

## **THEMES OF DISPLACEMENT AND ALIENATION: A STUDY OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE LOWLAND***

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**Dr. Archana Kumari**

Associate Professor

Department of English, Central University of South Bihar  
Gaya, Bihar, India

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, diasporic writings have occupied an essential place in the field of postcolonial literature. Diaspora, one of the major disciplines in postcolonial studies, extensively deals with migration, displacement, and alienation and its consequences. Displacement, in diasporic context, may occur either voluntarily or involuntarily. While colonial displacement usually happened forced and occurred primarily due to political and cultural reasons, postcolonial and postmodern displacement usually happen voluntarily and occur primarily due to globalization and aspiration for a better life. Like displacement, alienation is one of the basic themes that dominate much of the current literature. The present paper reviews recent development in the concept of Diaspora and the experiences of people in Diaspora and their ways to respond their experiences. The paper aims to bring forth the way Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize winner novelist, explores the causes and effects of displacement and alienation as experienced by the characters in her exquisite novel, *The Lowland* (2013). The paper also discusses some of the theoretical concepts such as Diaspora, displacement, alienation, identity and their application in the understanding of the migrants.

**Keywords:** Displacement, Alienation, Diaspora, Postcolonial, American dream

### **Introduction**

Recently, a new generation of South Asian female writers has begun to make their unique mark upon the world of Diasporic literature, which comes under the broader realm of postcolonial literature. The literature of the Indian Diaspora has contributed immensely and has received many accolades for enriching the world literature. Women writers of Indian Diaspora, like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Meena Alexander, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and others have been fairly in centre stage for the last few decades in voicing the diasporic consciousness. Many of these writers have explored the sense of displacement and alienation poignantly by dealing not only with a geographical dislocation

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but also with a socio-cultural and psychological sense of displacement and alienation. Jhumpa Lahiri is one such writer. The sense of psychological displacement is as potent as the act of physical displacement. An individual may stay rooted in a particular place still succumb to the sense of being displaced because the situation or people around them have changed. The similar situation we see in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Lowland*. Characters of this novel are displaced not only physically but also psychologically.

Born to Bengali parents in London, Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri, popularly known as Jhumpa Lahiri, was raised on the East coast of India and received higher education in the US. Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian-American writer is known for her short stories, novels and essays in English, and, more recently, in Italian. Lahiri largely writes about the complexities of human conditions and interpersonal relations of Indians and abroad – to be more specific Indian Hindu Bengalis in the USA. One can find striking similarities between Lahiri's situation and the situations of many of her characters. Jhumpa Lahiri is known for her literary outputs: *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) *The Namesake* (2003) *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) *The Lowland* (2013). Jhumpa Lahiri, in her novel, *The Lowland*, has proved her literary merit as an influential diasporic writer. Lahiri's *The Lowland* was shortlisted for the US National Book Award 2013, the Man Booker Prize 2013, and the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction 2014. Lahiri, in an interview, says that her second novel, *The Lowland*, is founded on a tragic incident she first heard about in India during one of her many visits while she was growing up. Two young brothers, who had become involved in a violent political movement, were executed just a few hundred yards from her grandparents' home in Calcutta (now Kolkata). The young men's family was forced to watch as they were killed. Lahiri says, "That was the scene that, when I first heard of it, when it was described to me, was so troubling and so haunted me — and ultimately inspired me to write the book" (Neary).

The story of *The Lowland* revolves around a Bengali immigrant family (the Mitras) in the United States in the backdrops of political revolt and the Naxalite movement in the 1960s in West Bengal, India. It deals with the experiences of displacement and alienation, leading to nostalgia and guilt of the central characters. Much of Lahiri's previous fictions have focused on the generational tension between immigrant parents and their children. She has touched on history and politics in other works, but in this book, they are an integral part of the story. *The Lowland*, among other things, exquisitely showcased the dynamics of the diaspora elements, such as alienation, loneliness, nostalgia, uprooting, and absorbing personality. Though Lahiri does not consider *The Lowland* as an 'immigrant fiction'; it can be observed that the major incidents in *The Lowland* are related to the diaspora problem.

Usually, Lahiri's works investigate the cultural displacement and its impact, but *The Lowland* deals with the psychological or emotional displacement of the characters. Unlike many other writings of Lahiri, displacement and alienation of the characters in this novel are

not caused by their diasporic dilemma. In Lahiri's previous works, the immigrants are torn between two cultures. The first-generation immigrants are not relinquished their native culture when living in a host country. As Safran says, "they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship" (1991: 85). The attachment with the native culture of the immigrants of the first generation coexists with their never-ending struggle for assimilation with the new culture. Assimilation in the new land is not easy because of feelings of nostalgia on the one hand and non-supportive circumstances in the new land on the other hand. However, in *The Lowland* the situation is quite different. Subhash and Gauri try to discard nostalgia in favour of assimilation into the adopted culture. Subhash finds solace in his scientific career and in the upbringing of Bela all alone after Gauri leaves them. Though initially, Subhash expresses his reluctance to integrate into the American culture but regardless of the disparities, he also notices the positive side of his migration. Because no one knows him or his connection with Udayan in America, so he can begin a new life and can affirm his distinctiveness. Gauri, on the other hand, realizes that the host land (America) is a suitable place for evading her former and agonizing reminiscences of Calcutta. Gauri adopts the American concept of individual independence and personal advancement by preoccupying herself with philosophy. But during the process of adaptation and assimilation in the host land, these individuals formed a hybrid cultural identity.

## 2. Literature Review

In today's globalized world, people's movement from one place to another, from one country to another, or from one continent to another, has been a popular activity. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (1996). Arjun Appadurai introduces the idea of newly imagined worldscapes. Appadurai opines that while movement and Diaspora are by no means new phenomena, what is new is that the world itself and specific localities have also become increasingly unstable and in flux, creating new kinds of global relations and "tragedies of displacement" (38). New dimensions of globalisation, technology, and mobility have led scholars like Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard to talk about the world in terms of homelessness and placelessness, as places have become more interchangeable and meaningless.

In this globalized world, there are certain terms which have either lost or significantly changed their original meanings. The term 'diaspora' is one of such terms. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, diaspora is "the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland". The dictionary describes that 'diaspora' is descended from the Greek word *dia-speirein*, meaning "to scatter, spread about." Etymologically, the term 'diaspora' means 'dispersion' or 'scatter through/across'. The term diaspora finds its roots in Ancient Greece where people moved away from their land for trade and business and thus initially diaspora referred to migration and colonization. Later on, the

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term was utilized for the Jews when they were forced to disperse from their land which led to a lot of suffering. It referred to the settling of the Jewish people outside of Palestine after the Babylonian exile thousands of years ago. The story of Exodus in the Jewish diaspora, continued to dominate for a long period. But, in recent years, the meaning of the term 'diaspora' has been extended to refer to situations other than the experiences of the Jewish community outside their homeland. Now 'diaspora' has become an umbrella term to refer to varieties of people such as immigrants, expatriates, 'transnational', people in exile, refugees, etc. (HimadriLahiri 9) and has acquired new connotations. Though there is a difference between these terms, they sometimes overlap with the term 'diaspora'. Recently, the phenomenon of diaspora has incorporated transnational dimensions due to unprecedented advancement in science and technology, flexibility in governments' policies and the expansion of socio-cultural, political and economic networks. Theorists like Safran, Sheffer, and Cohen have talked about different types of diaspora.

Similarly, the meaning of the term 'displacement' has changed over the period. In general terms, 'displacement' means a state of being out of one's own place. Earlier, the term 'displacement' was associated with negative connotations such as forced displacement, victimization, alienation, loss, etc. In this globalized world, the main motives of displacement to a foreign land are usually better job opportunities, trades and business, visits, further studies, etc. As mentioned earlier, displacement or movement has become easier by the advancement in communication, transportation, and technology, and the government's policies. There is a difference between the notion of displacement in the colonial and the postcolonial period. While colonial displacement usually happened forced (e.g., slaves, indentured labourers) and occurred essentially due to political and socio-cultural reasons, postcolonial and postmodern displacement usually happen voluntarily and occur essentially due to globalization and personal reasons.

The last decade has seen unprecedented attention to spatiality across the humanities, as evident in the publication of several anthologies, such as *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Warf and Arias, 2009) and *Spatial Turns: Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture* (Fisher and Mennel, 2010). This development shows that a spatial approach to literary studies is still a relatively new field of research in which many possibilities remain unexplored, especially when it comes to combining the subject of migration with literary studies. Scholars have written abundantly about various types of displacement. Perhaps one of the most prominent critics to theorize this state can be found in Edward Said's *Out of Place: A Memoir*. In modern times displacement has been identified in its four forms: physical/spatial displacement, cultural displacement, psychological/affective displacement, and intellectual displacement of the immigrant, the refugee, the exile, the expatriate (Anderson, 11). Though almost all of these elements can be attributed to the characters of the novel, *The Lowland* but the third category of displacement is more clearly

visible in the selected novel, whereas the other three categories are indirectly engaging. Psychological/affective displacement is very vividly portrayed through the persona of Subhash and Gauri. Their personal turmoil and secrets of Bela's fatherhood troubled their lives, and they turned emotionally displaced in the diasporic circumstances.

The concept of hybridity is the most widely employed and most disputed term in postcolonial theory. Hybridity, which in its most basic sense refers to 'mixture', is a very significant notion in diasporic literature because it creates an interesting paradox. In order to fit well with their host culture, migrants are expected to integrate into the new culture and act with it. Therefore, they are required to form a hybridized identity that includes elements from their home and host cultures both. Homi K. Bhabha, a leading voice in postcolonial studies, while talking about hybridity, states that the assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures, can be seen as positive, enriching and dynamic, as well as oppressive (*The Location of Culture*: 1994). The same has been depicted through the major characters of *The Lowland*.

Sense of displacement and alienation is prevalent in contemporary literary studies. Diaspora, as a major product of displacement, has become the point of contention for all cultural studies today. The concept of displacement is prominent in history, and therefore it is fundamental to all spheres of study. The concept of 'displacement' shows amazing interdisciplinary applications. Displacement has become such a fundamental phenomenon and concept that its implication guides all social changes and theories. John Durham Peters, in his essay "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora" writes that through the ages, the vocabulary of social description has been dominated by mobility and displacement:

*Consider some of the personae characterized by their mobility: Abraham, the sojourner and a stranger, never to return to His home; Odysseus, who finally returns to Penelope after his odyssey; Oedipus, an outcast from his city; the legend of the wandering Jew; flaneurs, loafers, and bohemians; gypsies, gypsy scholars, sea gypsies, and gypsy truckers; hoboes, tramps, drifters, vagabonds, and flimflam artists; sociologists, private eyes, men and women of the street; sailors, soldiers of fortune, adventurers, and explorers; border crossers of all sorts; gauchos, cowboys, and guerilla fighters; pioneers, pilgrims, and crusaders; knights-errant, troubadours, minstrels, charlatans, and journeymen; Huns, Vandals, Goths, Mongols, Berbers, and Bedouins; tourists, travelers, hajji, refugees, immigrants, the stateless and the homeless; commuters, telecommuters, jet-setters, migrant workers, and Gastarbeiter; automobilists, bikers, and circus people. Movement is one of the central resources for social description (18).*



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Displacement and alienation are the fundamental notions and themes that we come across in the postcolonial and postmodern literature. Exile, movement, displacement, and alienation have been common themes since Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *The Poems of Exile*, and even the *Bible*. The terms 'displacement' and 'alienation' have a strong connection with diaspora literature that studies the experiences of pain and pleasure of the people in the Diaspora. Displacement and alienation are inter-connected and inter-related terms as both affect each other, and at the same time, get affected by themselves. Displacement or dislocation usually has unfavorable effects in a diasporic situation and leads to alienation, identity issues, cultural conflict, nostalgia, longing, and belongingness, etc. seen in the displaced people. Some of these feelings are very much present in the characters of *The Lowland* as well. Displacement affects an individual's life in many ways. The characters of the novel experience displacement and alienation in their own ways.

Due to the diasporic writing, the theme of alienation has again become prominent in the last few decades. Alienation could be best understood with reference to the displacement and the survival instinct of individuals in the Diaspora. Etymologically, the word 'alienation' is derived from the Latin term 'alienatio' having 'alienere' which means 'to snatch', 'to avoid', 'to remove', 'to make a thing of others', etc. In the present day literary world, this term has acquired a very complex and multidimensional feature. Sidney Finkelstein defines alienation as "a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt toward something seemingly outside oneself which is linked to oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defense but impoverishment of oneself" (*Existentialism and Alienation*: 137). Finkelstein's theory refers to that alienation is a psychological phenomenon. Modern sociologists discuss alienation in terms of 'loneliness', 'exile' and 'rootlessness.' Alienation means "an individual feeling or state of dissociation from self, from others, and from the world at large" (Eric & Mary Josephson, *Man Alone* 1962:13).

### 3. Research Methodology

The present study reviews Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Lowland*, in the light of postcolonial and modern/postmodern readings with the focus on diasporic elements in it as an underpinning. In the postmodern era, there is no fixed reality and truth, and the meaning of everything has been changed; thus, the diasporic perception of displacement and alienation has taken a new dimension. The universal concept of 'displacement' as a painful experience has been deconstructed. The paper highlights how the effect of displacement and alienation on individuals in the diasporic situation varies from the earlier conceptions and experiences. This has been highlighted mainly through the major characters of the novel, Subhash and Gauri, who migrated to the US and who cannot think of going back and finally settled down in their motherland, India. Their migration from India to the US gave them a better opportunity and more liberty to pursue their aspirations. The paper also reviews some concepts like diaspora, displacement, alienation, etc. and their changed meaning in the postcolonial and postmodern

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period. The article mainly focuses on the themes of displacement and alienation and their effects on the characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Lowland*. The article, among other things, shows how the characters in the novel deal with displacement as an opportunity to get freedom from the barriers of their past life and start a new and better life.

#### 4. Discussion

To understand the diasporic elements in this novel, let us first know the story of *The Lowland* in brief. *The Lowland* is the story of two brothers, Subhash and Udayan Mitra, who are born only fifteen months apart, look and sound alike but are very different from each other. The two ponds near their house represent two brothers – at times separate; at other times, inseparable. Though they look alike, their nature was polar apart in certain aspects – one rebellious and exuberant, the other is responsible and contemplative. They seem inseparable while growing up in Tollygunge, the majestic city of West Bengal, which had witnessed the rise and decline of too many political regimes, the bloodletting during senseless communal riots, and a terrible famine manufactured by a colonial administration fighting a World War.

Even when they were old enough, they were permitted to leave the house but were asked: “not to lose sight of one another” (*The Lowland*10). But as they grow, the charismatic and adventurous Udayan becomes more radical and obsessed by a sense of equality and justice and joins the political Naxalite Movement of the 1960s and becomes involved in the movement which was set on bettering the living conditions of the poor population of India through the violent uprising. Subhash, in contrast, the more careful and pragmatic one, dutifully dedicating himself to personal rather than collective improvement, leaves the troubled city of Calcutta to pursue his higher studies (Ph.D. Programme) in scientific research (Chemical Oceanography) in Rhode Island. Udayan becomes upset at his brother's decision to leave the country and acknowledges the worth of his company for the first time in life: “You're the other side of me, Subhash. It's without you that I'm nothing. Don't go” (31). But despite his brother's request not to leave him, Subhash leaves India. Udayan, a dynamic idealist and impulsive by nature, deepens his involvement in the Naxalite movement by risking his life and family. In the meantime, Udayan, against his parent's wish, marries Gauri, who is pursuing her degree in Philosophy at Presidency.

But after a brief happy conjugal life with Gauri, he is killed by the police in the lowland behind his parental house for his involvement with the Naxalites. Subhash returns home, hoping to pick up the pieces of devastated family, and decides to marry his deceased brother's widow, Gauri, out of a sense of duty. He also decided to take Gauri to Rhode Island with him, although she is pregnant with his brother's baby. Gauri, who is only 23 years old, already a widow, was denied eating fish or meat, had to wear the widow's white sari, and was ignored by her in-laws. Police used to come to their house to investigate Gauri to get some

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information regarding her deceased husband's involvement in the Naxalite movement and the murder of a policeman. Subhash knows about his parents' intention of throwing her out of the house and so he makes Gauri aware by saying that "Even if the police leave you alone, my parents won't" (119). Subhash persuades her to accompany him to America to protect herself by saying: "that in America no one knew about the movement, no one would bother her. She could go on with her studies. It would be an opportunity to begin again" (119). He continues by talking about the unborn baby of her and her deceased husband that the child needed a father. "In America, it could be raised without the burden of what had happened....If she went with him to America, he promised her, it would all cease to matter" (119). Gauri, in order to save herself from an unhappy widowed life in the home of her disapproving in-laws, agrees to marry Subhash, and accompanies him to Rhode Island. The remaining text narrates the pathetic story of guilt and memory of the past, along with the highlights of political history and its effects on the Mitra family on the background of displacement, and alienation of the characters.

Lahiri's *The Lowland* deals with the themes of displacement and alienation, as represented mainly by the characters of Subhash and Gauri. Here it is worth mentioning that Lahiri has been very careful in delineating the psychological displacement and alienation than their any other types in *The Lowland*. Nadia Anwar in her book says that Lahiri's fiction "does not really touch upon the pains of displacement and dislocation," (Joshi 83) but the aesthetics of displacement; and the question that how the strife to get themselves "free from the traditional authority and a past which acts as a prison in both action and thought" (Sim 111) turns the ultimate truth into an ever-changing reality. The major incidents in *The Lowland* are related to the diasporic dilemma of major characters. The characters in the novel face the problems of displacement, alienation, nostalgia, cultural assimilation, identity crisis, and family relationship. One of the important themes of Lahiri's *The Lowland* is displacement across lands, which have been experienced by the protagonists of the novel.

But the disaster of displacement is not mainly due to the cultural differences or beautiful memories the characters left behind their homeland; rather, it is the tragic past that triggers the disaster. The characters do not face cultural shock, but they suffer due to the tragedy that is associated with their native land and have shattered their lives totally (Anwar 8). Born and grown up in India, Subhash and Gauri settled down in America, but Lahiri presents that the problems of their life are more due to psychological displacement than the geographical displacement. The following section discusses the experience of displacement and alienation of the major characters of *The Lowland*.

Though the diasporic dilemma is present in other characters too in the novel, it is heightened in the very complex character of Gauri. Gauri has been displaced from her ancestral home in Calcutta in India to Rhode Island in America; nevertheless, her immigration



or displacement is a kind of rebirth in a new culture, and the feeling of home is like something haunting and distressing which frightens her. Like Moushumi of *The Namesake*, Gauri discards her native culture and integrates into the American way of life. Also, like Moushumi, Gauri alienates herself in America from the rest of the world, not having a clear idea of what she wants and why. Gauri and Moushumi seem to share similar insecurity of being ignored by the male world. However, this insecurity enables them to develop their own trajectories without depending on anyone. It seems that the independency of American society makes Gauri forget her unpleasant past. This nature of Gauri resulted in her identity crisis.

At the request of Subhash, her deceased husband's brother, Gauri had married him even though she knew from the beginning that she would never love her new spouse. Though Subhash saves Gauri's life from the hardship of widowhood and domestic persecution at Tollygunge in India by bringing her in America, his decision to marry Gauri proves very painful. Gauri agrees to marry Subhash not out of love but to come out of the unwelcome house of her deceased husband and avail the opportunity of continuing her higher studies in America, as assured by Subhash. Subhash who hoped for a happy conjugal life with Gauri, at least at a later stage of his life, is proved wrong as Gauri could neither proved to be a responsible mother of her daughter, Bela, nor a loving and caring wife of Subhash. The inner disturbance of Subhash and Gauri is because of their connection with Udayan, and the secret of Bela's parenthood led them to become psychologically displaced in the diasporic environment.

Darwin, in his *On the Origin of Species*, spoke of a natural selection whereby the fittest survives in the constant struggle for existence. The same seems true for most migrants who leave their native land behind and tread new shores. In the new land, they struggle to assimilate, to acculturate to be fit enough to survive and prosper. While talking about the assimilation and acculturation strategy among international students, Singaravelu and Pope say that:

*International students adopting the assimilation strategy try to disengage completely from their culture of origin in hopes of being completely absorbed and accepted into the dominant host culture. [...]they may sacrifice their sense of identity, their conational (those from one's own country or culture) supports, and groundedness in their culture of origin. (p.20)*

In *The Lowland*, Gauri's life becomes exemplary of this notion. After her marriage with Subhash in India, Gauri accompanies him to America with her American dream of a better life. Gauri struggles with her displacement and alienation in her initial days in the US only to find a new identity at the end of the novel. Her decision to marry Subhash was "at once calculated and impulsive." Gauri had married Subhash "as a means of staying connected to Udayan. But even as she was going through with it she knew that it was useless, just as it

was useless to save a single earring when the other half of the pair was lost” (*The Lowland* 127-128). When we go deep into the psychology of Gauri, we find that the trauma of the death of Udayan was so much so that wherever she goes she carries Udayan in her mind; her home is where Udayan is. This makes her psychologically displaced. At the same time, the new land (America) gives her the opportunity to get freedom from the old and conservative traditions of Indian life and the bitter past of widowhood. Gauri, who is not able to forget her haunting past, tries to find solace in her own world, in her own way by fulfilling her current desires for liberty and independence. Unlike the conventional role of a typical Indian woman – a devoted Indian wife and a caring mother-- Gauri tries to discover her own identity and choices. She eventually forsakes her family to create her career; she disposes off her sari for tights and tunic, cuts her hair according to the American style, and attempts to engross herself in the study of philosophy. She starts living alone and making both professional and personal choices independently.

Ironically, the feeling of isolation and detachment comforts her as she says, “Isolation offered its own form of companionship: the reliable silence of her rooms, the steadfast tranquillity of the evening” (*The Lowland* 165). As the author says, Gauri turned down dinner invitation, offers to have lunch. She kept to herself at conferences, always retiring to her room, not caring if people found her unfriendly. Gauri seems to keep herself engaged and engrossed herself in personal advancement to get rid of the painful memory of her association with Udayan. Gauri’s love for Udayan had always resulted in her anger in everything:

*Anger was always mounted it, zigzagging through her like some helplessly mating pair of insects. Anger at him for dying when he might have lived. For bringing her happiness, and then taking it away. For trusting her, only to betray. For believing in sacrifice, only to be so selfish in the end* (*The Lowland* 164).

Gauri’s reflections suggest that the trauma of her past was too horrible to help her distancing from her connection with Udayan and everything related to him. She was not accepted as a daughter-in-law in Udayan’s house and she is an outsider in Subhash’s life. In the beginning, when Gauri had arrived in America, she avoided going out or visit places and preferred to remain inside the home, taking rest, studying the campus paper, occasionally switching on the television to watch its dull programs. But gradually, Gauri accepts the American concept of liberty, which gives space for individual independence and personal advancement. She starts herself adjusting and accepting to the American way of life. She becomes self-occupied with the study to foster her philosophical knowledge. She engrosses herself in the theories of Hegel and Einstein and with the study of tribulations of life, fate, love, God, and so on. Her obsession with the philosophy helps Gauri to distance and to be indifferent about family and her life. She isolates herself to a greater extent by obsessing herself with a doctorate in philosophy.

As mentioned earlier, displacement and alienation are inter-connected and inter-related, and people in the displaced situation feel alienated. *The Lowland* depicts how displacement leads to the issues of alienation, identity, cultural conflict, nostalgia, longing, and belongingness, etc. The characters of *The Lowland* feel alienated and unhappy on many occasions. Vijay Mishra opines that “All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way” (*The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* 2008).

Alienation, sociological or psychological, is often the consequence of psychological displacement, as is witnessed in *The Lowland*. Sense of alienation, emerging from an individual's displacement, is very much present in the character of Gauri, who has migrated from Tollygunge in West Bengal, India, to Rhode Island in America. Like Ashima, of *The Namesake*, who is unable to consider America as her home, Gauri, who remarries Subhash, is unable to set up home with him in America. For Ashima, the impact of displacement is direct, as the reader can witness the severing of the link between the individual and the homeland, whereas, for Gauri, it is indirect but more intense. The memories of home visits and revisits her through the memories, images, and moments she spent with Udayan in Tollygunge. Gauri's past makes it difficult to adapt her to any place as she was a stranger in her in-law's home, and she feels equally stranger in Subhash's life. Very efficaciously, Lahiri presents the solitude and alienation of Ashima and Gauri in their marriages. Gauri also gets a feeling of alienation from her daughter Bela who has started hating her since after Gauri had refused to carry her or letting her school skip one rainy day.

In the beginning years of her stay in America, Gauri is unable to put behind her unpleasant past, and which ultimately leads her detached and alienated from the present. People did not know much about her in America and she also did not want to know more other than American academia. Even after Subhash's efforts to make Gauri happy in every possible way, she could not overcome her obsession with seclusion and philosophy and could not attach herself with Subhash and Bela. But after a few years by staying in America, she finds independence in her attempt to forget her husband's death, to free herself comfortably. Gauri adopts the American concept of individual independence and personal advancement by preoccupying herself with philosophy, yet her obsession for them makes her psychologically alienated and unconcerned towards the real human life of love and family bonding. Gauri's obsession with her liberty and independence can be compared with Mrs. Sen's obsession with preservation of culture in the story titled “Mrs Sen”, in the collection of Lahiri's short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*. As Gauri's obsession with the study of philosophy leads her displacement and alienation, Mrs. Sen's obsession with fish leads to her downfall.

Her obsession makes her out of place. Mrs. Sen's attachment to her roots is the root cause of her alienation. But in the case of Gauri, her obsession for independence and personal advancement make her psychologically displaced and alienated. Gradually, Gauri finds

herself drifted away not only from the memory of Udayan but also from the life of Subhash and Bela. She had maintained not only a distance from Subhash but also Bela, whom she treats as if she were “a relative’s child and not her own.” Subhash was hoping a child of his own with her, but Gauri already knew: “that she had become a wife a second time, becoming a mother again was the one thing in her life she was determined to prevent from happening” (161). Finally, she becomes an outsider in the lives of Subhash and Bela. She started adoring the privacy that the American academic world offered her.

When Subhash visits Calcutta taking Bela with him, Gauri leaves him and moves to California permanently stating that she is going away and he should not try to find her. She leaves a note for him, saying that, “her address is not definite, but he can find her in the university.” Gauri’s alienation persists till the end of her every action and every decision she took. While living in California, though she could accept a same-sex relationship, she felt hurt when her partner dismissed their relationship as a casual fling that could be easily discharged due to external reasons. “The liaison ended, without rancor but definitively. Yet, Gauri was humiliated, for not taking it as lightly” (240). Lahiri writes of Gauri, “Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end” (240).

Subhash also faces displacement and alienation while living in America. Though Subhash left Calcutta physically to fulfill his ‘American dreams’, but temporally and psychologically, he remains stuck in Tollygunge, where he was born. Though it was his dream to pursue his higher education in America, Subhash feels displaced and alienated during his research work in his early days in Rhode Island:

*Sailing even slightly east reminded Subhash of how far away he was from his family. He thought of the time it took to cross even a tiny portion of the earth’s surface. Isolated on the ship with the scientists and other students and crew, he felt doubly alone. Unable to fathom his future, severed from his past (62-63).*

Very often, he goes back into the memory lane and remembers his time spent at Tollygunge. Sometimes he seems missing his family in the new land whom he had not seen for several months from where he cannot communicate them frequently. He says:

*For a year and a half, he had not seen his family. Not sat down with them, at the end of the day, to share a meal. In Tollygunge, his family did not have a phone line. He’d sent a telegram to let them know he’d arrived. He was learning to live without hearing their voices, to receive news of them only in writing (63).*

Subhash lives in a state of instability, fear, and alienation. Even though he was married, had adopted Gauri, and his brother’s child, Bela, as his own child, and living under the same roof, Subhash feels very lonely towards his old age. He becomes acutely alone as

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Gauri left his house all of a sudden, leaving him and her daughter, Bela, to fend for themselves. Later, Bela also confined herself in her own world. But Subhash tries to cope with his displacement and alienation mainly because of his own mistake of marrying Gauri by ignoring his mother's prediction of "doomed" marriage. Subhash had married Gauri because he wanted to remain connected with his brother as Gauri was carrying his brother's baby in her womb. But his marriage with Gauri displaced him psychologically as he could not enjoy the bliss of conjugal life as he had hoped. Finally, their marriage ends 12 years later when Subhash and Bela have to visit India owing to the death of his father. When Subhash returns to Rhode Island, Gauri had already left forever by shifting herself to California to start her career in teaching, and never to meet him again. Subhash observes Bela establishing her existence apart from him, which further deepens his sense of displacement and loneliness in an alien land. Though he finds some solace in the company of Bela's teacher, he still feels the pangs of loneliness in the alien land. Subhash contemplates: "... he had lost that confidence, that intrepid sense of direction. He felt only aware now that he was alone, that he was over sixty years old, and that he did not know where he stood." (244)

The themes of displacement and alienation are highlighted through the character of Bela also. When Bela grows up, she unwittingly becomes much like Udayan, an activist, motivated by a deep sense of educating and helping others. Formal education does not appeal her. The hollowness of Gauri and Subhash's marriage taught Bela to avoid commitment in any relationship. The separation of her parents ends up in detachment and alienation in Bela. She develops into a highly unstable and abnormal character. She abandons her family when she grows up. She starts alienating herself by withdrawing herself from her family and decides to lead a nomadic life and abstaining herself from marrying. Like Subhash, Bela is also psychologically displaced, mainly due to her mother's eccentric and inappropriate behavior. The news of her mother's decision, not to return, had shaken her to the core that she tries establishing her identity on her own, not having any idea of what she wants or why, which shocks Subhash:

*She was establishing her existence apart from him. This was the real shock. He thought he would be the one to protect her, to reassure her. But he felt cast aside, indicated along with Gauri. He was afraid to exert his authority, his confidence as a father shaken now that he was alone (214).*

Bela's retreat from him, her new indifferences, was too deep for Subhash. Bela's guidance counselor complains of Bela that her performance in the middle class was poor; she used to be unprepared and distracted in the class and seemed disconnected to other students. Slowly, the truth about her birth father (Udayan) and her mother's apathetic treatment had made her alienated from the rest of the world. She could not forget that "though she'd been



created by two people who'd loved one another; she'd been raised by two who never did" (300).

The novel delineates the themes of displacement and alienation not only through the characters like Subhash and Gauri, who feel alienated in the foreign land (America) but also through Holly, a native of America, a woman with whom Subhash had a romantic and sexual relationship. Holly also lives an alienated life. Holly and her husband used to live separately. "Though she was a mother, she belonged to no one else" (67). Holly used to keep her radio turn on when she used to go out for work and even if no one used to be there at her home to listen to it. She says to Subhash, "I keep it on. I hate coming back to a quiet house" (69). Holly's statement makes Subhash realize that "in some sense, Holly was more alone than he was. Her isolation without a husband, without neighbors around her, seemed severe" (69-70). Holly used to live alone with her son, Joshua, and her pet dog, Chester, in a cottage nearby sea beach of Rhode Island. "Though her parents were alive, though they lived nearby, in another part of Rhode Island, they had not come to take care of her" (72).

## 5. Conclusion

Displacement and alienation are the major concerns of postcolonial and postmodern and literature in general and diasporic literature in particular. Belonging and alienation, place and displacement -- these have long been Jhumpa Lahiri's abiding fictional concerns, but in *The Lowland*, they are alive more than any of her other fictional works. The novel contends with the notions of displacement, choice, responsibility, and identity across lands. Very beautifully, Lahiri portrays the experience of displacement and alienation and its consequences in the life of the major characters of the novel. But unlike her other novels displacement and alienation of the individuals are not the result of their diasporic problems, but it is primarily due to their choices and behaviors. The characters like Subhash and Gauri undergo the feelings of loneliness and estrangement in America due to their unfamiliarity with the host land's culture in their early days after their arrival. However, after sometimes they started adapting and assimilating themselves to the American culture. Other than a small number of occurrences of nostalgic emotions, the novel depicts how Subhash and Gauri accept and assimilate with the unfamiliar culture of America.

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