CONCLUSION

As ethnic Bengali women writers of the diaspora, both Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri celebrate myriad issues in their narratives. Both are concerned with human relationships, material and familial, and how the various stresses of the diaspora existence impact them. Both writers use novels and short stories to weave narratives that are richly textured with the nuances of dichotomies created between tradition and modernism, or resistance and acceptance in a diaspora situation. Being Bengali, women, and of the American diaspora, certain areas of thought overlap, which become evident in their literary output. However, various influences impact their writings leading them to focus on differing concerns and perspectives. Variations in the writings of the two writers occur due to differences in terms of their age (Divakaruni being older by ten years), as well as gap between first and second generation diasporas, with Divakaruni belonging to the former and Lahiri to the latter category.

A woman writer belonging to the first generation diaspora, Divakaruni typically recounts the Indian American women's struggle against traditional patriarchal attitudes as well as racial bias. Having been born and brought up in India before moving to America at the age of nineteen, Divakaruni is ideally placed to evaluate and compare how Indian women are treated in India and America, keeping in mind the patriarchal stereotypes so firmly entrenched in the Indian psyche. Her inherent awareness of her culture, its gender prejudices, and binaries of East and West all impact her work. Consequently, female friendships, female bonding, loneliness, and search for fulfillment that are an important part of a woman's life in India, all become important motifs. Divakaruni's social work with battered Asian women in America also adds to her insights into the situation of women and their conflicts with regard to marriage and migration. To this is added the influence of Indian mysticism, magic, belief in the meaningful significance of dreams, and myths heard in childhood. All these produce a heady combination of elements that make Divakaruni's narratives unique in their sensitive portrayals of women in the diaspora.

Ten years younger to Divakaruni, born in London and brought up in America, Jhumpa Lahiri as a second generation diaspora member is firmly entrenched in the culture of America, but is equally connected to feelings of immigrant melancholia because of having been brought up by immigrant parents for whom home would always be elsewhere. Lahiri's work is seen to be expressive of the issues concerning second generation diaspora, and the new hybrid identity comprising Indian as well as American elements. While Divakaruni's work is women-centric, Lahiri's work is un-gendered and neutral in its voice and not impacted by the mysticism of India as seen in Divakaruni's works. Both Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri began their story telling careers with short story collections which blend elements of East and West, as well as modern and traditional themes.

The titles both authors choose to give their works are indicative; not only of the stories contained therein, but also of the approaches the writers take to deal with them. As the title *Arranged Marriage* indicates, the work is a straight forward collection of stories on the theme of brides who step into arranged matches and negotiate their way between tradition and modernism as immigrants. The titles of the stories, such as "Bats" "Clothes" and "Silver Pavements Golden Roofs" are more symbolic, hinting at the theme of stories in a more oblique way. The same is also true of the titles of the stories in *The Lives of Strangers* such as "Blooming Season for Cacti", "The Names of Stars in Bengali" and "The Lives of Strangers" .The symbolism contained in these titles is whimsical, with an entire structure of meaning hinged upon a small element that is unconnected to the story. *The Mistress of Spices* is fairly indicative as titles go, but also it evokes curiosity about what the novel contains. Where *Sister of My Heart* is obviously a tale of two sisters, *The Vine of Desire* is a more complex title hinting at the various desires that cling to human lives like vines. *Queen of Dreams* is named thus for Rakhee's mother's work as an interpreter of dreams (which is a subplot), but it is also metaphorical in that it could mean the dreams all immigrants dream, symbolized through Rakhee and Belle's 'Kurma House'. Lahiri's titles such as *The Namesake*, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth* are also symbolic, but their symbolism is strongly connected with the narrative and deeply relevant to the story. Lahiri makes painstakingly sure that nothing of the meaning is left to the reader to construe.

Divakaruni's plots, like her encountered experiences are centered on women. Furthermore, with her focus on issues rather than character development, what she tries to achieve through her writing is a questioning and breaking down of stereotypes or behaviour of Indian men and women in India and America, that have solidified into accepted norms down the ages. Divakaruni's short stories are typified by realistic plots dealt with in a highly symbolic manner.

Subject wise, the plots centre around women who are struggling with doubts and fears in their lives, caught at cross roads between past and present, home and abroad, when the choices, made by the character alter their destiny. "Ultrasound" in *Arranged Marriage* presents a sensitive portrayal of how the arrival of a girl child is resisted, and the mother castigated for not conceiving a male child. Mrs. Dutta in "Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter" in *The Lives of Strangers* decides to return to India when she realizes that she can never be truly happy in her son's home in America. Sumita in "Clothes" in *Arranged Marriage* on the other hand, decides to stay back in America after her husband's death in defiance of cultural norms that would bind her into a white sari clad widow's existence, in order to fulfill her husband's dream. Divakaruni's plots thus deal with themes of spiritual and cultural reclamation in order to counteract the pressures of diaspora existence.

In the novels, Divakaruni's plots are experimental in their variety of stylistic devices, ranging from the story of sisters Anju and Sudha spread across *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine Of Desire* to a collection of diaspora issues dealt with by Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*, and second generation diaspora issues of Rakhee and Belle in *Queen of Dreams*. *The Mistress of Spices* and *Queen of Dreams* have plots that are a combination of realism and fantasy, with Tilo's magical spices helping immigrants in one novel, and Rakhee's mother's intuitive powers of dream interpretation helping people in the other. *The Mistress of Spices* has the earthquake while *Queen of Dreams* has the 9/11 attack on world trade central as a climatic point of catastrophe in the narrative. In both these novels, Divakaruni's juxtaposition of magic and mystic elements with contemporary diaspora issues indicate her desire to travel back in time and space to re-communicate with cultural roots in order to find solutions that American society is unable to find.

A range of linguistic devices are used to develop the plots. These include letters, dream sequences, journals, and various voices that narrate the story (like Anju

and Sudha in *Sister of My Heart*, and the multiple voices in *The Vine of Desire)*, revealing college assignments written by the characters, and cassette dictations (Sunil in *The Vine of Desire*). Sometimes, Divakaruni also incorporates dreams, dreamt by the characters while asleep, into the developing narrative. Hence, the dreams assume significance in the development of plot as is seen in the case of dreams and visions Tilo sees in *The Mistress of Spices* in relation to her spice magic, and the dreams Mrs. Datta sees in *Queen of Dreams* that help others negotiate their lives away from impending danger. All these devices used by Divakaruni impart her works with mysterious almost mystic interpretations and meanings that must be imagined or understood by the reader beyond the limitations of the text. Divakaruni delights in challenging conventions, and experimenting with narrative voices. The characters, thus, come alive through their own voices, giving the texts a lively feel. The seemingly confusing clamor of voice in *The Vine of Desire*, or *The Mistress of Spices* is symbolic of the confusion in the minds of characters, and society at large. Moreover, *The Mistress of Spices* has chapters named for spices, *Sister of My Heart* has chapters named alternately title 'Anju' and 'Sudha', while *Queen of Dreams* is divided into subparts titled 'Dream Journals' and 'Rakhee' in a further break from convention.

Divakaruni's plots also make masterful use of irony in order to convey the sense of diaspora angst. Sudha in a moment of weakness gives in to a sexual encounter with Sunil, thus betraying Anju, the person she is closest to, and the only one who had been steadfast in offering unconditional support when Sudha was defenseless and weak (*The Vine of Desire*). Sudha's betrayal is the ultimate twist of irony in that it hurts the one person who protects her and whom she loves the deepest. In *Queen of Dreams*, Mrs. Gupta's dream interpretations help people but are useless in securing her personal happiness. Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* dispenses succor through her powers but is powerless when it comes to her own happiness. Divakaruni's plots are a fusion of realistic and cosmic and often convey the importance of mysticism that connects the character with their inner self as well as their culture, and helps them cope with a self-centric society like America which is so unlike their own.

Plots in Jhumpa Lahiri's narratives are also well entrenched in Bengali cultural ethos, much like Divakaruni's. However, whereas Divakaruni's plots focus

on incidents, Lahiri's focus is on psychological development of character. The plots have a firm narrative pivot which serves as a setting for in-depth analysis of human relationship. This is seen in stories like "Interpreter of Maladies" in *Interpreter of Maladies* in which Tina's interaction with Mr. Kapasi is a starting point for a tangential exploration of stress caused in a marriage due to loneliness and boredom in America, and its regrettable outcome.

The plots of Jhumpa Lahiri show a deliberate progression from the consciousness of the first generation diaspora in *Interpreter of Maladies* to second generation diaspora concerns of multicultural assimilation, miscegenation and generation gap in *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth.* With plots that are a slice of real life, the stories of *Interpreter of Maladies* have plots that are narratives of negotiation between cultures, either in the context of the diaspora situation or in the context of middle class society in Calcutta. Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* is a straight forward paradigmatic plot encompassing the progress of successive generations of the Ganguly family towards acculturation in America. There is no ethnic conflict, and the focus remains on peculiar personal issues such as Gogol's name. The longer length of stories and ordinary day-to-day situations dealt with in *Unaccustomed Earth* serve to underscore the frustration and cultural dissonance of the second generation and its compromises in order to become a part of mainstream society.

The plots of Lahiri also ruminate upon first generation diasporic angst in its dealing of issues of food, loneliness, and generation gap with their children. First generation is often shown craving for its accustomed food, the taste of which is difficult to replicate in America. Thus there is Ashima's craving for *Muri* and mutton chops in *The Namesake*, Lilia's mother's search for mustard oil and green chilies in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", and Mrs. Sen's search for fresh fish in "Mrs. Sen's", both in *Interpreter of Maladies*. They also struggle with loneliness in America, like Ashima in *The Namesake* giving birth to her children without close family around, Mala struggling to adjust in "The Third and Final Continent" in *Interpreter of Maladies* and Ruma's mother insisting upon travelling back to India to meet her family despite the distances involved, and expenses incurred, in "Unaccustomed Earth" (*Unaccustomed Earth)*. The first generation must also come to terms with, and accept the generation gap with their children who live their lives by different parameters from their own. Hema has to accept Usha's boyfriends in "Hell-

Heaven", Ruma's parents too must accept her American husband Adam in "Unaccustomed Earth" both in *Unaccustomed Earth,* and Gogol's parents must accept architecture as his choice of career rather than medicine or law, and also accept his American girlfriends in *The Namesake.* The narratives are straight forward, linear, and consistent in temporal as well as spatial settings. Moreover, they show detailed psychological development of character that is representative of Lahiri's writing, making the stories come alive as seen through the eyes of the characters themselves.

In keeping with the plot structures favoured by Lahiri and Divakaruni the prose used by both writers is also distinctly varied. Where Divakaruni's talent as a poetess gives her prose a lyrical quality, Lahiri's prose is starkly simplistic without any of the poetic flourishes of Divakaruni's. Divakaruni delights in sensual descriptions of tastes, textures, smells, sounds, images and visuals of India dredged up from the resources of memory. Lahiri on the other hand, is direct in statement, with language unembellished by lengthy descriptions. Lahiri's prose, lucid in its simplicity, and conveying depth of meaning, also explores psychologically finessed characters with consummate mastery over language.

Divakaruni's prose abounds in Bengali words and terms such as *cha, chaer dokan, singara, mishti, palash* birds and so on, whose meanings she expects the reader to know, give her narratives an unmistakable flavor of India, and create a sense of ethnic exoticism. In *The Mistress of Spices,* all the chapters are named after Indian herbs and spices such as asafetida, ginger, *neem, halud, makaradwaj*, and *kalo jire*, whose meaning is explained in relevance to their medicinal properties in confluence with the kind of aid they provide to the characters Tilo gives them to. In *Queen of Dreams*, the Indian names of snacks that Rakhee and Belle offer on their revamped menu, such as *nimki, sandesh, singara, pakora*, are not just given to provide exotic flavours. They, in fact, convey a deeper, more significant message of retaining one's individual identity in order to create a meaningful space in the context of multicultural American society. Lahiri's more Americanized outlook on the other hand, is evident in her sparing use of Bengali terminology and giving careful explanation within the text, wherever she does use it.

Extensive use of metaphors is a distinctive feature of Lahiri's writing. Trains are a major motif, signifying a metaphorical transition between various stages of life in *The Namesake*. Ashoke's train accident leads to Gogol being given the writer's name; Gogol meets Maxine on a train; he also finds out about Moushumi's affair while on a train. All these are major turning points in the story that happen on trains. In "Unaccustomed Earth" the metaphor of gardening is used to describe the diaspora experience of uprooting and re-rooting in a very evocative manner. Food is another metaphor that is used repeatedly by Lahiri, in a manner so as to assert not only culture, but also power of the person who undertakes food work. Ashima's cravings during pregnancy in America in *The Namesake* transfer the food she craves into a metaphor of longing for the homeland. Ashima and Ashoke's continued dietary preference for Indian food all through their life in America becomes a metaphoric assertion of Indian culture, while their children's preference for American food becomes a symbol of multicultural assimilation of the second generation. This is also seen in the case of Ruma's son in "Unaccustomed Earth", who refuses to eat anything except macaroni and cheese.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni too uses food as a metaphor in various ways. *Queen of Dreams* uses traditional Indian food as a powerful metaphor asserting the importance of actively holding on to one's cultural roots in order to survive within the framework of Americanization. It is only when Rakhee and Belle embrace their roots in the form of a distinctive Indian menu in 'Kurma House', that it can survive the competition of the American chain store 'Coffee Café' across the street. The novel uses the food metaphor as a major motif to caution the immigrants in losing their original identity into anonymity in the face of the pressures of assimilation in America. It also reasserts the viability of Indian socio-cultural constructs like *adda* gatherings as a valid means of survival through social contact, a bulwark against loneliness and isolation in America.

Divakaruni does not create very detailed or in-depth characters, and often resorts to generalizations such as immigrant brides in her delineation. Yet, her range of characters is quite wide, ranging from the African martial arts expert, Kwesi, to Jagjit the school boy from Jalandhar, and Haroun, the Kashmiri taxi driver. With regard to wide range of characters, Divakaruni does not hesitate to create characters

far removed from the Bengali milieu, and this is also seen in the Punjabi characters of Belle and Jespal in *Queen of Dreams.* The men in her writing are mostly projected in a frame of reference limited to their interaction with the women, as is seen in the case of Jespal and Mr. Datta in *Queen of Dreams*, Sunil in *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*, and Raven in *The Mistress of Spices.* What compensates for the lack of in-depth depiction of characters, are other devices such as mythical symbolism associated with Raven and the myth of the singing serpents in *The Mistress of Spices.* In *Queen of Dreams*, the dream journals of Mrs. Datta, as well as the role of Maerd adequately compensate for the lack of in-depth character analysis, giving the narratives additional texture and complexity.

Lahiri's delineation of characters is stronger, and more individualistic than Divakaruni's. Characters like Bibi Halder in "The Treatment of Bibi Halder", Mr. Kapasi in "Interpreter of Maladies", Mrs. Sen in "Mrs Sen's" from *Interpreter of Maladies*, Gogol in *The Namesake,* and Ruma in "Unaccustomed Earth", all take on a life beyond the limitations of the text, to stay in the readers' mind long after the stories have been read. Lahiri's life like character renditions find a respondent chord in the readers' minds, and she fully exploits it to unfold her plots through the thoughts, voiced or unvoiced, of the characters themselves. Lahiri's narratives take on a deep poignancy because of her psychological exploration of the characters' minds. The story of Kaushik's childhood, traumatized because of his mother's illness and subsequent death, and its impact in rendering him anchorless, makes the novella "Hema and Kaushik" in *Unaccustomed Earth* a narrative of the evolvement of Kaushik's character. The same exploration of childhood influences that impact the development of character is seen in the case of Gogol in *The Namesake*, Usha in "Hell-Heaven", and Amit in "A Choice of Accomodations" in *Unaccustomed Earth.*

Thematically, both Divakaruni and Lahiri deal with a wide variety of diaspora issues in their work. Divakaruni's themes are predominantly concerned with diaspora women's efforts at forging new identities for themselves after immigration, using their memories of homeland as a resource, and combining it with newer influences. Thus, Divakaruni writes in a women–centric milieu in which women tap their inner strength to negotiate their way away from suppressive patriarchal control over their choices. There is a visible change from the first generation diaspora women who are

conditioned to adhere to traditions and remain entrenched in patriarchal values like Mrs. Datta in " Mrs. Datta writes a Letter", in *Lives of Strangers* or Daksha and Lalita in *Mistress of Spices* to the second generation which is thoroughly liberated, well-educated and career oriented. Stories like "A Perfect Life" and "Lives of Strangers" in *The Lives of Strangers* are about second generation women who question patriarchal strictures. *Queen of Dreams* is also about second generation women who are unhindered by patriarchy, as they set out to achieve professional goals while at the same time coming to terms with their cultural roots.

Although gender roles are often perceived as a function of culture, their questioning (women stepping out of the domestic sphere or men becoming proactive therein) point to a break away from patriarchal stereotypes. Male-Female stereotypes break down and roles become more fluidly defined in the face of socio-economic compulsions. "Clothes", "The Disappearance", "The Ultrasound" all recount a break from patriarchal control. Preeti in "Door", Abha and Meena in "Affair" and the women in "The Word Love", in Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage* all exercise independent careers as well as personal choices. The economic compulsion of pursuing careers as well as the freedom to do so accorded to women in America also results in the necessity of men contributing to the house-work. Twinkle's husband in "This Blessed House" is obliged to take over cooking when his liberated wife Twinkle refuses to do so. This is also seen in the case of Shukumar in Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter", because his wife holds a full time job while he stays at home, cooks, and house keeps. Both stories from Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* show a break from stereotypical patterns of behaviour.

Divakaruni being mainly focused on first generation diaspora perspective also writes on the theme of cultural clash. The brides in the stories of *Arranged Marriage* struggle with cultural Challenges after migration, having succumbed to the lure of NRI husbands. Often, the first generation women face disillusionment as they realize the constriction of the domestic space - an enforced solitude in absence of an extended family. "Doors" presents a picture of culture clash arising out of the vastly differing Indian and American concepts of personal space. "The Disappearance" is a story about revolt against domestic abuse – an assertion of personal dignity and freedom by a woman at the cost of her young child. Both these stories from *Arranged Marriage*

assert the personal freedom of choice exercised by women, in a manner that would be unimaginable in India.

The themes of Jhumpa Lahiri's works, on the other hand, show a definite evolution from the first generation diaspora concerns she perceived in her parent's acculturation, to second generation issues from *Interpreter of Maladies* through *The Namesake* to *Unaccustomed Earth*. The themes show development in that they project women making an attempt to get educated and exercising liberated choices in professional as well as personal or domestic spaces. Speaking in a gender neutral voice, Lahiri is not as women–centric as Divakaruni and even has a male protagonist as the central character in her novel, *The Namesake*. Moreover, her immigrants are not traumatized by immigration, discrimination, racism, or abuse like Divakaruni's often are, and they consciously accept that the cultural choices they've made are a necessity for progress in America. Lahiri's themes are concerned with human predicaments focusing on second generation diasporic dilemmas of miscegenation, erosion of culture and mixed identity. Belonging to the second generation Diaspora herself, Lahiri is fully cognizant of the contradictory parental and peer pressures faced by characters like Gogol in *The Namesake* who suffers an identity crisis, Hema in "Hema and Kaushik, or Usha in "Hell-Heaven" (*Unaccustomed Earth*). In addition, the second generation diaspora's feelings of alienation , from its Indian roots and it's struggle to preserve some part of them while living in America is a theme not only of *The Namesake* but also of the stories of *Unaccustomed Earth*. Slipping of culture is clearly seen in characters like Ruma in "Unaccustomed Earth' who stops cooking Bengali food because no one insists on it here, and there is just too much effort involved. Lahiri also thematizes the isolation and nostalgia of the first generation although this is done in a very limited way through characters like Mrs. Sen in "Mrs Sen's" and Mala in "The Third and Final Continent" in *The Interpreter of Maladies*, Ruma's mother in "Unaccustomed Earth" and Ashima in *The Namesake*.

As far as the endings go, both Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri conclude their narratives in an open-ended fashion. There is no neat tying up of loose ends and no ideal resolution. Endings for both writers are unhampered by wistfulness or nostalgia, and are sad or bitter-sweet much like real life, not happily ever after like fairy tales. The ending of Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* needs a heavy hand

with supernatural elements to conclude the narrative, while Rakhee and Belle are left struggling with the traumatic aftermath of 9/11 in *Queen of Dreams*. Sudha and Anjali too can only achieve an uneasy truce in *The Vine of Desire*. In Lahiri's novella "Hema and Kaushik", the doomed lovers must go on separate paths and not live happily ever after. Gogol in *The Namesake* too has to come to terms with his father's death and his own divorce, both unhappy circumstances, and move on in life in search of happiness. Both writers give a feel of verisimilitude, in that the endings of their stories do not indicate the ending of their characters' lives. Their lives ostensibly carry on until faced with the finality - death. Like real life, the stories too do have neat resolutions and must be left open to extension and continuation. This is seen in the extension of *Sister of My Heart* to *The Vine of Desire*.

By extensive use of Indian mysticism, magical elements, and Indian-American folklore, Divakaruni suggests that the chaos and trauma American society is being subjected to, engendering mistrust and hatred, can only be resolved by utilizing vast hitherto nascent reserves of wisdom of ancient civilizations. By sticking to the themes of Indian culture Divakaruni suggests that the fractured American society needs to accept and use ancient wisdom of other communities now associated with it through various Diasporas, in order to come to terms with itself as a thriving multicultural society. One way to achieve this, according to Divakaruni, is by retaining an independent cultural identity in the diaspora situation. Divakaruni's literary landscape consciously reflects the hyphenated Indian-American identity, accepting the status of the other within American multicultural ethos while also asserting the right to be a part of the mainstream. Her repeated forays into mysticism and connecting it with modern diaspora concerns in her work clearly indicates this to be the path modern society needs to follow in order to solve its problems.

Lahiri, by dealing with Indian culture, only as a part of the diaspora backdrop; as an essential part of the diaspora identity but not an actively asserted one, is equally unequivocal about the future trajectory of Indian Diaspora. According to her narratives, some dilution of native culture is unavoidable and necessary so as to adjust seamlessly in America. To some extent, living by the values that govern the place one is located in is wise if one is to find one's place in society and not always feel like an outsider peering in from the peripheries. Thus, Gogol and Sonia are allowed by their

parents to eat American food, and celebrate Halloween and Christmas with far greater fervor than Indian festivals in *The Namesake* as is Lilia in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" in *Interpreter of Maladies.*

Both Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, proclaim through their writings that Indian diaspora in America is here to stay and moreover, is vital to the demographics of the new world order. The philosophy of multiculturalism is the only viable way forward for a society desirous of progress and happiness and time is ripe for the Indian diaspora to emphatically assert itself as a vital part of the American mainstream. Moreover, both writers have used their literary output as a medium to articulate their concerns as well as their vision of an inclusive multicultural American society, and their success can be gauged by universal acceptance of their works in form of literary awards and best-selling numbers of books sales. Indian diaspora today is sophisticated and global in its outlook rather than provincial and tradition bound. It is equally at home in America as it is in India, perhaps more so, having decided to step away from the fringes of society and march into the mainstream. Comfortable travelling the world, modern diaspora no longer comes winging back to India instinctively like homing pigeons return to roost. Instead they prefer to maintain contact over electronic media and have family and friends visit them in America.

These writers have both successfully asserted the fruitfulness of the Indian diaspora's negotiation between Indian and American cultures to create a permanent as well as prominent place for itself in America. Hence, the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri are a celebration, not only of Indian culture and values, but also their reinvention and assertion in a valid, viable manner in the diasporic American context.