

**Role of Memory in Diaspora Literature: A Study of Lowland by
Jhumpa Lahiri**

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Abstract

Memories of the homeland play a crucial part in diaspora writing. The memories are triggered by the time they spend in their homeland. A diaspora writer frequently struggles with overwhelming homesickness and nostalgia. The literary realms of diaspora writers, worlds, and cultures communicate with one another, whether actual or imagined. The borderline that separates immigrants from others is thin and indistinct. The two worlds blend and converge, yet they need to be discernible because of their ever-shifting perspectives. One of the most disconcerting aspects of being an expatriate is the persistent need to go "home."

Keywords: Memory, Diaspora, Immigration, Homesickness

Introduction:

Jhumpa Lahiri is a modern and widely recognized Indian (Bengali) American writer. She was born in London on July 11, 1967. Her actual name was Nilanjana Sudeshna. When she started school, the instructors felt that Jhumpa (a simple nickname that is simple to pronounce) would be a fantastic name for her. After getting her B.A. in English Literature from Barnard College in 1989, she obtained her M.A. (English), M.A. (Creative Writing), M.A. (Comparative Literature), and Ph.D. degrees from Boston University. She has worked as a Vice President of the PEN American Centre since 2005. She has won notable prizes for her creative brilliance, including the Pulitzer Prize and PEN/Hemingway award for her short-story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (2000). Her debut novel, *The Namesake* (2003), became a blockbuster Hindi film with the same title. Lahiri's most recent literary work, *The Lowland*, received the DSC Award for South Asian Literature at the Jaipur Literary Festival in early 2015.

Discussion and Findings:

The Lowland is primarily about two brothers with an age difference of fifteen months only. They have always been together since their childhood. Subhash, the elder brother, is pragmatic and cautious, whereas Udayan, the younger one, is rebellious by temperament. In the 1960s, the rise of the Naxalite movement wreaked havoc on Calcutta. It prompted Subhash to depart for the United States to seek a PhD in marine chemistry. Led by ideals of equality and justice, Udayan participates in the

West Bengal-based Naxalite uprising. After a brief affair, he marries his girlfriend, Gauri, a philosophy student. His involvement in numerous violent acts leads him to death. Cops fatally shoot him in the lowlands just behind his home. Subhash returns home after hearing about Udayan's death. To protect from the hardships of widowhood, Subhash marries Gauri, who is already pregnant with Udayan's child. He takes her to the United States. The remainder of the narrative depicts the consequences of two prominent characters, Subhash and Gauri, and their battle to live with guilt and memories that touch them and their descendants. Stephanie Merritt writes in her review of *The Lowland*:

The Lowland is a sweeping, ambitious story that examines in intimate detail the intersection of the political and the personal, encompassing nearly 50 years of Indian and American history through the lives of one family (The Guardian)

The story focuses on the socio-political movement of Naxalites and its effects on the Mitra family against the backdrop of a diasporic environment and the psychological anguish of the primary characters as they strive to resolve the difficulty of their familial relationships. Jhumpa Lahiri also shows the emotional dilemmas of characters who persistently seek emotional connection and mutual understanding. The novel's plot is interlaced with the themes of familial relationships, displacement, alienation, and identity crises. Jhumpa Lahiri throws light on how immigrants and their children feel about the historical events in their home country and how these events impact the expatriate population in the settled country.

Udayan's death was like a call to duty for Subhash. After an absence of three years, he returns home to soothe his family while remaining utterly oblivious to the events unfolding in Calcutta. He marries Udayan's pregnant wife only to rescue her from the hardships a woman faces after he husband's death. His choice to marry Gauri and take her to the United States only intensifies his estrangement because all he obtains from this marriage is loneliness. Bela is born just a few months after they arrive in America. As a mother, Gauri cannot take care of Bela. She is also not able to connect with Subhash. Gauri's passion for liberty and individual autonomy is easily accessible on American soil. As a widow in India, her life would have been grey and depressing. However, she can throw behind her old beliefs and priorities without remorse in the United States. Her focus is only to move forward in her career and personal life. The interest in studying philosophy precludes her from caring for her daughter and spouse. Her interest in philosophy causes her to grow estranged from her family and careless about real human life and relationships. After Udayan's death, she was unwelcome at her in-laws' home, and after Subhash moved her to Rhode Island, she no longer fit into his life. She only finds solace in her philosophical study.

Memory is used to tell the story from different points of view. It is a retrospective method that provides the novel with a retrospective narration style in some of the most critical scenes of the plot. In other words, the story is told through the memories of one or more characters. Lahiri employs an intricate system of the memory trope combined with a significant amount of intense internal monologue. Bijoli, the mother of Udayan and Subhash, narrates her family's history and story via

her memories. The phrases have a lyrical intensity and eloquence that hint at how time flows together and how the past and present are linked. It also suggests that the past is always there, tying into the present and the characters' memories. Gauri's memories bring to life the scene of Udayan's arrest and murder. Her memories present her viewpoint on the Naxalite movement, illustrating the brutality of the police and the silent history of her widowed life. It is an incident that has not been documented in official history.

Nonetheless, this forgotten past is based on the recollection of a woman replete with her interpretation of events. It is worth mentioning that from her narrative perspective, the cruelty of the legal system and police is revealed. To erase her horrific experience, she attempts to forget that she had another son, Subhash. She tries to calm herself and eliminate her fear that the same awful occurrence would happen again. The death of Udayan casts a pall over the husband-wife relationship. Bijoli's displeasure stems from the memory of Udayan's death or any allusion. She stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the reality of the situation. Therefore, she steps into the realm of fantasy. She is an example of traumatic neurosis with memory as its primary source. Traumatic neurosis is the direct outcome of her inability to cope with the suddenness of Udayan's death. She cannot release herself from the hold of Udayan's ghostly efforts at alteration. She does not permit selling or moving out of the home where Udayan had resided during her lifetime. Her ultimate goal is to save the lowland, Udayan's tomb, and the two ponds as memorial stones. She loses her mind when she notices the area with the leftovers from a wedding party. She questions, "Who has insulted Udayan's memory this way?" (The Lowland 190) She has a complete breakdown after recalling her tragic past and becomes a clinical case of insanity. For her, memories become scary and violent. "She had been converted permanently by Udayan's death" (The Lowland 212). She re-enacts the previous experience when her child Udayan was alive. This is a symptom of her traumatic neurosis:

She waits for Udayan to appear amid the water hyacinth and walk toward her. It is safe now, she tells him. The police have gone. No one will take you away. Come quickly to the house she waits, sure that he is there, that he hears what she tells him (The Lowland 190)

The memories of Udayan push Subhash to marry Gauri to protect his brother's kid. He is not accessible from the influence of his brother. He could not erase his brother's memories, as evidenced by the lowland and the two ponds, because "he had no sense of himself without Udayan. From his earliest memories, at every point, his brother was there" (The Lowland 6). The intention behind marrying Gauri was to help him feel more connected with the memories of his brother. Returning to the United States, he hopes to start over and put the past behind him. He is deprived of his actual personality and nature while trying to forget the past. His sense of exile and rootlessness is evident because the memories of his past in India continuously haunt his sense of belonging.

He felt forbidden access; the past refused to admit him. It only reminded him that this arbitrary place, where he had landed and made his life, was not his.

Like Bela, it had accepted him while at the same time keeping a distance. He is still a visitor (The Lowland 255).

Nature acts as a link between Subhash and his home. He connects Rhode Island's geographical location to that of Tollygunge. The sound of rain awakens him at night. He is perplexed by the sound of raindrops striking panes. He recalls severe rain on the first night he spent with Holly and heavy rain on the day Bela was born. The memory of rainfall transports him to Tollygunge. "He thought of the monsoon coming every year in Tollygunge. The two ponds flooding, the embankment between them turning invisible" (The Lowland 260).

Subhash and Gauri cannot escape the past by fleeing from their house or memories. They are perennially rootless because they have neither changed totally in America nor have the memories of their previous existence in India liberated them from their grasp. Their belonging to India is a memory. They try to forget, but it is not possible to forget. The more they attempt to leave their house to forget the memories and family history, the more they are tormented by the past and its memory, leading them to loneliness and tumult.

Returning home becomes an unavoidable need for them if they want to heal from the traumatic and terrible memories. They are stuck in the past and unable to accept the realities of modern life. They are frozen in the turmoil they had left behind. The house has changed from what it used to be when they left for the first time. Perhaps they cannot live without the past and its memories. They have no choice but to return home. As they return home, the memory relinquishes its hold and allows them to live in the present. The therapeutic value of their return is a treatment for their painful and traumatic memories. Returning to Calcutta and the lowlands brings Gauri's thoughts back to reality. She pictures herself taking off her colorful bracelets, seeing the cops hurry in, seeing Udayan standing on the balcony for the very last time, sharing an intimate embrace, and tragically losing him and collapsing to the ground. She eventually returns to her current situation and reality. Similarly, her return to her childhood home and her talk with Manash, her brother, has a therapeutic impact because she needs love and brotherly care.

Conclusion:

The Lowland resounds with memories of Udayan, whose untimely death has a lasting impact on his loved ones. Memory and its enduring repercussions are hard to escape throughout the narrative. Memories in their various forms of happiness and misery are fundamental to each human identity. The mental stimulus returns to the human mind after the original effects and visuals have disappeared. The memory of painful occurrences can sometimes affect people's lives. Lahiri throws light on these elements of terrible memories and their disturbing effects. Bijoli, Gauri, and Bela, with their direct and indirect ties to Udayan's life, are undoubtedly wounded by his tragic death. In reality, the weight of his Udayan's memories is unavoidable, lingering and affecting them for the rest of their lives.

References:

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