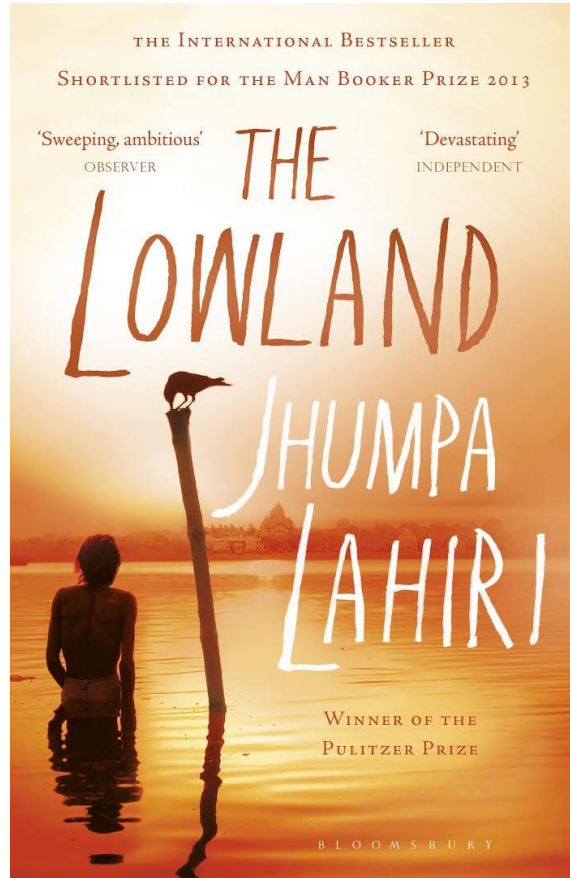


Identification: An Analysis in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

M. Pradeepa



Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri's, *The Lowland*, traces the fate of tender fraternal bonds torn by violent politics. Lahiri describes the events how the absence of loved ones becomes covertly a portent haunting presence within the subconscious mind of the affected characters directing their obvious actions to their own consequential ways of life. The novel acclaims as the timeless tale of emotions, beliefs, their vulnerabilities, needs and struggles. These are all woven together and brought to life by the simple expression, narrative and multi-dimensional perspectives. The emotional complexity is rich in the novel providing good reading experience. Lahiri's sense of history and its consequences presented in the novel are introspective to grasp human hearts. The present paper reflects on naked identities of the brothers, lovers, father and mother in the novel.

It also challenges the national politics with pathetic desperation and revolutionary zeal and also the hope and despair with devastating stories of passion and indifference.

Keywords: *The Lowland*, Melancholic, Identification, Life, Agony

Melancholic *The Lowland*

The melancholic tale, *The Lowland* is narrated with self-possession and distance. This book portrays gestures, symbolism, impeccable details and the subtlety with which people encounter life. The plot of the novel reminds one the story of a shattered family which is a kind of remaking the darkest hours of history. Jhumpa Lahiri examines the psychological nuances of certainty, guilt, grief, marriage, and parenthood in the book. The novel depicts two young brothers - one being headstrong and the other more conscientious, growing up in the 1960s amid the lowland of Calcutta, getting into mischief that suits boys their age in the background of the partition of India which led to the division of the Bengal province and the infamous Naxalite movement in India.

The novel unfolds various dimensions of its characters as growing older, meeting a bookish young wife who, even in the midst of conservative society, has feministic ideals and crude ambition and a determined and cruel mother-in-law. In this novel, Lahiri compares and contrasts a marriage that is made in love and another conceived for convenience. She contrasts the wet lowland of Calcutta with the coast of Rhode Island. The plot has woven with many complex strands such as intellectualism, battles, civil unrest and the sufferings of the living characters with post-traumatic stress disorder. It tends to compare how one mother lives with torment and agony while the other lives with ambivalence and it also showcases how our own skin moves slowly from a mother's abandonment and understands to live a life of exile. The happenings when people refuse to reconcile with the past and how this haunting past ruins the lives in the present and the realization of happiness is intertwined with misery and agony in the novel.

Confrontation and Shifting

The first section of the novel speaks about a kind of confrontation and shifting between Subhash's scholarly absorption in the estuaries and wildlife of Rhode Island and Udayan's tragedy of modern life such as political injustice and environmental degradation. The silent feel of coastal and suburban New England are captured skillfully with some disjunctural characteristics by the way of contrast, as when Subhash sees "vivid hues of cayenne and turmeric and ginger" (Ranasinha 263) in the autumn foliage. Meanwhile the private lives of the brothers seem to promise illuminating entanglements as how Udayan marries an independent woman defying his family and committed to his own political causes while the timid Subhash who is willing to get an arranged marriage, moves towards a single mother whom he meets on the beach. The brothers seek their identity choosing the lives of their own.

In spite of divergent thoughts, Lahiri explores how love can still be constant though people's lives. This concept suits the life of the brothers, Udayan and Subhash, in which they are tied together not only just by blood and their love for one another but also through devotion to their parents and their shared homeland. The novelist deals with the delves into the clash of

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cultures and the expectations for men versus those for women. The constant theme of hers is love, its expression and its meaning according to the characters depicted and their unique way of portrayal in the book. She raises the theme of silence and brotherhood between individuals as well as countrymen. In adulthood Udayan and Subhash tries to realign themselves to other people but their past continues to have an iron grip on them.

Focus on the Effect of the Movement

Lahiri stays away from the trap of politics and mainly focuses on the effect of the movement with her characters and their lives that form the heart of the book. At the end of the story, the life of the brothers and the women spot the sorrow lurking everywhere. The pain of inequality, duty and obligation are seen as a means to exceed the chaos of life and brings out revolutionary actions. The people become inwardly, closed-off and unable to count their blessing. The novel is about separate lives, coming together and crashing apart.

The novel does not seem to deal with the movement of Naxalism. In 1960s and 70s, the Naxalite movement is something that touches a raw nerve of almost every Calcuttan who might have lived in the city during those decades. Lahiri thinks of creating a story around it with the local ecosystem of the area inhabited by the protagonists as the backdrop. Naxalism was at its zenith during this period in West Bengal and perhaps Calcutta was the only place in India which saw the repercussions of Naxalism at its worst. Gouri's fate changes when she left Calcutta for America. Hence the past was analogous to determine the personality and identification of the characters in the novel.

Naxalism

Lahiri describes the background of Naxalism but not the pros and cons of the movement. She describes the struggles of the Bengali Communist Party, the reconciliation, immigration and integration, grief and its effects and the evolution of people as they grow from youth to middle age. The political and social structures oppress certain groups of people more than natural human suffering and oppression. In the end of the novel, the author proposes a metaphorical monsoon that hits Subhash to rouse out of his lifelong timidity as showing mud a hiding place. This mud out of the hard rain may provide Subhash new life or drown him. Hence the identification is subjected to every character in the novel those the author has well showcased from the bottom of her heart.

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