



Indian Spaces in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*

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DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.12.4.184](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.12.4.184)



Article info

Article Received: 20/11/2024
Article Accepted: 24/12/2024
Published online: 31/12/2024

Abstract

As a second generation of Bengali settlers in America, Jhumpa Lahiri had experienced identity confusion since her childhood. Shuttling between Indian and America both geologically and culturally had rendered her divided identity. Writing is her way to cope with the identity anxiety. In Jhumpa Lahiri's debut *Interpreter of Maladies*, identity is one of its profound themes. In this short story collection, through depicting and reimagining the Indian spaces, Jhumpa Lahiri has conveyed her thinking of identity problem. By a closing reading and textual analysis of Lahiri's debut work, this article divides Lahiri's thinking and exploration of identity into three phases: phase of identity anxiety, phase of identity combination and phase of identity recognition. While in those three phases, Indian spaces have always been the unignored roles in expressing the writer's thinking. In the present article, an attempt is made to show how the Indian spaces have reflected Jhumpa Lahiri's thinking and exploration of identity issue.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri; *Interpreter of Maladies*; identity; Indian space; short story.

Jhumpa Lahiri (1967-), an Indian-American writer, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction with her extraordinary first short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), became the youngest winner in the history of this prize. Lahiri displays her marvelous ability in the writing of short story. Apart from the Pulitzer Prize, she has won numerous other literary awards, such as the O. Henry Short Story Award and the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. Born in London, but Lahiri moved to America with her Bengali parents when she was three years old. From an early age, she has

shuttled between India and America with her parents. Therefore, the issues of diaspora, the difficulties of immigrants and the question of identity have given continuous inspirations for Lahiri's writing. Because of her Indian American identity, scholars often focus on the immigrant's diaspora experiences in her writing. After exploring the textual and thematic structure of Lahiri debut, Angelo Monaco regards Lahiri as "the interpreter of the new Indian diaspora" (72) and maintains that "*Interpreter of Maladies* sheds new light on the themes of diasporic literature" (75). Similarly, D.

Sumalatha considers *Interpreter of Maladies* is “a complex portrayal of family life of Indian immigrants trying to saddle two cultures-their Indian heritage and the American dream” (353). Since Indian foods, clothes, houses and other Indian elements are frequently seen in Lahiri’s writing, some critics pay their attention to exploring how these Indian elements are connected with the themes. Susan Koshy, who has noticed the spatial elements, notes that in *Interpreter of Maladies* “the stories zoom in on small happenings and circumscribed settings, maintaining a spatial focus on the home and a formal and thematic focus on the slight, inconspicuous, and fleeting events and affects in daily life” (595). The space has played a primary role in expressing the theme in Lahiri’s writing. In Judith Caesar’s view, “empty American inner spaces are at the center of the work of Jhumpa Lahiri” (52). However, many critics have ignored the connection between Indian spaces in Lahiri’s debut and her thinking about self-identity. On the one hand, as the second generation of Bengali immigrant, Lahiri has gone through the difficulties of constructing her self-identity just as her characters. In *My Two Lives* She once said that “When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things” (44). On the other hand, in her first collection Indian spaces were not only depicted repeatedly, but also were the primary backgrounds in some stories. In this paper, I argue that Lahiri had made full use of the spatial writing, especially the metaphoric functions of Indian spaces in this collection, which showed characters’ life conditions and emotional experiences, as well as implied Lahiri’s experience and reflections about constructing her self-identity.

I. Indian spaces and identity anxiety.

Grew up in Rhode Island, when Lahiri talked about her childhood as a descendant of the Bengali settlers, in *My Two Lives* she claimed that “my perception as a young girl was that I

fell short at both ends, shuttling between two dimensions that had nothing to do with one another” (44). As a person who has shuttled between India and America, Lahiri in her first short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, had presented her reflection for cultural identity as well as observations about immigrant problems in the Third World. When exploring the artistic state of exile, another Indian American writer Bharati Mukherjee had maintained that, “in my fiction, and in my Canadian experience, ‘immigrants’ were lost souls, put upon and pathetic” (ix). While in Lahiri’s first collection, through depicting the Indian spaces repeatedly in two stories *Mrs. Sen’s* and *A Real Durwan*, she has conveyed immigrants’ pathic and losing souls state vividly.

Mrs. Sen’s is the story of an Indian woman who has lived in American after her arranged marriage with an Indian immigrant. For Mrs. Sen, in this new land life is so different from India that she finds it’s hard to adapt to. Babysitting an American boy Eliot who lives with his single but busy mother, alleviates Mrs. Sen’s isolated and gloomy life. And with this American boy, Mrs. Sen has shared abundant colorful memories about India. Although the story of *Mrs. Sen’s* happens in America, and the protagonist Mrs. Sen has lived in American campus, she has spent a lot of time in recollecting the Indian space. And she has been telling Eliot about her recollections since the first day of the boy’s coming. In her sharing with the American boy, readers can find that the Indian spaces in her memories are always harmonious and warm. For instance, when she is chopping things on the floor, she remembers on celebration day in India women in neighborhood would: “bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night” (116). In her memory, there is a crowded and joyous scene that a group of Indian women are cutting up vegetables. This is an exposed Indian space where neighbors help each other

and work together pleasantly, which shows the harmony and warmth in the Indian space. However, it is when Mrs. Sen is cutting up vegetables alone in her living room that she tells Eliot about this Indian space. Hence, there is an obvious space comparison between her memory and her reality. As for cutting up vegetables, women work together in India while Mrs. Sen chops alone in America; women are in an open outdoor space while Mrs. Sen is inside her living room. Therefore, the openness and liveliness of Indian space has an apparent contrast on the closeness and loneliness of American space.

Then Mrs. Sen recollects more details about the Indian space. In her memory, although neighbors in Indian have no telephone in the house, people only need to yell a little louder, then all the neighbors have come to share the news and come to offer their help. In this space, obviously, the connection between members in the community is intimate. Without the modern technology, the telephone, people in this space can still build solid and sound relationship and make effective communication, which presents the harmony and warmth in the Indian space again. Nonetheless, Mrs. Sen's memory about the Indian space has rendered Eliot remember his home and his neighbor immediately. His neighbor, a young couple, hold a huge party on Labor's Day without inviting Eliot and his mother. Then in the late night, people in the party begin dancing on the terrace, which makes loud noise and disturbs Eliot's mother's sleep. Furiously, his mother finds out the neighbor's number and calls them to be quiet. Thus, there is no doubt that in Eliot's memory, his family's relation with the neighbor is aloof and dreadful. Hence, there are also apparent contrasts between Mrs. Sen's memory and Eliot's memory. At first, Eliot's neighbor holds a huge party but without informing them, which is so different from the warmhearted neighbors in Indian community. Next, the tense relation between neighbors represented by the loud noise and immediate call contrasts the harmonious atmosphere in Indian community.

These contrasts reveal the cultural difference between the American community and Indian community. Now Mrs. Sen has moved from the Indian spaces to an American space. However, as an immigrant, from India to America, Mrs. Sen maintains her Indian lifestyle and accustoms as possible as she can, which shows her inability to deal with this spatial difference. But surrounded by American spaces, she finds it's impossible to keep the former life in reality. Therefore, she indulges herself in the memory of Indian space. For Mrs. Sen, the recollection of Indian spaces is the way to master the past and construct the moment, as well as the way for self-existence. However, the more harmonious and passionate the Indian spaces are in her recollection, the more depressed and isolated her reality is. Hence, the memories of Indian space not only reveal her failure to tackle the cultural difference, but also reflect her cultural rootlessness.

If Indian spaces in *Mrs. Sen's* has implied the protagonist's cultural rootlessness, then in *A Real Durwan*, the Indian space presents the character's homelessness. The story of *A Real Durwan* is about an Indian refugee named Boori Ma, who comes to an old building in Calcutta to live and regards it as a shelter. In order to settle down in the building, she shoulders the responsibility of the doorman for the building as well as the sweeper of the stairwell. However, because of some changes inside the old building, ultimately Boori Ma is exiled out of the building by the residents. Although the set is in an Indian building, there is also a parallel Indian space which exists in Boori Ma's memory. The protagonist is living in the huge gap between those two Indian spaces.

Because of the partition between India and Pakistan, Boori Ma has become a refugee and separated from her husband and four daughters, a two-story brick house, and a number of coffer boxes. The turmoil has deprived her of almost everything. Though she can stay inside the building, the place she sleeps every night is behind the collapsible gate,

between the building and the outside world. there is no wall to separate her from the outside world, she is living in-between two worlds. The Indian space for Boori Ma's living is obviously shabby and miserable, most importantly it is a half-open space without warmth, safety and privacy. All her life is exposed to the residents' eyes. She has no haven to place her secret and privacy. The only way to find a private space is to search inside. Therefore, like Mrs. Sen, Boori Ma also indulges herself in recollecting and retelling the past. In her memory, life in the past was often full of prosperity and dignity. The family once had a pond, full of fish, on their property, and they would eat goat twice a week. Besides, on her third daughter's wedding the guest washed their fingers in pewter bowls, and the rice was cooked in rosewater. The abundance of foods reflects the wealth and stability while the daughter's wedding reflects the identity and dignity of her prior life. Hence, this is a totally different Indian space from which she is living in. From the past to the present, the variation of Indian space where Boori Ma lives in has revealed her diaspora and homelessness. The wealth and stability have evaporated with the partition and the identity and dignity is impossible to rebuild in the old building. Meanwhile, the Indian space, the old building where she lives can't really embrace her, but renders her sink into a more struggling situation. Hence, Boori Ma can confront the present only with the help of recalling the past, because although she may have nothing, she still has the memory of the past. However, the recollection and the retelling of the past cannot change the Indian space where she lives in, and instead of helping her earn residents' sympathy and respect, they only arouse others' irony and derision. What's worse, finally Boori Ma is forced to leave the old building by residents, which deprives her of temporary shelter again. Thus, being dislodged from the old building means Boori Ma experiences homelessness once again.

To sum up, in both *Mrs. Sen's* and *A Real Durwan*, the Indian space plays an essential role in presenting characters' rootlessness and homelessness. In some degree both Mrs. Sen's cultural rootlessness and Boori Ma's homelessness reflect the writer Jhumpa Lahiri's anxiety and confusion about her self-identity. As a second generation of Bengali immigrants, Lahiri has confronted with the anxiety of identity since her childhood. Shuttling between American culture and Indian culture renders her cannot gain the sense of belonging, as she once mentioned in *My Two Lives*: "when I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s, I felt neither Indian nor American" (44). Because of her divided identity, Lahiri considered herself an incomplete person. For Lahiri, writing is her way to ease the identity anxiety, as she wrote in her first Italian book *In Other Words* (2016) "I've been writing since I was a child in order to forget my imperfection, in order to hide in the background of life" (113). Undoubtedly, as the debut of her writing career, some stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* have conveyed her identity anxiety. Specifically, the protagonist's cultural rootlessness in *Mrs. Sen's* is the picture of Lahiri's disposition of cultural identity, while Boori Ma's homelessness in *A Real Durwan* is the reflection of Lahiri's lack of the sense of belonging. Both the disposition of cultural identity and the lacking of sense of belongs reveal Lahiri's anxiety about her cultural identity.

II. Indian spaces and identity combination

In the second phase surrounding the cultural identity, Lahiri has endeavored to mingle the Indian part and American part together, as she once wrote: "what drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life" (45). While in her first collection, Lahiri's consciousness of mingling these two cultural identities has been echoed in the two stories *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar*. The story of *Interpreter of Maladies* is

about an Indian tour guide, Mr. Kapasi who leads an Indian-American family, the Das's, to visit the Sun Temple in Konarak. On the way to the destination, Mrs. Das learns about Mr. Kapasi works in a doctor's office as an interpreter to explain what the Gujarati patients say. She is fascinated by the Mr. Kapasi's responsibility in the doctor's office. And Mr. Kapasi wonders that she would like to make friends with him, and they can keep in touch with each other by letter even after this journey. But unexpectedly Mrs. Das has revealed a secret that disturbs her for eight years to Mr. Kapasi, and asks him for help. After knowing the secret that Bobby, one of Mrs. Das's children, is not Mr. Das's son, but the consequence of Mrs. Das's adultery with a Punjabi friend, Mr. Kapasi is so nonplussed that he can't suggest any remedy that Mrs. Das desires. And in the end of the story, Mr. Kapasi witnesses the slip of paper with his address on it fluttered away from Mrs. Das's clothes. The set of this story is in India and Lahiri has depicted the Indian historic relics the Sun Temple circumstantially, creating an Indian space with profound historical and cultural atmosphere. In order to visit the Sun Temple, the Das's come to this Indian space. Thus, the Indian space firstly has offered the opportunity and room for Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das's interaction.

But these two people instead of communicating about profound history and culture of this Indian space, they mainly focus on their personal affairs. These two people, both the Indian and the American, are desperately eager to reveal their hearts to the outside world. For Mr. Kapasi, "he had dreamed of being an interpreter for diplomats and dignitaries, resolving conflicts between people and nations" (53). However, because of the family burden, he has to work part-time in the doctor's office to interpret for patients. But he considers this part-time job as a symbol of failure. Apart from his unrealized dream, an aloof relationship with wife makes his life more dismayed. He cannot share his dreams and ambitions with his wife,

he even cannot talk with her in English. Nevertheless, different from his wife, Mrs. Das shows great interests in his part-time job and regards it romantic. More importantly, Mrs. Das is an American, so his correspondence with her "would fulfill his dream, of serving as an interpreter between nations" (60). Therefore, he has a strong desire to make friends with her. As for Mrs. Das, married at a very young age, all her life is about endless housework and childcare. What's worse, her adultery with husband's friend tortures her moral and conscience for eight years. As she knows about Mr. Kapasi is an interpreter for patients, she considers him as the doctor who can give her some remedy to cure or relieve her moral pain. Therefore, in this historical and cultural Indian space, instead of focusing on the relics, the two characters have both been sunk into their respective dilemma. Robert Haas asserts that "throughout, the contrast of their blighted lives to the glorious vitality of the Sun Temple sculptures adds bite and poignancy to the comparison" (6). Above all, these two persons both have the need to communicate with each other. In the eyes of Mr. Kapasi, his interaction with Mrs. Das will not only focus on some personal affairs, but also be a cultural bridge between Indian and America, as he wondered "he would explain things to her, things about India, and she would explain things to him about America" (60). In fact, Mr. Kapasi's viewpoint has disclosed Lahiri's consciousness to mingle her cultural identities, in the story she has created a space for the happening of conversation between the Indian and the American. But the process and the consequence of this conversation fail to achieve the mutual respect and understanding. Mrs. Das's interest for Mr. Kapasi is out of her moral pain. Therefore, once she finds that Mr. Kapasi cannot give any remedy for her, she ends their conversation immediately. On the other hand, the dumbfounded Mr. Kapasi has no chance to express himself. Apparently, Mr. Kapasi is the passive side in this communication. It reflects the inequality and inefficiency in this

conversation. Symbolically, their interaction also reveals the situation that Lahiri mingled her cultural identities. Living in her Bengali parents' house, she acted in the Bengali way. But once out of the house, she was surrounded by American culture in every perspective. The unequal power of the two cultures echoes the two sides in Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das's conversation. Moreover, with the time goes by Lahiri has experienced a wider range of American culture, which gradually brings a much stronger influence to her. Then for Lahiri it is more and more difficult to strike a balance between those two cultures. Consequently, when Lahiri endeavored to mingle her Indian and American elements, the American culture always has a more powerful influence to her, as she wrote in *My Two Lives* "at home I followed the customs of my parents, speaking Bengali and eating rice with my fingers. These ordinary facts seemed part of a secret, utterly alien way of life, and I took pains to hide them from my American friends" (44). The hiding of Lahiri's Bengali life resonates Mr. Kapasi's passive voice, implying the dominating power of American culture. However, despite neither Mr. Kapasi nor Mrs. Das has achieved their respective desire, the happening of this conversation itself has reflected the endeavor for mutual understanding between Indian and American, as well as presented Lahiri's thinking about combining her Indian and American cultural identities.

Similar to *Interpreter of Maladies*, the set in *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* is also an Indian space. The story of *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* is about an Indian woman Bibi Haldar who has a weird disease since her childhood. She has lost her parents and lived with her cousin since her father died. She would tumult and shudder when the relapse comes. After experiencing a variety of treatments, Bibi still can't recover from her illness. But the community are warmhearted and kind to help her when she goes through the relapse. Because of Bibi's disease, her cousin has abandoned her. After

that she has lived alone, but unexpectedly she is found pregnant by the community. In the end, after giving birth a baby, Bibi has become a normal woman, getting rid of her illness. In this story, Lahiri has created an Indian community where the neighbors are so enthusiastic and warmhearted. As Bibi's neighbors, "we" have showed great sympathy and care to her. When the disease attacks her, nearly all the witnesses are eager to assist in immediately: "the opener of soda bottles pinned down her thrashing limbs. The vendor of sliced cucumbers attempted to unclasp her fingers. One of us doused her with water from the pond" (168). Apart from her illness, when she is in her stable condition, "we" also concern about her. Whenever "we" meet her, "we" will assure her we are always by the side of her, no matter when and what help she needs, she can come to us. It is obvious that the help and care "we" showed to Bibi have exceeded a neighbor's responsibility. Compared with the cousin who had abandoned her, therefore, in some degree the whole Indian community can be considered as Bibi's family. However, the help "we" offer and the concern "we" show to Bibi do not make any sense to cure her disease. "We" cannot find any method to ease her pain and any effective treatment to cure her. "Apart from keeping her company...there was little we can do to improve the situation" (167), which implies that even with the care and help of family, Bibi still cannot get rid of her disease. Therefore, related to Lahiri's growth experience, the diseased Bibi is the incarnation of the writer who is confused by her identity problem. The Indian community is the symbol of the Indian culture. And these warmhearted neighbors are the symbol of her family. As "our" help and concern cannot cure Bibi's disease, her family's company or in another words, Indian culture cannot solve Lahiri's identity problem.

Having experienced nearly all the methods, finally a doctor concludes that the only hope to cure Bibi is a marriage. Since then, Bibi is fascinated by this diagnosis and prepared

to get married. The need for a marriage implies the need for a new identity. Finally, after becoming a mother, Bibi is as normal as any woman in the community. Apparently, it reveals that getting a new identity is the effective way to cure her. However, due to her illness, actually no man is willing to marry her in this Indian community, which means that she cannot gain a new identity in that Indian space. Then who is the father of Bibi's boy? "We" have ransacked Bibi's living room for the sign of intrusion and assault, but the room is swept and in order. And in the later several years, "we" continue to search the man who had disgraced her, but all the investigations are in vain. Therefore, the failure of "our" investigation identifies that the man who made Bibi pregnant is not from the Indian space. Although Lahiri hasn't mentioned where that man came from, it can be referred that the man most possibly came from outside the Indian community. Meanwhile what shouldn't be ignored is that despite the outsider made Bibi pregnant, it is "we", the Indian community, who take care of her in her pregnancy, help her give birth the baby, as well as guide her how to be a mother. That means it is the combination of the outsider and the community that renders Bibi get and maintain the new identity, and then cures her illness. Since the above has discussed that the Indian community is the symbol of Indian culture, hence the outside space of the Indian community may be regarded as the symbol of American culture, accordingly the outsider is from American culture. Therefore, the effective treatment for Bibi's disease reveals Lahiri's consciousness to get a new identity by combine her Indian and American identities.

To sum up, the Indian spaces in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* have conveyed Lahiri's thinking and exploration of combining her Indian and American identities. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, the two characters' communication has unfolded this exploration in the Indian space. Though the consequence is not satisfied, at least it conveys the endeavor to do

it. While in *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar*, the Indian community is the symbol of Indian culture, which cannot solve the writer's identity problem alone. But the cure of the protagonist implies the possible positive result of combining the Indian and American identities.

III. Indian spaces and identity recognition

After craving for the balance between the Indian and American identities, Lahiri comes to another phase, in which she is content with the finding that her American side begins to gain ascendancy and weight. In her sight, "the immigrant's journey, no matter how ultimately rewarding, is founded on departure and deprivation, but it secures for the subsequent generation a sense of arrival and advantage" (45). As the second generation of Bengali settlers, Lahiri's sense of arrival, namely her recognition for American identity, is implied in two stories in her debut, *This Blessed House* and *The Third and Final Continent*.

This Blessed House tells a story about an Indian immigrant Sanjeev and his new wife Twinkle. The couple had just bought a house in America. When decorating the house, they found that many Christian stuffs appeared in or around the house. For these stuffs, Sanjeev opposed them violently and intended to throw them away at the beginning while Twinkle liked them and insisted in keeping them in the house. Almost every Christian stuff that Sanjeev intended to dismiss would be saved in the house by Twinkle in the end. But on their housewarming party, Twinkle found a bust of Christ for which Sanjeev considered it holy and beautiful, holding it tightly in his arms instead of throwing it away. In this story, although the set is in America, there is an apparent Indian space, the psychological space of Sanjeev. Despite living in America for many years, the male character still persisted in his Indian identity. When he was a student in America, every evening he would walk across the Mass. Avenue bridge to order Mughlai chicken with spinach from his favorite Indian restaurant. In

order to have Indian foods Sanjeev would like to pass through the American spaces every night. His persistence in Indian foods is the persistence in his Indian identity. Besides, when finding Christian stuffs in the house, he considered them "each was in its own way so silly. Clearly, they lacked a sense of sacredness" (139). As a Hindu, his disapproving attitude to the Christian items also mirrors his persistence to Indian identity. Therefore, it might be concluded that Sanjeev's psychological space is still an Indian space.

But after marriage this Indian space is not as stable as before. The change of this Indian space is reflected by Sanjeev's emotional change to Christian stuffs. In the beginning, when he saw the white porcelain effigy of Christ, he asked Twinkle: "at the very least get rid of that idiotic statue" (137). His hatred to the effigy of Christ implies that this Indian space is still powerful and sound. However, later more and more Christian items appear in his house, but he cannot throw them away, which gradually altered his psychological space. The turning point of this change can be found in his quarrel with Twinkle about a statue of the virgin Mary. When Twinkle found the statue on the lawn, she would like to maintain it in the original place. But Sanjeev was afraid that neighbors might mistakenly thought he's a Christian, so he demonstrated a more resilient opposition than ever before. He even had a violent quarrel with her. So as to keep his religious belief, the misunderstanding was not accepted by Sanjeev, which reveals his determination to keep Indian identity. But the result of their quarrel was his compromise with Twinkle, leaving the statue of virgin Mary on the lawn. His compromise with Twinkle implies his failure in keeping Indian identity. Thus, from violent opposition to reluctant acceptance, Sanjeev's changing attitude to the statue of virgin Mary reflects the falling of his psychological space. Moreover, another crucial turning point of his changing attitude to Christian items happened in their housewarming party when Twinkle found a

solid silver bust of Christ. In the eyes of Sanjeev, this bust of Christ "unlike the other things they'd found, this contained dignity, solemnity, beauty even" (158). He pressed the bust to his ribs carefully. Hence, there is a sharp change in his attitude to Christian things, from "idiotic" to "contained dignity, solemnity, beauty". Accordingly, this change also implies the collapse of the Indian space in Sanjeev's psychology.

But why would Sanjeev alter his attitude to Christian items? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to focus on the turning points of his attitude. Whenever Sanjeev shifted his attitude to these things, his wife, Twinkle, was always here. And it's his compromise with Twinkle that caused his changing attitude. Then why did Sanjeev compromise with her all the time? Was it out of love? The answer was no, because in the story Lahiri had emphasized that "he did not know if he loved her" (148). In fact, Sanjeev did not know what love was, only what he thought it was not. Lahiri described detailly Sanjeev's cognitive of what's not love:

It was not love, he had decided, returning to an empty carpeted condominium each night, and using only the top fork in his cutlery drawer, and turning away politely at those weekend dinner parties when the other men eventually put their arms around the waists of their wives and girlfriends, leaning over every now and again to kiss their shoulder or necks. (148-149)

From this description, readers can find that Sanjeev was isolated and lonely, above all, he had begun to realize the need of a wife and a family, namely the need to settle down. The appearance of Twinkle had fulfilled his need, so he married with this woman whom he had known for only four months. When he bought the house, he had already made up his mind that "he and Twinkle should live there together, forever" (146). Therefore, Sanjeev's appetite to settle down in America was too apparent to ignore. Therefore, it was his consciousness of

settlement that caused him compromise with Twinkle, altered his attitudes to Christian things and crashed the Indian space. In sum, the collapse of the Indian space in the protagonist's inner world reflects his consciousness of settlement.

Compared with Sanjeev who endeavored to main the Indian space in *This Blessed House*, the narrator in *The Third and Final Continent* has excluded the Indian space since the beginning. *The Third and Final Continent* is a story about how an Indian immigrant settled down in America. At first the narrator recounted his departure from India in 1964 to study in London. Then he flew back to Calcutta to marry a woman named Mala arranged by his family. A week after his marriage, the narrator flew to Boston, accepting his new job in Dewey library. In the beginning of his work in the library, he rented a room in an American Mrs. Croft's house, a 103-year-old lady who lived alone. Mrs. Croft surprised that an American flag was on the moon and she asked the narrator to repeat "splendid". Thus, each night after work the narrator would spend a few minutes with her and told her the flag on the moon was splendid. But because his wife Mala would come to America, he had to move to a bigger house. When Mala was with him, the narrator was not used to her. One day the narrator took Mala to visit Mrs. Croft, and she was declared as a perfect lady by Mrs. Croft. Since then, the narrator got along well with Mala. Later they bought their house, settled down in America. Although the main story happened in America, the Indian space was hard to be ignored. Similar to the story in *Mrs. Sen's*, the Indian space in this story was also in character's memories. However, the Indian space in the narrator's memories was not as harmonious as Mrs. Sen's, instead it was chaotic and insensible. Because of the widowhood, his mother went insane, and sank into a world of chaos. When the narrator recollected his mother's room in India, he remembered that in that room he had watched her die on the bed, and "had found her playing

with her excrement in her final days" (183). Therefore, because of his insane mother, the Indian space was full of chaos and insensibility. So as to run away from that Indian space, the narrator flew far away to study in London, then worked in Boston. When he lived in Mrs. Croft's house, he followed her requirement to say "splendid" about an American flag on the moon. Later he learned about that Mrs. Croft had raised her children alone after being a widow, he compared her with his mother, which mortified him deeply. Therefore, the difference between his mother and Mrs. Croft rendered him realize apart from a chaotic and insensible Indian space, there was an independent and rational American space, in which Mrs. Croft was the symbol. His submission and mortification revealed that he had considered Mrs. Croft as his spiritual mother in some degree. Because of Mrs. Croft, in America, the narrator found a completely different space from the Indian space in his memory. This space was independent, sensible and strong. While the chaotic insensible Indian space had aroused the narrator's consciousness to run away, this American space attracted him to settle down.

When the narrator learned that he was the first boarder Mrs. Croft ever referred to as a gentleman, he realized this American space had recognized him. However, Mala's arrival had shadowed his sense of belonging to America. The narrator was unaccustomed to her Indian clothes, cooking and living habits. Therefore, after living with Mala for a week, the narrator still regarded her as a stranger. In fact, beyond the narrator's aloofness to Mala, it's his rejection to face the Indian space embodied on Mala. The narrator once had shared a bed with Mala in a room next to the tiny room belonged to his mother. Thus, in the narrator's eyes, Mala had the shadow of that chaotic Indian space. Her arrival would undoubtedly arouse the narrator's memory about that Indian space where he had run away. Mala's existence in his life would undoubtedly shadow the

consciousness of settlement. But since the narrator had made his mind to settle down in America, he had to tackle with this issue. One day he took Mala to visit Mrs. Croft, his spiritual mother and the symbol of American space. After scrutinizing Mala from top to toe, Mrs. Croft declared "she is a perfect lady" (196). The narrator knew that Mrs. Croft's praise to Mala implied that the American space had recognized and accepted her just as Mrs. Croft praised him as a gentleman. Meanwhile, Mrs. Croft's praise also repelled the shadow of Indian space from Mala, therefore, the narrator felt "that moment in Mrs. Croft's parlor as the moment when the distance between Mala and me began to lessen" (197). Without the Indian space's shadow, Mala's arrival had strengthened the narrator's consciousness of settlement. In order to create their common memories in American spaces, with Mala the narrator explored the city, prospect street, Harvard square, Charles River, Harvard yard and Prudential building. The memories they created together in those American space had taken place of the memories about that chaotic and insensible Indian space, which would definitely support their settlement in America. In the end of the story, the narrator compared himself with astronauts. In his view, the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, while he had "remained in this new world for nearly thirty years" (199). As the astronauts' journey to the moon, the narrator's settlement in America was also an achievement. Moreover, they both went to a new world, but the narrator had remained in the world for thirty years while the astronauts stayed mere hours. This comparison has revealed the narrator's pride in settling in America, in leaving that chaotic Indian space. Also, thirty years is long enough to prove a fact that the narrator had rooted in America. His consciousness of settlement finally and successfully transferred into a sense of achievement.

To sum up, the Indian spaces in *This Blessed House* and *The Third and Final Continent*

have a close association with the protagonist's consciousness of settlement. In *This Blessed House*, this consciousness is revealed through the collapse of the Sanjeev's psychological Indian space while in *The Third and Final Continent*, it is disclosed by the narrator's escape from the chaotic and insensible Indian space. In both stories, the Indian space for the character is the space they decide to give up or run away, because they believe that they are not belonging to that Indian space or the Indian space is not belonging to them. Therefore, by arriving to a new land, America, they redevelop a consciousness of settlement. In fact, the characters' consciousness of settlement resonates Lahiri's recognition for her American identity. In *My Two Lives*, at the very beginning she said: "I have lived in the United States for almost 37 years and anticipate growing old in this country" (44). Unquestionably, it reflects that despite of the identity problem, Lahiri has embraced her American identity and been content with it.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, in the collection of *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri has depicted various Indian spaces. Each Indian space has its characteristics, but no matter where it is, in America or in India, in reality or in memory and psychology, it has a close relation with characters. By analyzing those Indian spaces and their relations with the characters, the paper argues that whatever emotions the character shows to the Indian space, it reflects Lahiri's thinking about her cultural identity, which mainly contains three phases: identity anxiety, identity combination and identity recognition. Specifically in her first collection, from exploring the consciousness of diaspora among female exiles in the Third World (*Mrs. Sen's* and *A Real Durwan*), to endeavor to mingle her Indian part and American part in the cultural crevice (*Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar*), then to observe immigrant's consciousness of settlement (*This Blessed House* and *The Third and Final Continent*), Lahiri has

conjoined her thinking of cultural identity with the Indian spaces in the stories, paving a path that combines personal experience with artistic exploration. However, what's worth noticing is that after about two decades, Jhumpa Lahiri's has written a new memoir, *In Other Words* (2016). Originally written in Italian, the book was then translated into English by Ann Goldstein. Averting from Bengali and English, Lahiri has sunk herself into a totally new language, Italian, for many years. It is the language that she has chosen for herself, because Italian is an enormously different language from Bengali and English. The choice of learning Italian and writing in it, on the one hand, isolate her from the identity issue between American and Indian; on the other hand, it may also convey Lahiri's courage and determination to create a new identity for herself. Thus, her first Italian book *In Other Words* presents her endeavor to search for a new identity, as Mohammad Shafiqul Islam argues that the book is "a revelation of her inner world. It shows how strong the impulse of a writer can be to seek a new identity when they feel a sense of alienation and ambivalence" (43). Using a third language Italian, in *In Other Words* Lahiri expressed that "I feel more than ever I am a writer without a definitive language, without origin, without definition. Whether it's an advantage or a disadvantage I wouldn't know" (131), which reveals that her sense of rootlessness in language, origin and definition still sticks around her. This might imply that as an Indian-American writer, Lahiri's meditation about immigrant's cultural identity is still ongoing.

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