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FROM INNOCENCE TO EXPERIENCE - A DIASPORIC PERSPECTIVE IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S  
*THE LOWLAND*

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ABSTRACT

The present article depicts about Lahiri's *The Lowland*, the most highlighted character Gauri who had experienced a lot in her life. The Indian family tradition and her innocent nature makes to live and survive alone without her husband, but her remarriage with her dead husband's brother, changes herself into a new who desires to get freedom to live independently without familiar to anyone's. To live a better and bright future and to spend a happy and luxurious life, Gauri feels fascinated by the glamour of the alien culture and lured by the dazzling beauty of the adopted culture around. So she migrated by her brother in law after the death of her first husband.

**Key words:** Diaspora, immigrant, female stereotype, exilement, gender role

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'Diaspora' is a word which is derived from Greek, which means 'to disperse'. The term diaspora means the movement of people or group to a country away from their own. Historically it means the movement of the Jewish people away from their own country to live and work another countries, mainly exilement of Jews in Egypt. The literature of diaspora refers to the literature of any people who have moved away from their own country and settled elsewhere. Diaspora is also a popular term in current research and it has various current transnational globalization: borders, migration, "illegal" immigration, repatriation, exile, refugees, assimilation, multiculturalism, hybridity.

The presentation of diasporic experience in Indian Fiction in English has ranged from identity crises, to relationship failures, to immigrant dreams and fantasies to a philosophical dimension the alienation the immigrant. Difficulties in adjustment, nostalgia for home, inability to 'connect' on return visits to India, schizophrenic sense of double Indian and Western identities or a sense of belonging nowhere, neither here nor there, remain the dominant feelings of the Indian immigrant. It is this psycho-cultural space that is especially explored, as we shall see, in Indian Fiction in English. In Post-colonial Theory Leela Gandhi tells us: "while 'diaspora' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'migration' it is generally involved as a theoretical device for the interrogation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism". The writings of the diasporic South Asian women writers clearly demonstrate that their notions of identity are intimately bound up with concepts of home and

place, as the space of return and of consolidation of the Self, enabled by the encounter not with the other, but with one's own (Grewal, 1996). The writings also suggest that the notions of self and identity, as conceived of by the women characters, change over time, and significantly, change depending on their location and environment.

In much of the literature of the diasporic South Asian women writers, the protagonists are portrayed learning to negotiate a hybrid identity, forging a new self which manages to co-exist more comfortably both in a South Asian environment and in a Western one. The majority of diasporic South Asian women writers portray their protagonists fighting the dual battle for ethnic/racial rights and recognition, and the battle against patriarchy and traditional cultural restrictions and taboos. These battles are made even more complicated by the fact that the protagonists are usually seeking acceptance both within the inner circle of their families and in the outer, racially and culturally different world.

The renowned diasporic Indian writer Jhumpa Lahiri is best known for her novels and short stories about the immigrant experience. She was born in England and raised in America parents who emigrated in India. Lahiri's writing is characterized by her plain language and her characters, often Indian immigrants to America who must navigate between the cultural values of their homeland and their adopted home. Lahiri's fiction is autobiographical and frequently draws upon her own experiences as well as those of her parents, friends, acquaintances, and others in the Bengali communities with which she is familiar. Lahiri examines her characters' struggles, anxieties, and biases to chronicle the nuances and details of immigrant psychology and behaviour. *The Lowland* is a familiar territory in which she is back to her nature settings of Calcutta and Rhode Island, telling the sagas of generations of Indian American immigrants.

*The Lowland* begins in Calcutta, against the backdrop of India's 1960s naxalite movement, an ultimately unsuccessful attempt at a Maoist revolution that unfolded first in a small west Bengali village before it made its way into the city. Two brothers, Udayan and Subhash Mitra, who are opposites in nature--- one wild and exuberant and rebellious, the other is responsible and contemplative and shy--- take two very different paths and the novel explores the consequences of their choices. Udayan is charismatic and adventurous. Subhash is more cautious, the solid dependable type. Udayan finds herself drawn to the naxalite movement, but Subhash, the dutiful son does not share his brother's political passion, he leaves home to pursue a life of scientific research in a quiet coastal corner of America. Udayan becomes involved in the Maoist naxalite political movement set on bettering the living conditions of India's poor through violent uprising. Subhash in contrast dutifully dedicates himself to personal rather than collective improvement: he earns a scholarship to study science in America and moves to Rhode Island.

As Udayan's involvement in this movement deepens the authorities come looking for him at his parent's home. Udayan, meanwhile has married for love against his parent's wishes: Gauri, a dark skinned philosophy student is his bride. The two have a brief happy marriage before he is killed by police for his involvement with the naxalites. A soldier demands that Gauri tell him where her husband is hiding.

"We think he might be hiding in the water, the soldier continued, not removing his eyes from her."

"No, she said to herself. She heard the word in her head. But then she realised that her mouth was open, like an idiot's. Had she said something? Whispered it? She could not be sure."

What did you say?"

I said nothing

The tip of the gun was still steady at her throat. But suddenly it was removed, the officer tipping his head toward the lowland, stepping away.

He is there. He told the others."

The novel is both personal and historical, but Udayan's sudden brutal death in action, the lowland becomes another kind of novel altogether. Fearing the long future of joyless widowhood that now stretches before Udayan's pregnant wife, Gauri, he takes the drastic step of substituting himself for his dead brother. Gauri is pregnant, though and in order to save her from an unhappy life in the home of her disapproving in-laws. Subhash marries her and brings back to Rhode Island. He lives there with his young wife, Gauri.

Following the tradition, Gauri marries Subhash, the brother of her dead husband Udayan, at the brother's request and Gauri knows from the beginning that she will never love her new spouse, Subhash. Though Subhash probably knows that but hopes he and Gauri might be able to build a marital life. Also in India, a widowed daughter in law must live with the parents of the late husband. Gauri's in laws never cared for her. So Subhash's marriage often saves Gauri from a life of domestic persecution and there Gauri gives birth to Udayan's child a girl named Bela.

But Gauri's indifference as a mother is at the heart of the story. It begins during her pregnancy, with her sitting in on philosophy classes at the university where her husband is studying. In this circumstances, Gauri soon discovers a desire for freedom and independence consuming her, ravaging her mind and body. After her daughter, Bela, is born, philosophy begins to absorb her entirely and she officially signs up for classes. When Bela is a little older, she begins to leave her daughter alone for increasing stretches of time. Subhash whom Bela does not know is not her biological father is the family's nurture. He does not let himself get trapped by the past, as she does and instead learns to adjust the present what happens to a family in which there is a reversal of traditional gender roles, with an ambivalent mother and a flexible gentle father is a crucial part of what Lahiri is exploring in the book.

A woman who loves her family, ready to sacrifice her future for the sake of other, believe in togetherness and being there for one another through good and bad, but in the novel Gauri appears starkly egoistical. She becomes a heartless woman, seems to care little or not at all for those closest to her. Lahiri draws a woman who makes a life on her own, alone, full aware of the intense pain her desire for independence causes those in her immediate entourage. The experience she has gained in America that makes her either a fully Indian woman or her independence instead of doing her duty and following tradition like by Indian mothers in our country. The family saga in our country makes an Indian woman to find happiness for her family, but in case of Gauri, though she was innocent, but by staying in America, she finds independence and neglects her daughter to forget her husband's death, free herself comfortably. Lahiri has given us this woman, unpredictable, breaks a character of a good Indian, a mother or a daughter-in-law. But Gauri's daring, her willingness to trample on the life that tradition and custom demand. Without fear, she strives out to live on her own terms—a truly American notion. America liberates Gauri into intellectual confidence and academic fame, yet it renders her incapable of parental feeling towards her daughter; meanwhile Subhash grows as close as any biological father to Bela, even while the threat of the inevitable revelation hangs over many years.

Belonging and alienation, place and displacement-; these have long been Lahiri's abiding fictional concerns, but in the *Lowland*, they are more alive than before, in the very shape of her sentences. The *Lowland* is a novel partly about personal ambition and how that squares with motherhood. It is not simply a novel about immigrants. It is a novel about finding the right place and the right people--- and about whether there are such things at all or if life is a matter of adjusting to circumstance.

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