. Under new circumstances, the significations of essentialized cultural symbols are, inevitably, revisited, appropriated and articulated with those of the excluded *Other* to construct new meanings.

3.2. Spaces of Differences and Contingency

By making continuous changes in the way of fitting into the new world, younger generation of immigrants in the New England places themselves in the space of presence and seeks to update it. That is, the tale of immigrants' children, no matter how rebellious they are and how much distance they make from their ancestral values, is not the story of walking away from heritage. Cultural practices once used to separate and then to differentiate, now serve to articulate differences and to work with them. For better or worse, there are similarities among Indians in terms of culture and cultural background. On her own identity formation in the new world, Lahiri sates in 'My Two Lives' that "While I am American by virtue of the fact that I was raised in this country, I am Indian thanks to the efforts of two individuals. I feel Indian not [merely] because of my genetic composition but rather because of my parents' steadfast presence in my life" (2006, p. 105). In the interview by Alden Mudge (2003), Lahiri comments on the circumstances of the hero in *The Namesake* explaining that

In the process of writing the book, I realized that it was important and inevitable for him [Gogol] to accept his name, to realize that there is never a way to shed what is given to you by your parents. The book isn't so much about names per se. It is more about what we inherit from our parents, certain ideas, certain values, certain gens, the whole complex set of things that everyone gets from their parents and the way that, no matter how much we create our own lives and choose what we want out of life, it is very difficult to escape our origins.

In a number of cases, the newly adopted name "Nikhil [as Gogol's initial choice to Americanization] evaporates and Gogol [as a link to the father and family] claims him again" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 106). For one, this happens when his father comes to the station to fetch him as he goes back to Boston from university every other weekend. At the station, his father calls him by his pet name "as he has been accustomed to hearing it all his life" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 124). Also, one night when his father explains to Gogol about the train crash and the significance of his pet name bound up with the incident, his name begins to "mean something completely new bound up with a catastrophe that he has unwittingly embodied for years" (ibid). He starts to rethink about his original name and it links him to his father's fate. Another crucial moment about unending revisits of heritage is when he learns that even the change of name into Nikhil and then into Nick has not made him totally worldly and American. It is at a party in his friend Maxin's parental house that a neighbor of them, Pamela, recognizing him by appearance and irrespective of "Nikhil" as his adopted name and its Americanized connotations, starts to associate his traits with his ancestors' geography.

Occasional reemergence of the root via cultural symbols convince the Bengali young man of the seriousness of the issue. Gogol who once had the nightmares and "fears of being discovered, having the whole charade somehow unravel, and in nightmares his file are exposed, his original name printed on the front page of the *Yale Daily News*," (Lahiri, 2003, p. 106) later had no dread to be called by his original name, Gogol. In the rituals held to commemorate his father's death and attended by both Indians and non-Indians, he feels comfortable with both names. The Bengali young man, also, tends to give in to his mother's desire to marry a Bengali girl as a sign of positive response to the Bengali collective desire abroad. Bandyopadhyay (2009, P. 106) writes on Gogol's partial turns to his cultural heritage and asserts that "It is in these circumstances where traditional Indian concept of filial duty and responsibility are reasserted as values that Gogol understands his true position in the world. Along with the legacy left by the father, he finds a new love to cherish for the motherland far away." Procter (2004, p. 5) also states "no youth culture [is] free from parent culture" and no marginal insinuation is absolute defiance to the center.

In 'Unaccustomed Earth', Lahiri invites the grandfather, Dadu, to work on the differences that his own grandson displays. Already aware of the challenges, he begins to work through a dynamic cultural approach. His clever plan is to moderately cultivate, in close engagement with Akash, the deceased wife's memory as well as the interests of his grandson in the adopted soil of America. The garden in Ruma's yard serves as the symbolic bed to room multiplicity of references and their inevitable interconnectivity. The grandfather is to plant "small hydrangea" in memory and "in honor of his wife" (Lahiri, 2008, p. 49) and tells Ruma that the hydrangea "were always your mother's favorite," and "In

this country that is" (Lahiri, 2008, pp. 51-52). Father says the soil, in its turn, will help such memories grow and remain green as far as they are cared for and watered. His advice is revealing in the sense that as long as his method of dealing with emerging issues within immigrant Indian communities is pursued by her daughter and other members of the community, the unfriendly soil will yield fruits which everybody will benefit.

Ruma's father's mission is hybridization of the soil. Dadu asks Akash to help him plant his favorite things, mostly American products, in the same soil by the side of hydrangea. While grandfather lends a hand to Akash to plant his favorites in the plot, he asks him to bury things "Not too deep…. Not more than a finger" (Lahiri, 2008, p. 44) with the implication that cultural space is not the site of enduring imprints and that cultural things cannot be planted too deeply and permanently in the space. As Akash picks up a miniature plastic dinosaur and forces it moderately into the ground, the grandfather points to the toy and asks:

"What color is it?"

"Red."

"And in Bengali?"

"Lal."

"Good."

"And neel!" Akash cried out points to the sky. (Lahiri, 2008, pp. 44-45)

The ritual continues as the grandfather helps the grandson bury in the soil a pink rubber ball, a few pieces of lego sticks stuck together, and a wooden block etched with a star. The significance of instance lies in the point that the ritual of cultivation turns into the scene of cooperation between two generations in negotiating differences. They cooperate to plant homely things with different cultural significations in the foreign soil as the child echoes Bengali language cross-bred with the cultural components of his toys technically American. Akash plants his American toys, next to hydrangea, in American soil, projected out of the ground in *lal* under the *neel* sky. Culture and cultivation, for Dadu, means production: producing mixed-traits, producing hybridity, producing negotiated differences, producing traces of past and present, and producing a new space. Ashutosh Dubey (2002, p. 22) comments on the dynamism of such space in Lahiri's short stories stating that "The immigrant experience is complicated as a sensitive immigrant finds himself or herself perpetually at a transient station fraught with memories of the original home which are struggling with the realities of the new world." In *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*, there are moments of articulation which call for simultaneity of adjusting to the cultural realities of the new society and displaying unwillingness to cease to be an Indians. In other words, diasporic agents work through past and present to suggest that "there is no 'in itself' and 'for itself' within cultures because they are always subject to intrinsic forms of translation" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 210).

4. CONCLUSION

In his study of the spaces of ethnicity, or ethnoscapes in Lahiri's works, the researcher, firstly, traced those moments which, exclusively, dealt with the spaces of resistance. It was argued that the pattern of space of resistance in Lahiri's fiction categorically features a space of binarity, that is, Bengali culture vs. American culture. Earlier generation of the Bengalis in America was discussed to be persistent to secure their ancestral cultural values in the newly adopted land. They were further discussed to be resistant to any form of contingency and assimilation in the host culture. The researcher argued that, by "producing things in space" and by relying on "imagined communities", the immigrants produced two kinds of spaces resistant to the values of host culture. It was displayed that, through the performance of rituals, the hardliner immigrants struggle to reproduce the same values and cultural things, exclusively Indian, in the new space. The study revealed that the imagined Indian communities

also serves as a means to produce cohered spaces to guarantee the essentialized meanings. By remembering the traditional occasions and ceremonies and by active engagement in the practice of local rituals, certain Lahiri's characters struggled to fulfill the so-called collective aspirations of Indian immigrants in New England. It was shown that such moves serve to abstract the space of immigrants and to resist any change, relations and dialog, hence the meta-narrative of self and Mother India.

Furthermore, the researcher examined the relational spaces, exclusively, within the ethnic Indian community in America and analyzed the configuration of such spaces. It was discussed that the Indian immigrant community is further an articulated space, the space which hosts both differences between generations and their interdependency. The researcher, firstly, displayed that the younger generation of immigrants incessantly transgressed cultural frontiers of tradition and pronounced discontinuities with the past. Their independent moves revealed that the claim for the absolute idioms of grand spaces is no more than an illusion in the cultural context. By undermining the pushes for homogeneity of imagined communities, the younger generation posed challenges to the discourse of originality within Bengali immigrant society. The study, also, disclosed that producing ruptures with the past and tradition is not the final project as far as cultural spaces of Bengali immigrants are concerned. It was indicated that no matter how much distance the new generation of immigrants make from their ancestral values, heritage and reminiscences of the past are always haunting in their daily activities. It was displayed that young generation of Bengali immigrants in New England are involved in an unending struggle for producing discontinuities with the past and tradition and, at the same time, they cannot completely break with the heritage, hence, a double gaze fore and back. As the space of ethnicity in Lahiri's fiction was schematized and represented in the form of an ambivalent and multilayer space of resistance and articulation, so is the representations from the concept of diaspora in its classical and contemporary senses.

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