

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

GYPSIES FROM POSTCOLONIAL TO MODERN ERA: THE LOWLAND AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT



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Literature being the reflection of society displays the lives of humans in a crystal clear manner. Jhumpa Lahiri, a dominant figure in the field of literature portrays the life of two ordinary brothers who turn into two different persons as they grow up and the traumas they encounter to face the hurdles in the way towards peaceful life. Though this novel focuses on Subhash and Udayan, Gauri, another prominent figure plays a dominant role in the life of the brothers which leads to an imbalance resulting in dissatisfaction and disaster.

Keywords: Deception, Emigration, Trauma

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Subhash and Udayan are siblings of fifteen months difference, live in the Lowland, Calcutta. The title justifies the area they live, where the rain water accumulates during rainy season. Both are contradictory to each other as, Udayan is a courageous man, whereas Subhash is hesitant and frightens of problems. At the same time both are so intimate to each other and they never leave other's company at any cost. But at the same time, Subhash prefers to be away from his younger brother as much as possible. So, he decides to study abroad and moves away from Udayan and their lovable place Lowland. Lahiri, the novelist portrays this paradox between the two brothers in her novel *The Lowland* in a peculiar manner.

Udayan's strong desire in revolution and Subhash's fleeing to abroad be the major dissimilarity in the novel. But the rapport between the two brothers rises even they are far apart. They share the important events through letters, maybe that's the reason Subhash never feel like missing his

home in abroad. But he feels worse when Udayan his younger brother marries earlier.

Udayan's wife Gauri the other major character of the novel, is also responsible for some important twists and turns. Gauri's was once a wealthy and honourable family in their locality. Soon the poverty has taken place in their family. As a result her father and mother die leaving their children to their parental uncle. She grows there with her elder brother Manash. Gauri prefers books and indulges herself in her studies whenever she feels lonely. In the mean time she meets Udayan whom she marries later and dreams of leading a happy life till her end. Udayan marries Gauri against his parents' wish. Both lead a happy life at first but their happiness never last long, because Udayan dies at a shooting by the police as he is a wanted criminal of Naxalite movement, once again Gauri feels lonely. His parents' dissatisfaction on their marriage prevails like a spell on them.

In this novel, Lahiri portrays the then aggressiveness of Naxalite movement through the character Udayan, as a wanted criminal in Tollygunge. Gauri and her mother-in-law are in verge of fear about Udayan's offense against the government which may harm him and Gauri feels insecure as she is on her family way. Udayan dies as she fears. She never feels like being home from her childhood and also her confidence level seems to decrease double after Udayan's death. First she leaves her home when her parents die. Then Udayan fills the gap by taking her to his home after their marriage. But soon after the death of Udayan, Gauri stands as the naïve victim for Udayan's act. She remains helpless that she has nowhere to go.

Subhash the elder brother of Udayan rushes to India in order to pacify the situation. Later he marries Gauri and takes her to America with him. There she delivers a girl child, Bela. Subhash is a good father to Bela, whom he considers as his own daughter. Sure the reader might come to the conclusion that Subhash and Gauri will make a happy home for little Bela. But what happens in Bela's life is different and the little girl endures many pangs in that small age. She becomes a victim of her mother's betrayal, who leaves home without the knowledge of Bela and Subhash. Home represents affection and security in everyone's life and everyone believe that people return to their home no matter how far they go. But for Gauri, it seems different totally that she always remains a gypsy throughout her life. On the other hand Udayan also never has been in home in his childhood days whereas Subhash feels safe in his home. Udayan's nature is to explore the world so he becomes a revolutionary, but Subhash is timid and hesitant, so he prefers to continue his studies in abroad. The novelist portrays the oxymoron between the two in well manner. At some point both Subhash and Udayan leave their home and suffer for their deeds. The interruption of police in Udayan's journey in the form of arrest for being in Naxalite movement and later he dies. Also Subhash travels far from his home and settles in an alien land where he finds no home till the end.

"Subhash, on the other hand, devoted himself whole-heartedly to bringing up Bela, playing

the dual roles of mother and father to her" (Batra 162). Subhash makes a fine home for Bela and Gauri. Subhash never betrays little Bela even though, he is not her real father. His love towards Bela pacifies Gauri and she becomes inattentive towards her daughter. Bela starts to stay inside her room all day to finish her thesis. But this does not seem to bother little Bela, because she satisfies herself by the mere presence of her mother in home. All her evenings she spend with her beloved father either by shopping or going for a walk or she sits and does her home work with him. Udayan's thoughts start to haunt Gauri and she could not come out from the crisis of his death. But at the same time, Gauri as a mother deceives Bela and goes to California by getting a job.

"Anger at him for dying when he might have lived. For bringing her happiness, and then taking away. For trusting her, only to betray her. For believing in sacrifice, only to be so selfish in the end" (*The Lowland* 164). This is all about her frustration towards life without Udayan whom she loves most. She expects a happy life with Udayan after their marriage. But all her glass menagerie shatters by Udayan's death. Still in America, with Subhash and Bela she is unable to come out of the delirium she has had on Udayan's death before her eyes. She acts rude to Bela at many times but she never ever tries to bother about that. It is a problem with Gauri, who never feels being at home. She never feels secure at any place other than being with Udayan. She drags little Bela across the carnage of earthworms in the pathway when she hesitates to step on it. "I don't like you, Bela cried out, shaking herself free. I'll never like you, for the rest of my life....." Bela's words had pervaded Gauri like a prophecy." (*The Lowland* 170)

Naxalite movement is so vigorous in Calcutta and police alerts to shoot the rebellions at sight and Udayan remains one among them. He takes part in the revolution without his family's knowledge, even without the knowledge of his wife Gauri. It is a treacherous action as it concerns with the three people who relies much on him. Udayan in the fantasy of young age fails to predict the consequences of the revolution which reprimand his family's happiness. Once again Gauri becomes an

orphan by the man she loves most. Her future dooms by the selfish act of Udayan who goes into the wall of fire leaving his innocent family thunderstruck by his death. Sudden death of Udayan collapses the calmness and happiness of the family. His parents lost one of their sons, but it is Gauri who loses her entire life and hope. Revolution comes as an impediment of Gauri's happy marriage life.

Out of all the commotion Subhash leads a peaceful life in America, nothing affects him until his brother dies in gunshot. Subhash as an elder brother of Udayan, does not want to desert Gauri who is expecting a child in few months. So he marries her and takes her to America with him. But the rest of his life with Gauri is not as he expects. She is in delirium of missing his dead husband Udayan that she never feels close with Subhash, but Subhash is true to his relationship. "The wide berth for herself that she had been seeking in their marriage, he now willingly gave. He no longer wanted to touch her in bed, he no longer bought up the possibility of a second child" (*The Lowland* 176)

Also little Bela is so close to Subhash, that he is everything to Bela. That is the reason Gauri never strains herself to fulfill Bela's needs. Finally, Gauri's deception affects Bela's hope and confidence in life. Bela greatly struggle to overcome all her problems with the help of a man who never thinks of betraying her. That is her beloved step father Subhash who shoulders her in her hard times and encourages her without fail. "In the *Lowland*, while Bela's Character is understandable, Gauri's remains highly complicated and inexplicable".(Batra 159).

Gauri and Subhash consider being the gypsies from postcolonial to modern era. They never bind with the place where they belong. And they never try to settle in one place as they love exploring new places and people. They are the personification of wild river which goes aimlessly and also without destination.

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