

Diasporical Experiences of Gauri in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

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Abstract

This paper tends to analyze the experiences of gauri in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland. Loneliness is camouflaged throughout the novel. The main protagonists discussed in this paper are Gauri and Bela. It explores how one's past affects oneself as well the offspring. In this novel, it analyses why and how Gauri is affected and how she affects Bela. How they both try to create an identity of their own. In a new place, perspective of a woman is different from that of a man. The author has talked about the irony of freedom through Gauri. It is a clash between freedom from social stigma or from the imaginary bonds from mind, heart and soul. The author has juxtaposed India and Rhodeisland in the lowland.

Keywords: *Jhumpa Lahiri, The Lowland, Diasporical experience*

I. Introduction

This novel is slightly different from other works of Jhumpa Lahiri. In her other works Lahiri would have portrayed her characters struggle to adapt in their new land but in the case of Gauri it is different. The author has juxtaposed home and the host country in this novel. Gauri's life is a continuation from Calcutta to Rhode Island. Gauri carries her past all through her life and tries to realign her past. She takes so many steps in her life to forget Udayan but Alas! Her life turned out to be a disaster. Certainly it affects her daughter Bela. Bela, grows out to be an organic lover. She helps people to grow their own vegetable garden in their house. According to Bhaba, past is a painful re-remembering to align the trauma of the present. (leela, 9).Gauri, struggles to align the past and the present. Her experiences in her life, finally gives her an answer to her struggles.

PLOT

Udayan and Subash are brothers. Both are smart. Udayan is a notorious kid whereas subash is an introvert. Subash and Udayan part ways when Subash moves to USA for higher studies. Udayan joins a naxalite

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group when farmers were thwarted from their rights and was thrown into extreme poverty. Udayan meets Gauri while having a conversation with Manash, who is a friend of Udayan. Gauri is locked with her books in balcony. She is a philosophy student in presidency. Gauri and Udayan fall in love with each other. They get married to each other. Due to her unconditional love for Udayan, she helps him in some of his conspiracy cases, but she was oblivious about the consequences of what she was doing. When Subash learns that Udayan is married, he feels envious as his younger brother is married before him. In Calcutta, Udayan was captured by the paramilitary forces, due to his involvement in a conspiracy case. He was killed in front of his parents and Gauri. On the otherhand, Gauri was given plain white saree and she was given bland food to eat. Gauri was pregnant. Subash meets Gauri for the first time, it is from her he learns about udayan's death. Subash was quite astonished to see the orthodox behavior of his parents towards Gauri. Subash marries Gauri in order to help her and the yet to be born child on behalf of Udayan. Gauri accepts this marriage and considers this as a means of freedom from this situation. Gauri moves to Rhode island. She gives birth to Bela. Gauri, though married to subash she sees Bela as Udayan's and not Subash. So she cuts her bond with Bela and Subash and moves to califonia to continue with her project in philosophy. This separation affects Bela's relationship with Subash and she isolates herself from her father as he did not take any steps to search her mother. With this outline of the novel, this paper begins to explore the diasporical experience of Gauri and Bela in the lowland. Gauri agrees to marry Subash to free herself from the entire social stigma that prevailed in Calcutta. Gauri imagines starting anew in Rhodeisland forgetting the entire negative scenario's that had happened in Calcutta. But Bela who belongs to Udayan remains a constant bond between Calcutta and Rhodeisland, as well as Udayan. Gauri envies Bela's relationship with her father Subash as he is proving to be a better parent than Gauri. Gauri adapts herself well with the new environment. Gauri manages well in public as wife of Subash. Lahiri portrays Gauri as a woman with everlasting freedom not bound to any limitations. Decision making is the most important freedom (kabeer, 13-24). This implies the fulfillment of women empowerment in general, in most of the places though women are given plethora of rights, they are not given the right to take any decisions either for themselves or for their families. Gauri in Rhodeisland makes her own decisions to lead her life. She enrolls herself in some of the lectures in university campus. She showed so much of interest in her studies in order to forget her past from her mind. Nevertheless Bela is a constant reminder of her past. Despite being a mother she ignores Bela and leaves Rhodeisland. Gauri sees Udayan and his death in Bela.

The author has given vital importance for Gauri's emotions who has witnessed a terrible cruelty. Initially Gauri felt this marriage with Subash would soothen her life and forget her past. After Bela was born, everything turned worse. Gauri tries to alloy with Subash and Bela but she is unable to mingle with as she felt the image and memories of Udayan still haunting her. Gauri was financially well settled in California. Gauri created an identity in California with ease but she was struggling to come out of her past especially Udayan. She feels the illusion of Udayan all over Rhodeisland and California. Gauri occasionally had an impulse to have physical relationship with one of the university professors, she follows him but she sees him with another women. In California Gauri has a physicalrelationship with lorna one of a student who admires gauri. The author's intention is not to portray the negativity of gauri but has picturised her struggle to find all the means to erase her past from her mind especially Udayan. Once she dreams of udayan approaching her and she denies saying "im married to your brother" (Lahiri, 286). The author has portrayed Gauri, trying to find a place where there is no trace of Udayan and his memories.this

intensity is well understood with her relationship with Lorna. Gauri's urge for physical relationship is definitely not out of desire but her impulsiveness to get rid of Calcutta and the malevolent memories of military force killing Udayan in front of her eyes. Despite leaving Subash and Bela, she could not find the expected solace of her mind. Obliquely Gauri was responsible for the policeman conspiracy case. Also she was responsible for his wife who is a widow standing in white saree without sindoor on her forehead. Gauri feels blameworthy for warding off all the happiness from her life. Loneliness, one of the effects of diaspora is deeply felt in this novel. Gauri is left aloof in California. She tries to find the whereabouts of Subash and Bela. Bela is off from any blog or websites. Gauri in her early 60's meets an old couple with their grandchild. When asked about her kids she replies that she has one daughter. At this age she realizes that Udayan's memories are going to stay with her forever and her decision to move away from Subash and Bela was wrong. Now she feels guilty for her prompt decision. Bela, is a second generation Indian American. Bela's life transform into a complete gloom after her mother's disappearance. She isolates herself from her beloved father, as well as from the rest of the world. She manages everything on her own. Though she loved her father a lot, absence of her mother distanced her from her father. Her performance in school deteriorated. The author has portrayed the significance of the role of a mother through Bela. Bela's interest deals with organic farming. She helps people around her to do organic farming. Bela did not go to pursue her higher studies and undergo a professional degree. Sometimes she participates in American parade. Bela never consults with her father while taking some decisions. Subash too hesitated to talk to her about her career and life. He was very angry with Gauri for spoiling his relationship with Bela. Lahiri has talked about the importance of a family which structures a child psyche when the parented bonds are destroyed. Bela conveys her father that she is pregnant and that her baby does not need a father. The child will be happy with a single lovable parent, who remains with her forever and she can prove herself a better parent than Gauri.

II. Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* illustrates the emotions of a woman who has lost her husband and another abandoned by her own mother. It talks about how their emotions shape their life, and how they perceive the world in front of them. Diasporical experience of Gauri is quite different from others, she utilized this freedom from Calcutta to change herself. She did succeed in doing that but failed as a mother and as a wife.

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