

## JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE LOWLAND*: AN EPITOME OF DIASPORA

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### Abstract

*The migratory process leads to upsurge severely issues that are quite uneasy for migrants, refugees or exiled persons. Diaspora talks genuinely a lot of migratory experiences, rootlessness, identity formation and self alienation on the account of dislocating or transmitting of migrants from origin country. The nagging sense of nostalgia, cultural differences and longing of motherland are perennial aspects of diaspora. The research paper is an attempt to bring out nostalgic state of characters as well as highlights emotional attachment of characters with past memories in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland. The paper will mainly elucidate the nostalgic state of Subhash who supposed to have found loneliness in the course of staying in America. The paper exhibits an overall view of the ever evolving representation of Indian culture, picture of homeland, earlier memories.*

**Keywords:** The Lowland, Diaspora, Nostalgia, Revival of past memories, Self alienation, Homeland, Cultural differences.

### Introduction:

Jhumpa Lahiri is a perennial voice of Indian diaspora. She was born in Boston and raised in Rhode Island. She is one of the most fascinating writers of Indian diaspora. Her works especially deal with the migration, cross-cultural conflicts, hybrid –cultural, sense of alienation, transnationalism, identity crisis, sense of nostalgia, third space, longing for homeland. In her writing she poignantly shows the dilemma of migrants, pains and agonies. She has penned two short story collections and two noted novels. Her first short story collections, *The Interpreter of Maladies* won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 2003. Her second novel *The Lowland* was also nominated for Booker prize which published in 2013. Indian diasporic writers carved a distinct niche for them across the world. Indian diasporic writing have changed the global perspectives of world literature. Jhumpa Lahiri as

an iconic face of Indian diaspora who has probed diligently the crucial issues of migrants. She mostly writes about reminiscent of the bygone that still blossoming her heart.

## **What is Homeland? :**

The concept of diaspora lies the image of a remembered home that stands a distance between temporally and spatially and the place of origin may be the focus of a sustained ideology of return (Avtar Brah 1996:180). The lowland talks broadly about that childhood gone days which had been spent by Subhash and Udayan together in the vicinity of the Lowland. Therefore the lowland is not merely a place where Subhash and Udayan rose up and also they used to play football however the lowland is a great hallmark of home memory that always directly connects with Subhash.. Jhumpa Lahiri indeed narrates the native homeland that always in the eyes of Subhash as:

In the humid climate of Calcutta, evaporation was slow. But eventually the sun burned off most of the floodwater, exposing damp ground again. So many times Subhash and Udayan had walked across the lowland. It was a shortcut to a field on the outskirts of the neighbourhood, where they went to play football. (Lahiri 1)

While reading the novel we realize that the lowland, a strong metaphor that emotionally ties two brothers and it also explicates the warm connection of Subhash's past memories with homeland.

## **Diasporic issues in The lowland:**

The Lowland gives a canvas of diaspora. At the beginning of the novel, the writer narrates pleasantly the Lowland where Subhash and Udayan were lived with their family. The novel traces the beautiful glimpse of Calcutta. The story gives also picture of Naxalbari movement that were very active in West Bengal during 1967. It was set up against the backdrop the West Bengal government and gradually it had spread its wings in other parts of India. The story sets not only in India but also in America.

In the novel Subhash and Udayan grew up in the vicinity of Tollygunge and both had spent their childhood days in and around the lowland, it was the place where they had shared and enjoyed childhood memories with each other. As the novel goes on Subhash goes off to America because where he would have to pursue his PhD programme. No sooner did he reach to unknown land, he felt the breeze of unknown land can't be given the pleasure and soothe as he had enjoyed and got soothe in the womb of motherland. The host land, a place that was very difficult and even strange for him and he also thinks that America and Indian or homeland might not come together in any circumstances. The nostalgia and longing for home continuously was hammering to Subhash however he comes in touch with America.

Jhumpa Lahiri quotes:

The university had begun as an agricultural school. A land grant college still surrounded by greenhouses, orchards, fields of corn. On the outskirts were lush pastures of scientifically cultivated grass, routinely irrigated and fertilized and trimmed. Nicer than the grass that grew inside the walls of the Tolly club.

But he was no longer in Tollygunge .He had stepped out of it as he had stepped so many mornings out of dreams, its reality and its particular logic rendered meaningless in the light of day. The difference was so extreme that he could not accommodate the two places together. In his mind. In this enormous new country, there seemed to be nowhere for the old to reside. There was nothing to link them; he was the sole link .Here life ceased to obstruct or assault him. Here was a place where humanity was not always pushing, rushing, and running as if with a fire at its back. (Lahiri 34)

The novel shows appropriately the nostalgic state of Subhash who finds himself on the margin of two different cultures. Subhash thinks that the unknown country could not be given pleasure; it would not provide shades and love. He keeps very closely in touch with the motherland that is too really heavy and pleasant.

The novel highlights several key issues of diaspora on the account of voluntary displacement of subhash to America. Past memory is a strong tenet of diaspora and Subhash is always associated with his earlier memories.

Jhuma Lahiri states the dilemma of Subhash as

He found a room in a white wooden house, close to the main road of the village, with black shutters flanking the windows .The shutters were decorative, never opening or closing as they did throughout the day in the Calcutta, to keep cool or dry, to block rain or let in a breeze or adjust the light. (Lahiri 35)

If we turn to look views of diaspora of Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, a distinguished scholar- Diasporas emerge out of processes involving movement, migration from a ‘here” to a “There” from a homeland, real or imagined, to a hostland, loved or hated. (Paul Tiyambe Zeleza 5) It apparently gives a broad picture of dilemma which is highlighted throughout the novel.

The journey of subhash gives a glimpse of his intense feeling towards his motherland or homeland where he did born. He first encountered to culture of America where he did find many things that were unfamiliar but he seems to feel that the room was giving a canvas of earlier days of Calcutta however past either breeds or sprouts his heart. Jhumpa Lahiri is an authentic voice of Indian diaspora. She vividly distinguishes between homeland and host culture in order to probe the nostalgic state of Subhash Mitra.

In making reply to Udayan’s letter or reading Udayan’s letter repeatedly shows that Subhash was not only excavating his emotions towards Udayan but also showing a great

affinity towards his homeland. The letter is not merely a means of communication but it clears accurate picture of homeland and it elucidates differences between the host land and motherland in terms of weather, geographical features and culture.

Jhumpa Lahiri narrates as

I have been studying chemical processes unique to estuaries,  
Sediments that oxidize at low tide .Strips of barrier beach run  
Parallel to the mainland .The ferrous sulfide leaves wide black stains on the sand.

As strange as it sounds, when the sky is overcast, when the clouds are low, Something about the coastal landscape here, water and the grass, the smell of bacteria When I visit the mudflats, takes me home .I think of the lowland, of paddy fields. Of course, no rice grows here .Only mussels and quahogs, which are among the types of shellfish Americans like to eat. They call the marsh grass spartina .I learned today that it has special glands for excreting salt, so that it's often covered with a residue of crystals. Snails migrate up and down the stems .It's been growing here over millennia ,in deposits of peat .Its roots stabilize the shore. Did you know, it propagates by spreading rhizomes? Something like the mangroves that once thrived in Tollygunge.I had to tell you.(Lahiri 43&44)The virtual discussion which happened in between two brothers really gives a plethora of diaspora. While studying under the realm of American culture somewhere he finds himself that the atmosphere is as unfamiliar as the sounds of the clouds gather in the sky. He further describes the coastal landscape, water and grass which take Subhash directly to the lowland.The smell of bacteria propels him to remind the paddy field in the lowland. He likely compares Indian crops with American crops; mussels and quahogs. Shellfish is a main sea food of American people as if rice is the major food of Indians.Subhash talks further in the letter that marsh grass spartina is growing in America over millennia and its roots strongly found at the sea shore .Subhash deliberately recalls the lowland where mangroves once rigorously developed likely rhizomes widely crawled.The lowland is actually being used as a metaphorically in the novel on the account of to make a distinguish between American culture and Indian culture. Subhash compares deeply the native place with Rhode Island. The novel is dealing with self alienation as a key element of diaspora.

In showing loneliness of Subhash, Jhumpa Lahiri observes:

Sailing even slightly east reminded Subhash of how far away he was from his family. He thought of the time it took to cross even a tiny portion of the earth's surface. Isolated on the ship with scientists and other students and crew. he felt doubly alone. Unable to fathom his furthers, served from his past .For a year and a half he had not seen his family, at the end of the day, to share a meal .In Tollygunge his family did not have a phone line. He had sent a telegram to let them know he'd arrived .He was learning to live without hearing their voices, to receive news of them only in writing.(Lahiri 62&63)

After starting his Ph.D programme at unknown land, thereupon Subhash realized that the host country is far away from my India and even he thinks about the time which was enforcing him to remember and excavate past memories. He feels a sense of alienation therefore he could not fathom about his future. Nearly a long period passed away to see his family members and even his family didn't have Phone line but he had sent them a telegraph that was a thread to express his arrival .He had somehow decided to live without listening his dear ones sweet voices .He had received their messages in the form letters .The dilemma of alienation or isolation was hammering to Subhash every stage. Jhumpa Lahiri highlights different shades of diaspora throughout the novel. Culture is a paramount factor that easily shown the actual distance from homeland. Homi Bhabha s notion of Diaspora offers that culture is always ready in sense, diasporized.

He equates:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational .It is transnational because contemporary post –colonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement whether they are the middle passage of slavery and indenture ,the ‘voyage out ‘of the civilizing mission ,the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the west after the second world war,or the traffic of economic &political refugees within & outside the third world ....The translational dimension of cultural transformation – migration,diaspora,displacement ,relocation makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification.(Bhabha 1994)

Sharmani Patrica Gabriel equates in her Ph.D thesis on culture as it is fundamentally translation and its rooted histories of displacement .It constantly making connection between the here and there, the post and present. The novel, *The Lowland* explicates Indian culture, festival that stings Subhash forever and Subhash realized that it is harder to aside away from native culture.

Evidently Jhumpa Lahiri notes

He began his third autumn in Rhode Island, 1971. Once more the leaves of the trees lost their chlorophyll, replaced by the shades he had left behind: vivid hues of cayenne and turmeric and ginger pounded fresh every morning in the kitchen, to season the food his mother prepared.

Once more these colors seemed to have been transported across the world, appearing in the treetops that lined his path .The colors intensified over a period of weeks until the leaves began to dwindle, foliage clustered here and there among the branches, like butterflies feeding at the same source, before falling to the ground. He thought of Durga pujo coming again to Calcutta .As he was first getting to know America, the absence of the holiday had'nt mattered to him, but now he wanted to go home .The past two years, around this time, he had received a battered parcel from his parents, containing gifts. For him.Kurtas too thin to wear

most of the time in Rhode Island, bars of sandalwood soap, some Darjeeling tea. He thought of the Mahalaya playing on All India Radio throughout Tollygunge across Calcutta and the whole of the West Bengal, people were waking up in darkness to listen to the oratorio as light crept into the sky, invoking Durga as she descended to earth with her four children. (Lahiri 82&83)

In this novel Subhash presents and talks about Durga Pujo which is being celebrated every year across India and especially in Calcutta, He still sticks with native culture that spills in his heart when he feels that host culture would not taken the place of his native land or culture .As Subhash spent many days in America and with the dawn of autumn in 1971 Subhash reminisces about the season when his mother used to make food for family where there would have incriminated of ginger, turmeric and vivid aspects of cayenne.

In America he had missed all things that was hampering to him.

He also brooded over Durga Pujo is usually a festival of various colours, a heyday for Calcutta .As he was gradually rooted in America he came to know the holidays were no mattered at all therefore he expresses his strong will to leave for India on the account of enjoying holidays. In the course of his stay in America, His parents had been sent a battered parcel to Subhash with containing gifts. The gift contains of Kurtas, sandalwood soap and some Darjeeling tea. The gift which had sent from his parents end that were not just physical gift but it shows a deepen love in between Subhash and his parents. Meanwhile he remembered the All India Radio that was playing throughout Calcutta and the whole west Bengal.He also thought of the mythical story of Durga Puja and people of West Bengal had started auspicious celebration with woke up at very early in the morning.In fact Calcutta and the native culture were past collective memories which always at the centre of Subhash's soul and heart.Jhumpa Lahiri has woven the past with present in the novel likely presence of subhash was associated with his earlier days As Hurriyet Babacan and Narayan Gopalkrishan assert that "Past exerts a continuing influence on the present" (Hurriyet Babacan and Narayan Gopalkrishan 2012:187). The novel quotes:

He had forgotton the possibility of so many human beings in one space, The concentrated stanch of so much life. He welcomed the sun on his skin, the absence of bitter cold, But it was winter in Calcutta. The people filling the platform passengers and coolies and vagrants for whom the station was merely a shelter were bundled in wooden caps and shawls only two people had come to receive him.A young cousin of his father's Biren kaka and his wife. They were standing by a fruit vendor, unable to smile when they spotted him.He understood this diminished welcome ,but he couldn't understand why,after he had traveled for more than two days ,after he had been away for more than two years, his parents were unwilling to come even this far to acknowledge his return. When he had left India his mother had



promised a hero's welcome, a garland of flowers draped around his neck when he stepped off the train. It was here, at the station, that Subhash had last seen Udayan. He had arrived late on the evening of his departure, not riding with Subhash and his parents and other relatives who had formed a small caravan from Tollygunge, but assuring him that he had meet up with them on the platform Subhash was already seated on the train; he had already said his good byes, when Udayan put head up to the window. He extended his hand through the bars, reaching for Subhash's shoulder and pressing it, then slapping his face lightly. Somehow, at the final, they had one another in that great crowd. He pulled some green –skinned organes from his book bag, giving them to Subhash to eat on the journey. Try not to forget us completely he said. You'll look after them? Subhash asked, referring to their parents.

You'll let me know if anything happens? What's going to happen? Well then, if you need anything? Come back somebody, that's all. Udayan remained close, leaning forward, his hand on Subhash's shoulder, saying nothing else, until the engine sounded. His mother began weeping. Even his father's eyes were damp as the train began to pull away. But Udayan stood smiling between them, his hand raised high, his gaze fixed as Subhash retreated farther and farther away from them. (Lahiri 88-89).

We came to realize that Subhash was living in present with a great touch of past. As soon as Subhash reached at his motherland he felt that the sun was also greeting to him with scorching and even it was a period of winter in Calcutta. There was actually absent of bitter cold in the course of his visit to motherland and there after he saw the platform is occupied with passengers, coolies and vagrants as if it is a merely shelter for selling wooden caps and shawls. As he came down to Calcutta platform his eyes were caught evidently to his father's cousin Biren kaka and his wife who were standing by a fruit vendor. Their facial expression was telling him that it was undiminished welcome but he could not judge why this happens? Even he had distanced for more than two days to reach here. He was thinking that his parents were not willing to greet him by giving huge welcome. He immediately goes back to trace his first journey to America that was a memorable because all family members personally had presented on Calcutta station to give warm greeting to subhash for his first foreign journey. Where in His mother had promised to welcome him as a great warrior. He also recalls the garland of flowers that draped around his neck. He admits that it was the station where he had last seen Udayan. The past easily spilled over from his heart as if all family members were with him. He says that when he had boarded in train, Udayan slapped on his face delicately and he also pressed his shoulder with lovingly. He had offered Subhash green –skinned organes and telling him that to eat on this long journey and keep in touching with us constantly. In conversation between two brothers, Subhash replied his younger brother, Udayan you had to take care of parents and please pass messages if something happens. The emotional conversation had held on station signifies that they were emotionally

attached to each other. Further, no sooner had the engine sounded, her mother had began to weep on the station and Even his father eyes were become numb. But Udayan stood in between his parents and he raised his hands on the account of take a last look of Subhash. As the novel moves on many things come into light and a new journey of Subhash starts with Gauri, Udayan's widow when demised of Udayan. Both they were married and they flew off to Boston because Subhash wanted to start a new life in the womb of America. As Subhash and Gauri landed in Boston, Gauri was smelled a new fragrance in the alien air. She also makes a comparison between the homeland and the host culture as if Subhash had experienced earlier during his first trip to America. Jhumpa Lahiri narrates the nostalgic experiences of Subhash and Gauri diligently which are reflected in their act.

Henceforth the novel quotes:

For thought she waited all day for Subhash to come back to the apartment, feeling uneasy when he wasn't there, once he did, she avoided him. (Lahiri 130) The novel manifests the self isolation of Gauri when she was felt very uneasy in new unknown place without Subhash. Gauri misses her homeland in the course when she was learning a few names like as McCloskey, McGovern along with she was hearing about two parties; Democratic and Republican. She was heard news of Richard Nixon, who had visited to China one month before and shaking hands with Mao. Gauri couldn't find there about Calcutta .She also tries to reveal the harsh past that had totally shattered her life in the heart of Calcutta.

Jhumpa Lahiri shows past memories about homeland through Gauri's quote:

She learned the names of candidates: Muskie, McCloskey, McGovern. The two parties, Democratic and Republican .There was news of Richard Nixon, who had visited China the month before, shaking hands with Mao for the whole world to see. There was nothing about Calcutta .What had consumed the city, what had altered the course of her life and shattered it, was not reported here. (Lahiri 130&131)

In this way, the novel is as a blueprint of diaspora which vividly revolves around Subhash, Gauri and Udayan and their emotional attachment.

## Conclusion:

I would like to conclude this research article by pointing out that the novel is perfectly a plethora of diaspora. The long journey of separation seems appear to be a great jolt and make Subhash very nostalgic. We can say that Jhumpa Lahiri evidently has dug out the nostalgic state of migrants and their past memories simultaneously put forwards Indian diasporic writing on global map. Finally we can say universally migrants predispose strongly to their native culture, roots and earlier past.



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