

# Jhumpa Lahiri's Lowland: Study of Female Psyche

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## ***Abstract:***

*Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the eminent writers in Diasporic Literature. In Jhumpa Lahiri's work The Lowland (2013), the character's portrays different complexities in their nature which results in the traumatic experiences of their emotions. The present paper uses psychoanalytical theory for understanding the behavioral nature of the characters. Subhash and Udayan are brothers but both are very different from one another. Their psychological differences lead them to different direction. Subhash being more reserved and obedient while Udayan mischievous and impulsive. Udayan joins and becomes member of Naxalites- a radical group of Maoists who oppose the current Indian Government due to the mistreatment of the lower classes including agricultural workers. Subhash moves to Rhode Island to pursue a PhD in environmental science, Meanwhile Udayan falls in love with Gauri and thereafter marries her. One evening, Subhash receives a telegram from his parents, telling the execution of Udayan. In this novel, the female protagonist Gauri, being a widow later gets hitched to her spouse's sibling. Gauri who is traumatized by her husband's death goes through a lot of tumult in her mind and thereby with her life. Being an Indian origin, a girl is expected to respect the values that she has inculcated from the family around nobody heeds to the psychological trauma that she's going through. Her daughter Bela, deprived of her mother's love and affection is equally disturbed. This paper explains this psychological struggle that the character undergoes.*

**Keywords:** *Trauma, psychoanalytical theory, mistreatment, values, struggle*

Jhumpa Lahiri vividly portrays the picture of the Indian immigrants of women in the alien countries. Her female characters are worst sufferers due to their identity loss because of the dislocation of their husband. Women struggle to adjust in the alien country as immigrants. Most of her characters are housewives, who remains at home and their condition is pitiable as they have to look after the household chores. Though they have migrated to other country, they have to look after the kids and perform all the necessary day to day activities. They are dependent and subjugated due to silent suffering. They are trapped in family life and goes through psychological isolation. Jhumpa Lahiri very beautifully depicts the life of female characters who are exiled and feels suffocated in foreign land. They are portrayed as an ideal picture of Indian wives who follow the path of their husband as they move to foreign land for their profession and make this new world as their new home. But silently bearing the pain of alienation and making an effort to live happily in their family.

Born in London, Nilanjana Sudeshna, more popularly known as Jhumpa Lahiri is a diasporic writer who lives at Rhode Island, in New York. Most of the writers of India are born and brought up in India but Lahiri's connection with India is through her parents and grandparents. So whatever knowledge Lahiri has acquired about India comes up from parents, grandparents, magazines, newspaper. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* highlights the issue of Female psyche in search of her identity. The character of Gauri is selected to analyze her complex identity. She changes throughout the novel, Lahiri has Indian roots and she mostly describes the character migrating from India to other countries and the changes that immigrants faces. Traversing between Indian origin inheriting their traditions and values from their homeland and confounding a new world. Lahiri's *Lowland* gives account of the people lost in the new world.

The story of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*, begins with two brothers, Subhash and Udayan, with their parents living in Tollygunge, Calcutta. The brothers are close to each other as their age difference is of two years. Since childhood they shared same room but their views, ideas and ambitions were different. Subhash, the elder one moves to the United States for further studies. Udayan being the younger one moves into Naxalite movement in Calcutta during the seventies of the last century. Udayan falls in love with Gauri and marry her, within two years of marriage he gets killed by the police. His pregnant widow was not much liked by her parents-in-law, when Subhash learns about his brother's death, he comes and marries Gauri, his younger brother's wife. In America nobody knows about what happened back in Calcutta with Mitra family which gives Subhash and Gauri a chance to start new life. However, the turbulence in their mind and secret of Bela haunted them and they became psychologically displaced in a diasporic environment. As the story unfolds, we learn about the complexities in life of the character.

Before meeting Gauri Subhash had an affair with a married woman, Holly, with a child who's having dispute with her husband. They both were in affair with each other for a while. But neither of them seemed to be deeply drawn to the other however, Subhash felt jealous when she reconciled with her husband because of their child. Though Subhash and Gauri stayed in the same house and shared the same bed as they have child now, but Gauri never expressed

any happiness nor did she complain of anything. The whole Scenario changed when Gauri migrated to United states From India. In India also Gauri's life was different. Her mother used to stay Sick So she was left with the relatives to take care of. For Education Cities were better that's why she made to stay in city and in weekends/holidays returns to visit her parents. She did not even mind that her parents had not brought her up. In fact, “she appreciated them for letting her go on her own.” (Lowland 57). Gauri, remarries Subhash in the hope that in some way the memories of Udayan will be found in Subhash but nothing was there. Gauri unable to forget her past keeps herself aloof and alienated discerned of the life in America. She started to search her own identity though she was totally amazed of the new way of life in America and tries to be an American. She changes her look by throwing away her sarees and wearing new Dresses, got new hairstyle like Americans. Though her English was not that good as when she came to U.S she didn't even knew English, it was hard for her to understand. But gradually she changed herself. She starts going to the University nearby. She explores multifarious possibilities in the United States and gradually takes her life in her own hand by choosing the person she wants to be. A need for transformation was needed after the death of her husband as this was the phase where she was unable to understand what happened with her. Being the widow of Udayan and accepting the unborn child. Hence, here the psychic trauma that she went through during this period made a huge transformation in her life and later resulting with estranging her own daughter. When Bela turns five, Gauri is desperate to move out, to find time for herself after years of staying at home and looking after her daughter. But, Subhash refuses, saying that, he didn't want his daughter to be looked after by a babysitter. In her spare time, she visits library. Gauri begins to cherish the time, she spent on herself.

Woman are seen as nurturers and caretakers and is expected from the women by the dominant culture and this is the reason why Gauri feels alienated in her own home. At University she is happy, loses herself in the books and busy in coursework. She's unaware of the fact that being a wife and a mother she has the responsibility of family too. She's totally lost in her own world that Gauri even forgets about giving time to her daughter Bela. She's grateful to Subhash for bringing her to America with him and resentful to him for not being Udayan. From childhood she has seen a lot in her life that she is unable to believe in being married and motherhood anymore. And one day Gauri abandons Bela which Subhash founds later and out of anger he stops talking to her. But for the sake of Bela, they stayed under one roof, whereby she continues her studies and travelled to Boston for doctoral programme.

On his father's death, Subhash visits Calcutta with his daughter Bela. On their visit to Calcutta Subhash's mother, Bijoli nearly discloses that Udayan is Bela's father. Bela asks Subhash about Udayan, he says that Udayan is her uncle who is no more. On returning to America, he finds out that Gauri has left them and accepted a job, teaching at university in California. Before leaving, she leaves a letter leaving Bela to Subhash. Soon they managed to cope up with the situation effectuated by Gauri but the Bela's fissures were deep enough as her performance in class degrades and she prefers to be alone most of the time. Lastly, Subhash was insisted by the social counselor to take Bela to visit a psychologist. Gauri's sudden departure has left indelible mark on the twelve-year-old Bela.

Although it is difficult to empathize with a mother who abandons her daughter and her husband. The cutting of her hair and saree were the first signs of her rebellion. She left everything behind and moved out to pursue her work, this is such a selfish act but the pain that she has harbored within, the pain of being separated from parents in her childhood, losing the ones she loved, his brutal killing, unacceptance by her in-laws everything amounts to abandoning in some ways. This study shows that negating the feminine self, she doesn't find peace. She is a successful professional, but ends up being alone.

**Conclusion:** In brief, Gauri defines her identity in America. The Lowland shows women independence within itself. Gauri reflects multiple identities, search for lost home and identity. She moves from town to country, leaves her family, get acquainted with new people. She wants to be more American and less Indian and thinks that she succeeds. After much later, Subhash and Bela no longer needed Gauri, Gauri would like in their life to be a mother and a grandmother. At last, Gauri even went back to Calcutta she is not embracing her Indian identity because this return is yet the destructive part because she is neither American as she thought her identity lingers between being American and Indian.

#### **Works cited:**

Lahiri, Jhumpa. The Lowland. United Kingdom: Random House, 2013