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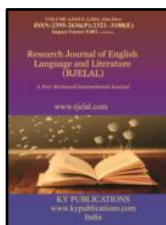
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## JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *LOW LAND*: PASSION TOWARDS EDUCATION DIMINISHES THE DEPRESSION OF GAURI

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### ABSTRACT

According to the law of nature, Education plays a vital part in the development of the human personality. As we grow higher and higher in the level of education, we do rise the same level in the knowledge of the internal secret of nature. Education, in other words can be defined as a gradual process of approximation of oneself to the reality of life and it sets aside the meaningless comments of familial and societal. Jhumpa Lahiri in her writings evinces Gauri as the best example for the person, who craves for learning, aiming that, would restore her mind in comfort zone. The dilemma faced by a young widow on accepting the second marriage and the turmoil of her mind on choosing a life based on the education she has got is depicted in this work. The cozy life she has possessed was voluntarily renounced over the search of individual freedom is vividly pictured in this novel. All the way, she has firmly creped the rope of education as her way of life. This attitude helps her to overcome all sorts of difficulties she faces in this novel. In the first half, Lahiri depicts Gauri as a woman with normal intentions, longings and encounters her in second half compromising her depressions with the passion towards her studies. Due to the affinity towards studies from her college days, when she moves to Rhode Island by the unprepared marriage, later gets admitted in an American university to quench her thirst for knowledge, kindled by the fire of wisdom, she tries to deprive out of the depressed state of mind.

**KEY WORDS:** Depression, Destiny, Education, Independence, Knowledge, Passion.

### INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in the development of human life especially women's. When a woman is suffering in the hands of fate and in her mental agony, education provides the confidence of leading a life of her own choice. Jhumpa Lahiri in her Man Booker Prize short listed (2013) and DSC Prize for South Asian Literature (2015) won novel "The Lowland" portrays the character Gauri with the notion of showing the plight of a Diaspora Indian woman. Gauri by attraction became the wife of Udayan, a radical communist in Calcutta and by his untimely death

became the wife of his elder brother Subhash, a Ph.D Scholar in America. Her turmoil over the remembrance of her first husband and her inability of leading a smooth life with her second husband has skillfully woven in this acclaimed novel. Education helps to overcome her turbulence and makes her settling in a distant place for secluding herself in the rest of her life. This paper pinpoints the gradual development of Gauri's academic skills from stage by stage amid her perplexed life and her relief of escaping from dilemma over to lead a normal life of a woman of Indian born and to live a life of her own choice of a woman of American

educated. Jhumpa Lahiri, as a child of Bengali parents who were settled in America and as an American brought up woman strives hard, as she told in her revelation *In Other Words*, "I spend more than a year promoting my last novel, *The Lowland*" (195) to present the life of the complicated character, Gauri in an accepted and admirable way of steering the story successfully.

#### **WOMAN OF DESTINY**

On depicting the character, Gauri, Jhumpa Lahiri portrays her as a woman of destiny. From her childhood she seldom enjoyed the tender affection from her mother as well as father even though her father was a district judge in and around the pastoral places of rural Bengal and cared about the wellness of his children including Gauri, "Her father was a district judge, and her parents and her sisters had moved every few years from place to place, to beautiful bungalows paid for by the government, in pretty parts of the countryside"(67). As there were more age differences between her and her elder sisters, there was no real attachment and they were soon married off the family, "Her sisters belonged almost to another generation: teenaged girls when she was an infant, young women when she was a child" (68). Gauri was sent to her maternal grandparents in Calcutta with her brother Manash on the ground of her mother's poor health. She began to be a part in her grandfather's apartment confining her stood on the balcony facing the junction from where she had first seen Udayan.

Having acquaintance with Udayan as a friend of Manash, she was induced by his casual behaviour and fascinated with his radical thoughts, she started to love him. Even though she had been living with her uncle and aunt, she did not mingle with anyone; this could be understood by one of her conversation with Udayan as "I'm not their responsibility. They have their own children to worry about"(69). The elopement of Gauri with Udayan led a permanent detachment with the family she had ever been lived. On her losing husband in the hands of paramilitary forces for having involved in unlawful activities in Calcutta and Bengal in front of her, she became once again a woman of destitute and solitude. No one from her home, except Manas did not attend the commemorations held in her in-laws

home as Udayan's mortal remain was not given to their family. "The body was not returned to them. They were never told where it had been burned"(129). Beloved husband's immature death, the sudden indifferences of her in-laws made her once again a woman of so pity. She was confined to remain in a small room where she had lived with Udayan and was forbidden to eat fish, the very basic food of Bengalis and any other ceremonial foods. She was considered as a burden to her in-laws in the absence of their beloved younger son, "No one bothered her"(129). "She wished the days and months ahead of her would end"(132). The callous attitude of her in-laws made Gauri unsympathetic towards them when she left and settled in America. From her childhood she led a life of no expectation. She voluntarily accepted the soliloquies as a way of life as there was no way to escape from the place where her husband was born. She never tasted any sort of happiness and enjoyment in her life. Udayan made her happy in some way, but that too was disowned in two years by his sudden death.

Her marriage with Subhash could be purely be considered as a mean of escaping from the torturous behaviour of her in-laws and to free herself from the frequent enquiry of police on the ground of Udayan's contact with naxalites, the revolutionary communists. "The only way to prevent it was to take Gauri away"(138). Even she refused to marry Subhash as it is disloyal to Udayan, she accepted his proposal on the assurance of her wishes of not yet born child and there were chances for pursuing her studies in a foreign land without any interruptions of anyone especially her in-laws. "She could go on with her studies. It would be an opportunity to begin again"(143). "He told her not to think about what people might say, how his parents would react"(143). Within twenty three years, she became the pawn in the hands of destiny. She had to depend more on others than herself. First, she was thrown to their grandparents by her own parents, then with Udayan for a short period of two years, after his death she had to accept the offer of Subhash. So in life, she was thrown to pillar to post in the hands of fate and the two brothers, both are her husbands, a woman never imagined in her life, "Always at the end of a queue, in the

shadow of others, she believed she was not significant enough to cast a shadow of her own" (72).

Even after settled in America, she felt the haunting loneliness. She did not share a comfortable and heartfelt life with Subhash. She expected her pregnancy over and there could be a disconnection with Udayan. But she could not do it throughout her life. Over disturbance in her mind for twelve years, he cut off herself from her husband and daughter, Bela and flew to California to get charge of teaching position. There she lived a life of independence for more than thirty years without having any contact or being contacted with Subhash and Bela. At the later stage in her life, she visited Calcutta to meet her brother, Manash, but it was not materialized. She walked through the street of Tollygunge where she lived once; she was not identified by anyone. She felt the emptiness. In desperate mood, she even imagined about killing herself by jumping from the balcony, "She pressed herself against the railing of the balcony. It was high enough. She felt desperation rising up inside her. Also a clarity. An urge"(395), of the hotel where she was staying in her Calcutta (now Kolkata) visit. So without fulfilling her expectation in her life throughout her life even though she had achieved in her career position as a faculty and a visiting scholar through strengthening her education got in India and America, Gauri, the character is depicted as a woman of destiny, who does not enjoy the peaceful mind from her childhood to her years of advancement.

#### **EDUCATION- A SOLACE**

In 1968 West Bengal was under President's rule, a period of unrest existed, "The education system was also in crisis. It was an outdated pedagogy at odds with India's reality. It taught the young to ignore the needs of common people. This was the message radical students started to spread"(31). Udayan, the radical, stood for the benefits of common people induced this urge in Gauri by providing books and exchanging opinions in detail, "They exchanged opinions about the limits of political freedom, and whether freedom and power meant the same thing" (71). As a psychology student, inspired by reading Marx's *Manifesto*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Felix Green's book on

Vietnam etc makes her feel that we human beings are born for certain reasons, "She felt her mind sharpening and focusing" (71). Accompanied with Udayan, she participates in radical meetings and renders a helping hand in their activities, "When speeches were delivered on the quadrangle, about the continuing rise in food prices, about the growing population, about the shortages of jobs, they listened to them together" (70).

From the beginning, Jhumpa Lahiri exhibits Gauri as a woman of learning. Learning was imbibed from her childhood by reading the line, "A fair brought booksellers once a year"(68). She had got inspiration from her grandfather, "It was her grandfather, who'd been a professor at the Sanskrit College, who'd died with a book on his chest, who inspired her to study what she did" (69). Even Udayan introduced her to Subhash in his letter as a woman who prefers books to jewels and asked him to bring some books he listed, for her when he returns to Calcutta, "Don't bother putting them in the mail, they'll only get lost or stolen. Bring them with you"(57). The friendship and later love between them has been developed based on their habits of reading and exchanging views about radical thoughts and philosophy. After Udayan's death, when she was confined in her room, books only gave her relief. That was even noticed by Subhash, "He glanced at a set of shelves built into one wall, where she stored her books"(116), "He saw other books spread open, facedown, covered in smooth brown paper"(117). In Rhode Island, while passing her time in her pregnancy, out of interest in studies, she searched the philosophy department and sneaked into the lecture hall, listened the class without enrolling herself as a regular student. She felt taking care of her own child as a secondary one than attending the classes and reading in the library. It was understood by Bela's words, "You're not paying attention, Bela protested, when Gauri's mind strayed"(193). For the cause of getting education, she was ready to renounce anything, including her child, Bela. She had been waiting for certain years that Bela was able to do her own work and not depend her mother. Without taking care of anyone, she had been cramming in her room even in the late

night for reading, writing and typing for years to finalize her dissertation.

Subhash brought her to America as his wife to lead a torture free life from her in-laws and frequent police enquiries. But soon he understood that she was not the woman who would satisfy the different needs of family members: Bela and himself, "My mother was right. You don't deserve to be a parent"(211). At the same time, he did not disturb her to pursue her studies as he thought that her interest in studies would help her to overcome some sort of depression that still persists in her mind, "He knew the marriage, which had been their own choice, had become a forced arrangement day after day"(258). Bela, though she did not know anything about her mother's past, also helped her mother by not disturbing her while she was studying, even from her infancy.

Gauri, she might have compromised with her second husband, Subhash and her daughter, Bela for leading a normal and comfortable life, cared only her mental satisfaction. The education, she got gave her the life of leading a life of individual. By disturbing the harmony of her husband and daughter she had been leading a life of seclusion in the distant place, California. She voluntarily wanted such punitive life and reduced her depression by seriously engaging herself in lectures, counselling, mentoring students and guiding them without having any second thought about her husband and daughter in Rhodes. She led a life of her own choice for thirty years only by the education she had got.

Had she not been taking the bold decision of moving to America as the wife of Subhash and had she not been taking the decision of separating herself from her husband and daughter to rejuvenate herself from the depression made by her first husband Udayan, she would have been a traditional wife and mother but in her inner she would be torn out every day. She never wanted to lead such a hypocritical life and took the responsibility of being a careless wife and mother voluntarily, "It was the just punishment for her crime. She understood now what it meant to walk away from her child. It had been her own act of killing. A connection she had severed, resulting in a

death that applied only to the two of them. It was a crime worse than anything Udayan had done"(294).

Education made everything possible in Gauri's case. Even in later stage, as she grew old, she was slightly disturbed by depression by meeting Bela in Subhash's house and visiting Calcutta, "She pressed herself against the railing of the balcony. It was high enough. She felt desperation rising up inside her"(295) and "The sensation of nothing supporting her, of no longer resisting. It would take only a few seconds. Her time would end, it was as simple as that"(296). But, she immediately managed to overcome by making herself ready to fly to London to attend a conference. Thus, education makes Gauri alive throughout her life even there were many dark incidents and episodes disturbing her throughout her life.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Gauri is a rare breed girl, "She prefers books to jewels and saris" (56). She is a bookish girl, heedless of her beauty, unconscious of her effect. The involvement in the research work, papers, lectures, classes mostly derives not only her past memories of Udayan, her pen interest in revolutionary movements, most diminutive exchanges with Bela and very less with Subhash, "Her ideology was isolated from practice, neutered by its long tenure in the academy. Long ago she'd wanted her work to be in deference to Udayan, but by now it was a betrayal of everything he had believed in. all the ways he had influenced and inspired her, shrewdly cultivated for her own intellectual gain" (284). Even though she is intending to be a mother, the fervency in studies and its work withdrew her not only from her responsibility, but fades away the blues. She admits that it is our responsibility to fit ourselves in the place where we feel comfortable, complete and where we find source for growth in all the required avenues, "Still, Gauri had waited until she'd been offered a job, until the occasion of Subhash's return to Calcutta"(280) and " But of course it had not been a competition, it had been her own squandering. Her own withdrawal, covert, ineluctable. With her own hand she'd painted herself into a corner, and then out of the picture altogether" (280). As the freedom of choice will be the expectation of a youthful

thinker, Subhash agrees Gauri's actions honest, definitive, not craven, not ongoing, not stealthily breaching her trust.

Jhumpa Lahiri being a woman, infers the inner most thoughts, longings, desires, predict the needs of Gauri, the protagonist. The spark of knowledge ignited in her later life, illuminated her indomitable spirit of inner self. Here, our protagonist eliminates the 'fined mindset' that promotes status-quo and picks up the 'growth mind set'. Thus the learning habit keeps the protagonist engaging her without much distraction; the education she got, retains her personal identity and provides her the life of career interesting.

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