

ISSN: 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

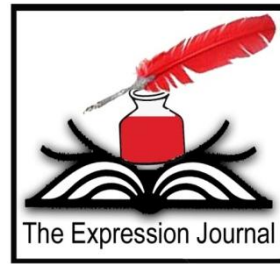
Bi-Monthly Referred & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Vol. 1 Issue 1 Feb. 2014

Editor-in-Chief: Bijender Singh

Email: editor@expressionjournal.com
www.expressionjournal.com



JHUMPA LAHARI'S *THE LOW LAND*

K. Chandra Sekhar

Assistant Professor of English,

Vignan Institute of Technology and Science,

Andhra Pradesh, India



The novel stretches for nearly four decades in time and moves from India to America and is peopled with a handful of characters connected by blood but separated by volition. It is the story of the dead Udayan and his elder brother Subhash who though looks alike is of opposing characteristics. Udayan, dynamic and pushing while Subhash withdrawn and diffident has attachment for each other which tragically results in unforeseen disharmony in Subhash's family life. In their childhood they used to play in the open place in Tollygunge the memories of which hanunt Subhash long after his brother's death.

In youth the brothers part their ways. Udayan drawn towards reform and revolution becomes active in the Naxal Movement. Subhash on the other hand leaves for America for education much to the chagrin of his brother. The narration is shifted to America to describe the experience and exploits of Subhash. He learns about Udayan's marriage and his parents' welfare through occasional letters her received from his brother. He meets a married American living with her daughter and separated from her husband and is emotionally attached to her and her daughter. His first visit back home follows his brother's elimination by the police in a brutal open encounter. His heart goes out for the widow of his brother who is looked down upon by his parents as a necessary outsider. His sympathy for her plight and his affection for his brother coupled with his dislike of his parents; behavior compels him to take the decision of marrying pregnant Gauri and of taking her with him to America. It was not a decision

taken impulsively and despite the heartless ungrateful behaviour of Gauri in later years he never regretted his action. The story of Subhash and Gauri in America moves rapidly as Gauri delivers Bela.

The novelist appears to have been on the side of Subhash the male rather than on Gauri the mother. Gauri's character delineation is harsh and is projected as a child bearing and not a child rearing mother. It was Subhash who ungrudgingly and affectionately brings up the child either for his love for his deceased brother or for facilitation gauri to indulge in her studies. Gauri uncharacteristically keeps herself aloof from Bela as if Subhash's bounden duty was to take care of Bela. Subhash's initial interest in Gauri has no ulterior motives and is born of humane consideration for Gauri and Bela. It is Gauri who behaved in strange manner after her child's birth and the reader gets no clue to the detached behavior of Gauri. As the narration moves forward and backward in a clumsy manner we discern the tentative relationship of Gauri with Udayan. Their togetherness as wife and husband was the outcome of youthful attraction and not caused by sharing ideologies and tastes. The indifferent attitude of Gauri to her daughter widens the hiatus between mother and child.

The uneasy relationship of Subhash and Gauri after Bela's birth culminated in their parting of ways. Gauri, the Indian born woman overwhelmed by the freedom offered by Subhash and the new environment is now transformed into the modern outgoing female of independent thinking. Her first husband Udayan who lives in her memory as the narrator mentions in the course of narration has no impact on her nor does the mild natured Subhash evoke soft feelings in her. The personality of the main female character is complex and confused as we read her journey of life. Even the walking away from her house was shrouded in mystery though the fissures in the family appear before Subhash and Bela visit India after the death of Subhash's father. The disappearance of Gauri was unexpected and unwarranted and the daughter Bela begins to detest the lady who abandoned them. Gauri's life now takes a course which was not intended and planned by either Subhash or Gauri. She makes academic progress and lives a life of freedom and it shows that she has no emotional attachment with either Udayan or Subhash and no bonding with her child. The minor incidents in her life in the far-off country do not contribute fresh insights into her character except that she takes advantage of the moment at hand and has no qualms. She in a way can be described as an abnormal woman of unfulfilled desires. The two avoidable contacts she had with a former student and a researcher on the campus show her in

poor light. Lahari has succeeded in portraying the female protagonist as a dashing lady and her counterpart as a man of compromise and affection.

The failed confrontation between Subhash and Gauri shows the disturbed mind of Gauri and it was an anti-climax as she unexpectedly sees her daughter Bela. The incident rouses pity for Gauri as her heart swells with motherly love and Bela ruthlessly spurns her. The daughter, more than mother realized the injustice done to Subhash. Bela accuses her mother of taking advantage of Subhash and of abandoning her. It was a heart touching scene with Gauri trying to befriend Meghana and Bela purposely sending the girl out as if she does not want even the shadow of Gauri to fall on her daughter. She ruthlessly asks her mother to leave the house as if the house would be polluted by her presence.

Unfortunately, Gauri leaves her consent papers for divorce. Her stay in Rhode Island for the last is wrought with suspense which was built adroitly and sustained meticulously. It's publicized and the author too stated that the novel was inspired by an incident of encounter during Naxal Movement. Notwithstanding the public statement of the novelist, the Movement is alluded to and has little to do with Gauri's actions. Gauri was never directly involved in the Movement and Udayan too did not take her into confidence in as far as the activities of the Naxal Movement are concerned. The impact of the Movement in the story is confined to the husband of Gauri, brother of Subhash and father of unborn Meghana being involved in it.

An ironical incident in the story is that of the policeman who once let off the brothers in the childhood became an accomplice in the murder of the policeman. She acted as an emissary at the behest of her husband to exchange secret letters between Udayan and tailor woman, who faintly resembles the old lady in Charles Dickens novel of French Revolution.

It was Meghana the daughter who imbibed some qualities of Udayan. Meghana in spite of the upbringing determined to live the life of a nomad and did odd jobs to help the folk. If upliftment of the oppressed is at the centre of Udayan's Movement, to a certain extent Meghana fits the bill as his successor.

To comprehend the working of the characters not much conversation is recorded and is to be construed that the actors in the complex story behaved as they did because the narration tells us. The

two scenes which are etched on the readers' mind are poignantly described and stand testimony to the author's skill. The suspense generated in the last few pages when Gauri makes an effort to meet Subhash is a masterstroke of Jhumpa Lahari, which proved her fiction writing. Similarly the end of Udayan in a cruel manner in Tollygunge too is depicted in a touching fashion.

Jhumpa Lahari being a successful writer has produced yet another master piece, a novel of diasporic material. *Lowland* is a family drama. She well presented human relations and emotions both in Indian and western contexts. One can only hope soon she will produce a more challenging novel with Indian sensibilities in Indian environment with characters drawn from native soil unaffected by alien culture. degradation and answers the concern expressed in the beginning, "*Bharat Mata ro rahi hai*".

References

Lahari, Jhumpa. *The Lowland*. Random House, India, 2013. Print.