

Individuality Development in *The Lowland*

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Abstract: Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Lowland* brings up a tale of two brothers born in Calcutta, the woman they each marry and the child born in to this unexpected triangle. *The Lowland* portrays personal quest in the characters. Instead of pain and grief of nostalgia, immigration acts as a support to individuality development in the plot. There is no perfect or idealistic approach in the novel rather it is imperfect in its own way. Complexities in human relationships increase with the self-centered attitude. Gauri's character is non ethical, self-centered, confident and mean. Her character gives the novel a wide dimension to study individuality development in a modern woman. Her quests to identify her own self, gender and nation is prominent. She takes many bold steps keeping her family at the stake of suffering.

Index Terms- Individuality, struggle. Development, the Lowland

I. INTRODUCTION

Individuality is a self-approach of an individual that influences his own life and others who come in contact with him. It is a powerful desire for personal choices. Subhash and Udayan Mitra are brothers but they are quite different from each other. Their psychological make-up leads them in different directions. Udayan's impulsiveness makes him a radical who loses his life in an encounter. Socially concerned Subhash tries to set things right. He struggles within himself before he settles down the storm in his life. Gauri who is traumatized by her husband's death goes through upheavals in her mind and hence her life. Her daughter, Bela, deprived of mother's love is equally disturbed. In this respect the paper will discuss the three generations with the social and familial environment influencing individual approach and understanding.

II. UDAYAN AND SUBHASH

The two brothers born and brought up in same family under same environment choose different nature of paths in their lives. It is so because analysis and reasoning are the personal phenomenon. Every individual's observation and learnings varies even under similar circumstances. Subhash, who was more sober and simple opts for higher education in Oceanography and settles in America. Whereas his brother Udayan turns out to be a teacher by profession but being experimental and daring in life he gets drawn into a radical left movement called Naxalism, (its name derived from Naxalbari, a tiny village to the north of Calcutta where impoverished peasants rose up against the police and landlords in 1967, sparking off dreams of a nationwide insurgency that would replicate Mao's earlier revolution in China.) In this reference Jhumpa Lahiri gives a brief introduction to what she wants to convey about two siblings born and brought up together:

They're separate people, but by and large their lives are communal. And when I think about how they are now, and then I fast forward in my mind years from now, I realize that, however close they remain emotionally, that physical closeness will go away. It changes and evolves as we grow up and become more individual. (Leese, np)

The 1970's stream of Naxalism draws the two brothers separate. Subhash was a god fearing, caring and responsible character. His idealism remains unpaid in the story. His decisions were always inspired by the welfare of family. He leaves home for higher studies in America thus bringing pride to his parents after education he chooses respectable job of teaching. There is sense of insecurity in Subhash who never received unbiased parental love. His parents were partial for his younger brother Udayan. That can be brought out as one reason of developing personalities in opposite directions. Udayan being the loved and pampered child develops wings of liberty of following one's own will. Although Subhash is a character who is bound by societal and familial rules. Freud terminology of "sibling rivalry" works in the case of these two brothers who live in competition to win parental love and favour.

Udayan daring behavior is governed by his id, "He was blind to self-restrains" (Lahiri 11). Freud theory says, id seeks to bring about satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle. In spite of being asked not to set a foot on the new pathway Udayan walks on it just for the sake of fun "forming impressions of the soles of his feet" (Lahiri 12). Udayan's decision of taking part in Naxalite movement is the result of his fearless attitude. Subhash possesses much anger and resentment with the freedom of his brother. He never puts check and control on his brother for being an activist because he was aware of the danger involved in it and somewhere or the other his jealousies want Udayan to pay. Ultimately he dies and Subhash returns back to support his parents but receives cold welcome. His parents did not open up their grief in front of him neither give him importance as the only son. Subhash gets much disappointed with the

treatment but his super ego does not allow him to do anything wrong rather his willingness to act as the saviour of the family gets shape after meeting Gauri, widow of Udayan. He decides to marry her and move back to America. Subhash did his best to save Guari and Bela but his efforts end fruitless as Gauri fails to accept Subhash's efforts of making a family with her. At last she leaves him and her daughter to live into the new world of individual efforts. This incidence increases Subhash's sympathy for Bela. The reason being that he himself have never been able to win his mother's love.

He has been brought up in Bengali cultural space and had deep respect for his parents and affection for his brother. He also had a sense of responsibility for his parents. His words to Udayan reveal the deep sense of parental responsibility: "They're the people who raised. Who continued to feed you and clothe you? You'd amount to nothing if it were not for them" (31 Lahiri)

Subhash life is full of struggle and aggression. First of all in lack of mother's love he develops jealousy for his brother, then he did not marry his first love for the sake of his own customs and traditions. His marriage with his brother's widow was not for love, it was his egoistic decision. Their marriage ultimately ends in melancholy and repression. The death of parents, Gauri's leaving home, Bela's indifference, death of a friend Richard leaves Subhash helpless and alienated. He is more often found to be driven by death instinct called Thanatos by Sigmund Freud. Freud describes it as "an urge in organic life to return to an earlier stage of things" (qtd. in "Sigmund Freud"). But his guilt free conscience makes his life instinct stronger than death instinct which does not let him think of suicide as away out. He does not isolate himself from others. It was not before Subhash talks his heart off to Bela's teacher Elise Silva than he got himself free from depression. Subhash reaches a strong and developed stage where he had no complaints. Bela joins him as a daughter.

Subhash character develops and explores possibilities remaining within the limits of customs and traditions. Gauri's walkout from home explores new dimensions for both of them. On the one hand Subhash attains his part of freedom and on the other Gauri's quest as an individual takes her to new ends.

III. GAURI

Gauri's subjectivization as a widow rendered her helpless in Calcutta of the 1980'. She was leading her life following the mandates of her mother-in-law being dressed up in traditional white sari, muted clothing and by turning vegetarian. Jacques Ranciere defines the process of subjectivization as "the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to another" (Ranciere, 60) Her identity throughout is seen in relation to another relative of hers. Whether be it as Manash's sister, Udayan's wife, daughter in law of the Mitra family,

Subhash's wife or Bela's mother- she had to act accordingly. Gauri's marriage with Subhash frees her of Indian taboos of widowhood. Her immigration to U.S. gives her a new birth. Unfortunately this new birth is alleged with unseparable past. Her new husband was the elder brother of her late husband whose death was an encounter of police against Naxalite workers. A movement in which she was playing an indirect role with her husband Udayan. Gauri was never able to forget her first husband. She accepts all traditional widow's customs and leads undisputed life with her in-laws. It was at this time when Subhash marries her and flies to America to give her and her unborn child a new identity. Gauri tries to shed away her past by giving up her Indian individuality in order to be an American. She sheds her long hair and gives up dressing in saree. Her Indian personality made her feel alien in the American society. Her western clothes and academic interest made her part of American culture but she could not change her Indian personality, complexion and name. This dilemma presents the complexity of identity crisis faced in diasporic situation. Gauri lives in the theory of third space as framed by Homi Bhabha. He says

On her part, Gauri, lived in confusion too having lost her identity in relationships: "From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman... She had married Subhash, she had abandoned Bela. She had generated alternative version of herself... only to be alone in the end" (240 Lahiri).

Gauri unconsciously punishes herself by separating Bela from herself. The act of unknowingly helping Udayan in killing a policeman and thus orphaning his son gives rise to a feeling of guilt which she could not get rid of even after moving to the U.S. Gauri appears to be a projection of Jhumpa Lahiri's own psyche. She projects her own fears and anxieties as a working mother through the character of Gauri. The guilt feeling in Gauri for destroying Subhash's and Bela's life does not let her live a peaceful life in California also. This guilt stops her from making friends and thus she punishes herself with loneliness. She feels doubly alienated. First, as an immigrant and secondly as rejected by her own family. The gulf widens between her family and her in America. Her disputed mind never was able to free itself from past trauma. Success and freedom made her more shallow she runs between one thing to another never achieving satisfaction in her life. She even gets involved in lesbian relationship with one of the student. Bela her daughter accepts her father after knowing the truth that he is her step-father but was not able to accept her real mother. It was Bela who got deeply affected by her mother's decisions and attitude. As a child she did not get her mother's love and affection rather her left her on her own fate to fight. After Bela majored in environmental science, she decided not to become like her parents, immersed in research in a university, instead decided to join Peace Corps. Lahiri makes a pertinent comment in on the fractured relationships. "On either side of the enormous country they lived apart, Bela roaming between them" (222).

On personal level Bela totally rejects her mother in her last encounter she refuses to acknowledge her or pay undue respect towards her but for the sake of her daughter she writes a letter of reconsideration where she signifies that for the sake of her daughter she may come up in good terms with her as being the granddaughter of the house she can freely

decide whether she needs you in her life or not. It can be seen as Bela's quest to reach out to her mother, leaving the possible option of getting connected through her daughter Meghna.

IV. CONCLUSION

Individuality development of every character in the novel is interrelated with the household conditions and familial terms. Individuality develops with the upbringing and at same time with the interpretation of individual. As in the case of Udayan and Subhash both brothers born and brought up in same family have such a magnificent difference in their attitude. Gauri is a character that is totally a product of circumstances and environment. She is a feeble character in the sense that she never fights back she takes things as it is. She moves on with every feeling never checks and controls. It was she who helped her husband in Naxalite movement, it was she who tells the copsudayan's hiding place, it was she who betrays her daughter and feels she can never undo the wrong she has done to her daughter, it was she who gets involved in lesbian act. With so much flaws in character her instinct to live life never distinguishes but yes her family relationships lose their shape and were on the verge of end. Her positive growth is only visible on academic front which has been her soul instinct from the beginning.

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