

MEMORY IN JHUMPHA LAHIRI'S *THE LOWLAND*

Prof. Yuvraj Shinde
Ismail Yusuf College,
Mumbai

Abstract

The human is animal but a social animal. It is, therefore, very difficult for human beings to live alone without the company of others. To human beings, isolation is dreaded curse they always try to avoid. But the course of human life never runs smooth and they have to live with isolation. This isolation torments them, destroying their vigor and will to survive, and makes them like a dead wood which contains body structure but no living spirit. In this process of isolation, memory turns into menace, making life more difficult and complex for such people. Due to the haunting nature and continuous presence in their daily lives, memory becomes “Albratrass around their neck” from which they cannot escape. The memory has instinctive ability to penetrate into the powerful walls of “Time and Space”. Whatever may the nature of “time and space”, memory is always present, defeating the very advantages of time and space. The memory is really dangerous phenomena for the migrated people. The memory contains the past which they want to forget, transforms past into present, finally disrupts the linear motion of time, and awakens dead from the grave, making them actual participant in the lives of living people.

Key Words: Social, isolation, memory, time and space etc.

The human is animal but a social animal. It is, therefore, very difficult for human beings to live alone without the company of others. To human beings, isolation is dreaded curse they always try to avoid. But the course of human life never runs smooth and they have to live with isolation. This isolation torments them, destroying their vigor and will to survive, and makes them like a dead wood which contains body structure but no living spirit. In this process of isolation, memory turns into menace, making life more difficult and complex for such people. Due to the haunting nature and continuous presence in their daily lives, memory becomes “Albratrass around their neck” from which they cannot escape. The memory has instinctive ability to penetrate into the powerful walls of “Time and Space”. Whatever may the nature of “time and space”, memory is always present, defeating the very advantages of time and space. Haunted by the continuous presence of alienation and memory in her own life, Lahiri pours out anguish and

trauma of alienated people through her novel 'The Lowland'. Amidst of alien people and land, it is really Herculean task for migrated people to build healthy relationship with people, and to have a normal human life. The situation gets more complex due to the constant memory of their land, people, and culture. To them, happiness is a just mirage that never becomes reality. Though they are different from each other, the characters of Subhash, Gauri, and Bela are good examples of victims of this problem.

The memory is really dangerous phenomena for the migrated people. The memory contains the past which they want to forget, transforms past into present, finally disrupts the linear motion of time, and awakens dead from the grave, making them actual participant in the lives of living people. Like Democles sword, the memory always hangs over the life alienated people. The characters of Udayan, in this novel, is a dead but it is alive in the memory of Subhash, Gauri, and Bela. Even though he is dead, he affects and changes lives of other characters in the novel. Because he was kept alive in memory by other characters in this novel. In this novel, past, instead of being dead and out of action, determines the present and future also. It does actively participates in the action of present through the medium of memory. Due to continuous memory of Udayan, Subhash, Gauri, and Bela fail to develop meaningful with each other.

Subhash, being the brother Udayan, suffers from the death of Udayan. Both had shared childhood and early youth with each other. Both were similar to each other:

“They were similar enough in build to draw form a single pile of clothes. Their complexions, a light coppery compound derived from their parents, were identical. Their double – jointed fingers, the sharp cut of their features, the wavy texture of their hair. Sitting over the chessboard they were mirror images; one leg bent, the other splayed out, chins propped on their knees”.

Subhash, his very identity and being, is defined in relation to Udayan. In their childhood, the life of Subhash is overshadowed by Udayan. In the company of Udayan he feels inferior, weak, and incomplete. Though he achieves stable life in America, but the feeling of weakness and inferiority remain same. For other characters in the novel, he always evokes the memory of his dead brother. After the death of Udayan, when he meets his mother who does not accept him due to his identical nature with his dead brother to whom she wants to forget. Once again, he bears the pain of separation from mother without any wrong doing. On this level, Udayan is separated from mother due to his own death, but Subhash, on the contrary, estranged from his mother due the memory of Udayan. Therefore, the memory of Udayan haunts him all over life. He marries Gauri, the wife of Udayan, to offer security to her and her child. It is selfless act of love on this part. But Gauri never returns the love which he expects from her. Because he reminds her of Udayan, and of guilt which she cannot speak. After becoming failed son to his parents particularly to his mother, he then becomes failed husband to Gauri. In this way, his marriage

fails, and he has been deprived basic joys of life. Though he is not biological father of Bela, he loves Bela but he fears that the memory of Udayan will take her away from him as it has done with his wife and mother. When Gauri separates from him, Bela blames him rather than Gauri for the separation though it was Gauri separated from him. Due to this separation, Bela leaves him alone. The life of Subhash is the good example of power of memory in human life. The memory of Udayan has created havoc in Subhash's life, and he feels rejected by others though he has done good to them.

After Subhash, Gauri is the second person who suffers from the memory of Udayan. The love and marriage has completely changed life which was safe and secure in her relatives house. Though she was unwillingly to take part in revolutionary activities of Naxalbari movement, she was forced to participate by Udayan. Thus, knowingly or unknowingly she collaborates the murder of Nirmal Day, the police officer by giving information about his daily movements to Udayan. Thus she has a blood on hand, and for this reason, she does not want forgive Udayan even though he is dead. Therefore, she suffers continuously from the guilt which is associated with the memory of Udayan. In order to free herself the guilt of murder she desperately wants free herself from the memory of Udayan. But unfortunately, Udayan is always present in her life through Subhash, her second husband, and Bela, her daughter from Udayan. Gauri perceives Subhash as,

“Again the voice, also Udayan's. Almost the exact pitch and manner of speaking. This was the deepest and most startling proof their fraternity”.

Gauri thinks of Bela as,

“It was a girl, as she was certain it would be. She was relieved that her hope had been fulfilled, and that a young version of Udayan had not come back to her. And in a way it was better to give the child Subhash had thought of, to grant him that claim”.

Though she remains grateful to Subhas for his help, but she is not able to love her. He stands for the past which she wants to forget. She tries to love him but could not get the success due to the memory of Udayan. Thus her first marriage failed only because of Udayan, her second marriage failed due to the memory of him. For her, Udayan is always alive in her memory and so does the guilt of murder of police. Though she is the mother of Bela, but she tries to be away from her daughter. Time and again, Bela connects her to Udayan, and therefore, she leaves Bela to Subhash and goes away. She leaves everyone, but memory stays with her forever. Due to continuous presence of memory, she never develops meaningful relationship with any one. Her life drifts slowly.

Bela's life is more complicated as compared to other characters in the novel. Due to the failed marriage of Subhash and Gauri, Bela does not have normal childhood. When Gauri walks out of their home, Bela goes into depression, and is treated by the doctor. Due to her mother's separation, she cuts off herself from her father. Therefore, she leads very unstable life without fixed home or relatives. Like Subhash, she reminds other about Udayan.

Subhash thinks of Bela as

“He'd experienced such closeness with only one other person. With Udayan. Each night, extracting himself from her, for a moments his heart stopped, wondering what she would say, the day she learned the truth about him”.

Bela could not develop a meaningful relationship with her mother due to the memory of Udayan. Like other characters in the novel, the memory of Udayan is active in her life also. Unfortunately, it also changes the course of her life in a wrong direction.

Bijoli, the mother of Subhash and Udayan, was completely devastated by the death of Udayan. She could not love Subhash after the death of Udayan. Because,

“The moment he returned to them after Udayan's death, the moment he stood before them, she'd felt only rage. Rage at Subhash for reminding her so strongly of Udayan, for sounding like him, for remaining a spare version of him”.

To Bijoli, Subhash should have been a comfort, the one son remaining when the other was taken away. But she was unable to love one without the other. So that she feels the deepest shame a mother can feel, of not only surviving one child but losing another, still living. Thus, she never recovers from the death of Udayan.

Thus the sudden death of Udayan has shocked all of them but his continuous memory has devastated their own lives. Unfortunately they are unable to free from this memory, and hence they suffer.

Works Cited:

- 1) Jhumpa Lahiri . The Lowland .Random House 2013
- 2) Bart Moore Gilbert. Postcolonial Theory Contexts,Practices,Politics. Verso 1997
- 3) Robert J.C. Young . Post Colonialism .Oxford University Press. 2003
- 4) Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray . A companion to Postcolonial Studies. Blackwell Publishing 2000