

## Two Worlds and the Eventual Tensions: An Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

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### Abstract

This article is an attempt to explore the two worlds experienced by the major characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's (2013) *The Lowland*. The fiction depicts two paradoxical worlds and the characters cannot help embracing them for social, cultural, political, and ideological reasons. Subhash and Gauri are the major characters in the novel who experience the paradoxicalities in their lives because of their existence in two different countries: India and America. The paradoxicalities are portrayed in terms of geography, culture, personal relationships, and diaspora. Hence, what results is an unavoidable tension that springs from the oppositional experiences lived by them. Moreover, the third major character, Udayan, also attributes a substantial degree of tension to the making up of the plot. This article focuses on the nature of these two worlds and the tensions they create in Subhash, Gauri and Udayan in *The Lowland*.

**Key Words:** two worlds, paradoxicality, tension, Naxalite politics, diaspora.

### 1. Literature

Jhumpa Lahiri, the Pulitzer Prize winner for the year 2000 in the fiction category, follows a method of portraying two contrasting worlds in her novel *The Lowland*. The idea of two worlds appears in the novel in different manners. Its plot comprises the stories of two brothers, namely Subhash and Udayan, and a woman Gauri, who first gets married to Udayan, and then after his death, with his other brother, Subhash. Moreover, it deals with two geographical localities, Kolkata and Rhode Island. Though Subhash and Gauri led two different lives in Kolkata and Rhode Island, as Indians and diasporas, Udayan was born in Kolkata and killed there. As a diaspora, Lahiri's own geographical and psychological divisions are reflected in those of Subhash and Gauri. Dr. T.K. Pius (2014) argues it stating that, "*The Lowland* reflects two sides of its author's persona – her Bengali heritage (though she was born in the UK) and

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her upbringing in Rhode Island” (p. 101). Both Subhash and Gauri live between Kolkata and Rhode Island within the separate ambiances of these two localities. The Kolkata ambience reflects the family’s middle-class life along with the chaotic political circumstances, while the latter brims with the local academic excellence of a high-profile US university, though the tension of having to live as diaspora never leaves them.

The diasporic characters move from their native country to the colonial centre, which can be considered as “from the situation of conflict and uncertainty...” (King 2000, p. 146) to the “metropolitan center” (King 2000, p. 70) respectively. This journey to the metropolitan centre is not so smooth as it is considered to be. A predominating anxiety works inevitably in them caused by the social, cultural, and ideological dilemma. According to Cohen (1997), the diasporic community considers that the notion of the “old country – often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotion” (p. ix). This loyalty to the former country gives birth to a diasporic tension among the immigrants. McLeod (2007) observes that, “Too often diaspora peoples have been ghettoised and excluded from feeling they belong to the ‘new country’” (p. 208). It happens because of the interference of their former culture. Ashcroft et al. (1989), on the other hand, describe diaspora as a postcolonial condition, which “does not simply refer to geographical dispersal but also to the vexed question of identity, memory and home which such displacement produces” (p. 218). All of these issues become problematic for the diasporas in assimilating themselves in the new land, and so, they keep living between two worlds. In Lahiri’s (2013) *The Lowland* Subhash and Gauri are severely affected by diasporic tensions.

### **1.1 The idea of the Two Worlds and its Inevitable Tension**

In probing the inherent tension in the novel, Pradeepa (2018) argues that “Jhumpa Lahiri examines the psychological nuances of certainty, guilt, grief, marriage, and parenthood in the book” (p. 210). In the beginning of the novel, Subhash and Udayan encounter a tense moment at the Tolly Club, as they were not allowed to enter the premises of the club. As children, they got familiar with the colonial notion through the club. They realised that it was a separate world, where the commoners were not allowed to enter. Nayar (2016) argues that the colonisers created the colonial spaces such as maps to enhance their “understanding and control” (p. 135) of the natives. The club can be taken as a colonial space built by the colonisers out of their “imperial gaze” (Nayar 2016, p. 136). So, elimination of the natives from the colonial space through the

exertion of the binary colonial/native divide becomes prominent. The Tolly club can be taken as a colonial space which continued to maintain its imperial legacy even after the independence of India. For this reason, Udayan, Subhash, and their father could not go there. As the novel progresses, this tension that originated at the club premises, takes on different forms, in terms of political, cultural and familial conflicts. Udayan got involved with the Naxalite politics to eliminate the discrimination that he found everywhere in the society. Though, it was the result of his experience in the club that spurred Udayan's revolutionary zeal, Subhash and Gauri experienced two worlds because of their diasporic identities.

Subhash's tension begins from the time he met his dead brother's widow Gauri. Gogoi (2020) argues that "Subhash is appalled by the covert design of his parents to drive her out of home" (p. 252). He cannot tolerate the maltreatment of his parents to Gauri. For this reason, he decides to take her to the USA ignoring his parents' red eyes and, thus, ignites a life-long tense relationship with them.

## **2. The Two Geographical Worlds in Conflict**

In the novel, Lahiri (2013) portrays two geographically divided worlds through Kolkata and the Rhode Island, both of which she frequently visits and makes a critical assessment of their differences and similarities. Samanta's (2014) comment in this respect is noteworthy, "Calcutta (or Kolkata), as she reveals, is at the same time absent and vibrantly present in her life" (p. 110). Her characters also wander between these two cities embracing and shaking off their former cultures. Thus, life becomes conflicting for them in the USA.

The Tolly Club scenario starts the process of acceptance and abandonment for Udayan and Subhash, while the Rhode Island setup does the same for Subhash and Gauri. In their childhood, both the brothers were curious to peep into the club premises which soon turned into abandonment as it was not easy to do so. Lahiri (2013) takes on the Tolly Club as a world within the world: "... built on reclaimed land. Centuries ago, when the Bay of Bengal's current was stronger, it has been a swamp dense with mangroves. The ponds and the paddy fields, the lowland, were remnant of this" (p. 12). The club possesses two characteristics prominently - the first one is its colonial infrastructure and the second one includes its secluded existence even after the country's independence.

The club was founded by the colonisers and the legacy was maintained by the native elites later. Eventually, it became a symbol of separation and elitism as the commoners were not allowed to enter. To Lahiri, it was a separate world within Kolkata. Subhash and Udayan's father used to watch the horse race in the club track "from behind the wall" (Ghosh 2013, p. 4) but after their birth, "the height of the wall was raised, so that the public could no longer see in" (Ghosh 2013, p. 4). The placement of the geographic position of this region with the club and the lowland reflects the author's dormant motif of portraying two worlds in the novel. These double-edged meanings are clarified in the author's description of the lowland which is portrayed both as the breeding house and the house for the resurrection: "certain creatures laid eggs that were able to endure the dry season. Others survived by burying themselves in mud, simulating death, waiting for the return of rain" (Lahiri 2013, p. 3). The high-walled club was the symbol of the divided India in which few people enjoyed everything, while others led very impoverished lives: "People still filled slums all over the city, children were born and raised on the streets. Why were a hundred acres walled off for the enjoyment of a few?" (Lahiri 2013, p. 25). The question mark in the quotation clearly refers to the far-reaching divided world dichotomised by the club.

Lahiri (2013), too, sets Rhode Island as an opposite existence of Kolkata, which, to Subhash, is a free world for fulfilling his ambitions. It is a place in which the most devastated person could find a way out. Moreover, the area is an academic hub, where one can fulfill his desire through assimilation and acculturation. Both Gauri and Subhash are the best examples of this, but eventually, they suffer from diasporic issues in their conjugal life. Chen (2015) establishes it as one of Lahiri's characteristics. He says, "In Lahiri's works, private homes, instead of public spheres, are always the place for personal trauma and social conflict" (p. 109).

### **2.1 The Two Brothers and Their Two Personalities**

The idea of two worlds can be highlighted in terms of the two distinctive personalities of both Subhash and Udayan. They are portrayed in the novel as completely opposite to each other. Since their early life, they have been proved to be different in nature, practice, and belief, as Lahiri (2013) states:

Since childhood Subhash had been cautious. His mother never had to run after him. He kept her company, watching as she cooked at the coal stove, or embroidered saris and blouse pieces commissioned by a ladies' tailor in the

neighborhood. He helped his father plant the dahlias that he grew in pots in the courtyard. ... He waited for chaotic games to end, for shouts to subside. His favourite moments were when he was alone, or felt alone.... He lives in his own world, relatives at large gatherings, unable to solicit a reaction from him... (p. 10)

She clearly portrays Subhash as traditionally a good boy in the Bengali families. He is truly defined as a *bhalo chele* or *lokkshi chele* of the family.

On the other hand, Udayan was very naughty in his childhood. He created constant tension in his mother's mind. He did it with his sudden disappearance or unresponsive manners. Lahiri's observation explores his true self:

... when he was a boy, he hid compulsively, under the bed, behind the doors, in the crate where winter quilts were stored. He played his game without announcing it, spontaneously vanishing, sneaking into the back garden, climbing into a tree, forcing their mother, when she called and he did not answer, to stop what she was doing. As she looked for him, as she humored him and called his name, Subhash saw the momentary panic in her face that perhaps she would not find him. (p. 10)

Lahiri, very keenly, brings out the differences between the brothers exploring their paradoxical characteristics. The difference between them becomes very transparent when she says, "While Subhash stayed in clear view, Udayan was disappearing" (p.10). In course of their growing up, the differences between them became more visible. When they were old enough to visit outside alone, they began to visit the Technician's Studio, which was very famous as the cinema icon Satyajit Ray shot his *Pather Panchali* there. Both of them were very thrilled to see the famous actors and actresses in the studio, but their outlooks to the actors and actresses were different. Lahiri (2013) argues, "Udayan was the one brave enough to ask them for autographs. He was blind to self-constraint, like an animal incapable of perceiving certain colors. But Subhash strove to minimize his existence, as other animals merged with bark or blades of grass" (p. 11). This habit of hiding himself from the turmoil of the surroundings becomes Subhash's life-long mission. In his school and college life, he promptly keeps himself within the border of his confined personality, while Udayan explores himself with the on-going happenings of the country and the world. While the former was unmoved or less responsive to the external affairs, the latter was prompt and super responsive. Thus, the two brothers became the alter ego to one another. Udayan's involvement with the extremists' politics rightly proves his different and distinctive characteristics. *The Washington Post*

review on the book rightly observes the dual existence in the fiction with the argument that Jhumpa Lahiri's new novel is the embodiment of, "The worlds of the familiar, the exotic, the best of human nature and the most selfish inhabit" (Lothar, 2013).

Lahiri's (2013) *The Lowland* also portrays the political division in India as a tension-provoking theme. She introduces the widely-discussed political issue of India called the Naxalbari Movement which was an armed movement in India. Shah (2014) acutely observes that the novel "can be read as a narrative about what life could be in the absence of the ideological movements of the 1960s and the 1970s" (p. 30). Lahiri (2013) narrates the root-area of the movement stating it as, "one of a string of villages in the Darjeeling District, a narrow corridor at the northern tip of West Bengal. Tucked into the foot-hills of the Himalaya, nearly four hundred miles from Calcutta, closer to Tibet than to Tollygunge" (p. 20). The uprising began from the clash between the tribal peasants of Naxalbari village and the wealthy landowners of the locality on the issue of the "ownership rights for sharecropper" (Lahiri 2013, p. 20). The local incident was turned to a regular movement by two activists of the Bengal Communist Party- Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal. The movement became so strong that the local government of West Bengal took very stern actions against these activists. To subdue the movement, the government killed innumerable people. Udayan got involved with this movement and clearly followed his own version of ideology. Subhash tried his best to keep his brother away from the extreme political ideology, but failed to do so. Thus, two brothers followed two distinctive ways of life.

## 2.2 Divided Political Worlds

Lahiri (2013) takes the political theme as one of the major movers in her novel. Through the portrayal of the political division, she structures two selves of the two brothers who are remarkably divided in their perceptions, beliefs, outlooks, and practices throughout the whole novel. Udayan is portrayed as one of the onlookers of the Naxalbari uprising since its inception which left an indelible impression on him. Dorji (2019) argues that "Udayan is the representation of thousands of other young and zealous people who have been swayed to take part in the movement and do something worthwhile for the country in their lives" (p. 1260). For this reason, he supported the peasants and their actions wholeheartedly. His logic for joining the political party becomes apparent from his own statement, "of course it was worth it. They rose up. They risked everything. People with nothing. People those in power do nothing to



protect" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 21). He could not rely on the policies taken by the local and central governments of India, and rather these actions enraged him extremely. Lahiri (2013) adds, "Udayan sprang up from the chair where he'd been sitting, pushing a pile of books and papers away from him in disgust. He switched off the radio. He started pacing across the room, looking down at the floor, running his fingers through his hair" (Lahiri, p. 22). He believed what the then Chinese press reported about the uprising, "The spark of Darjeeling will start a prairie fire and will certainly set the vast expanses of India ablaze" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 23). Gradually, he felt a dividing line in his mind which intensified his decision of getting involved in the movement. Thus, he became the member of CPI (ML), founded on "Lenin's birthday, April 22, 1969" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 32) with the ideology, "the chief task of the party was to organize the peasantry. The tactic would be guerilla warfare. The enemy was the Indian state" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 33). Thus, he shaped his own world.

Udayan was gradually turning to be a leftist activist being greatly moved by the writings on CPI (ML). He was coming out of his former world in which Subhash had a substantial space. This new world was shaped by his intellectual ventures which began with new readings such as the books *The Wretched of the Earth*, and *What is to be Done?*. He became an avid reader of Charu Majumdar, who relentlessly wrote on the class struggles in India, particularly in West Bengal. Majumdar accused the then Government of India of its pro-American and pro-Soviet Union activities. On the other hand, Majumdar was highly appreciative about Mao and the Chinese. He believed that revolutions in India were possible if "the tactic of area-wise seizure of power can be the only tactic" (Lahiri, 2013, P. 25). Hundreds of young Bengalis, including Udayan, were greatly moved by Majumdar's words. He started following the leftist ideologies of Majumdar and others' blindly. He began to attend the secret meetings of the party to get access to more authentic and accurate ideologies.

Udayan strengthened his political career by becoming a regular activist of the party. He took up different responsibilities of the party, such as writing slogans. He stored red paint, brush, and papers containing the slogans in his bedroom. Interfered by Subhash, he clarified his belief about his political ideology saying, "if we don't stand up to a problem, we contribute to it, Subhash" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 29). He clarified his political vision to his brother in America again and again in different letters. He was gradually getting inseparably connected with the armed revolution of the party. He wrote, "A Red Guard is forming, travelling to villages, propagating Mao Tse-tung's quotations" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 42). He

dreamt of a new country with new social orders, but everything went in vain with his death. Lahiri sums up his political career saying, "Udayan had given his life to a movement that had been misguided, that had caused only damage, that had already been dismantled". (p. 115)

As the children of a middle-class family, both Subhash and Udayan knew that "they were expected to fulfill their potential, to support their parents one day" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 26). What is very remarkable to explore is that Udayan shook off his middle-class psychological hangover after getting involved with politics. In response to Subhash's enquiry about what their parents would think if they came to know about Udayan's activity, he bluntly replied, "there is more to life than what they think" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 30). Even more, in a letter written by him to Subhash in America, he inspired him to join the Vietnam War protest. He says, "But if you can bear to tear yourself away, try to make yourself useful. I hear the anti-war movement there is in full swing". (Lahiri, 2013, p. 42)

### **2.3 Political Division and Tension**

Subhash knew what was happening from the very beginning of his brother's involvement with politics. Udayan's visiting the party office, attending the secret meetings, and reading the leftist books and pamphlets were known to him, but he himself never actively took part. Udayan used to discuss the issues with his brother who was never taken by the Marxist ideologies. His difference with his brother becomes evident in Lahiri's observation: "he wasn't convinced that an imported ideology could solve India's problems. Though a spark had been lit a year ago, he didn't think a revolution would necessarily follow" (p.28). What worried him most was Udayan's active participation in the revolution. When he saw him inscribing the party-slogans, he could not but ask him, "What happens if the police catch you?" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 29). Subhash's fear was intensified as he marked a catastrophic change in the city with the birth of the new political party. Lahiri remarks, "It was a portrait of a city Subhash no longer felt a part of" (p.33). Their ideological separation led them to follow two different worlds. Subhash went to America for higher study, while Udayan got involved in the extremist politics of "the Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist. The CPI (ML)" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 32). It can be argued about Subhash that he could identify his own interest easily and work accordingly. While living in America, he shared the anti-Vietnam War sentiments, but he "knew he had to be careful. He knew he could get arrested in America for denouncing the government, perhaps even holding up sign" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 36).



Both Subhash and Udayan possessed the ambitions of travelling beyond the boundary. The former did it by setting his goal of going to America for higher studies, which Lahiri (2013) states, "... he had been waiting all his life to find Rhode Island. That it was here, in this minute but majestic corner of the world, that he could breathe" (p. 65), while the latter wanted to fulfil his revolutionary zeal. Lahiri (2013) clarifies Udayan's interest in journey saying, "He wanted to see more of India, he said, the way Che had travelled through South America. He wanted to understand the circumstances of its people. He wanted to see China one day" (p. 59).

Though Subhash never accepted his brother's political world warm-heartedly, he envied Udayan for his daring and brave activities, but it was difficult for him to follow him. Because of his inability, "he was sick of the fear that always rose up in him; that he would cease to exist, and he and Udayan would cease to be brothers, were Subhash to resist him" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 29-30). He understood that his brother would never refrain himself from his political involvement. Both of them realised that their paths "had already parted" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 33). Their "loyalty to one another, their affection, stretched halfway across the world. Stretched to the breaking point by all that now stood between them, but at the same time refusing to break" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 43). It is very transparent to both of them that they followed their own ways very deliberately with the clear understanding that their affection for each other was unbreakable.

But the separation between them was inevitable. It began with their choice of careers. Subhash went to America and embraced the newness of the land, while Udayan was exploring newness in politics and his personal life. He married Gauri, one of his comrades, secretly which tremendously upset his family. Subhash also reacted to the news strongly. Though he considered it as a "parents' place to decide" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 47), he clearly realised that it was "another example of getting his way" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 47). Thus, they followed two different ways.

### **3. Diasporic Worlds of Subhash and Gauri**

Subhash was very determined to go to America for higher studies. Lahiri (2013) portrays Subhash in the novel to show how young people from India dream to go to America for changing their lives. He is portrayed as an emblem of these diasporic generations who always possess two worlds in their consciousness – the former land, and the present abode. However, Gauri's objective of going to America was completely different from that of Subhash.

An analysis of these two characters would offer how Lahiri (2013) builds up two worlds in her novel. As diaspora, both Gauri and Subhash can be poised in two different worlds. Gogoi (2020) argues that Gauri lived in “in-between the two worlds” (p. 251) as a diaspora. The former resembles Lahiri’s protagonist Ashima of her first novel *The Namesake*. Ashima, after going to America, tried to discover it when her husband was busy with his professional activities. Gauri also “began to explore other parts of the campus, wandering in and out of various departmental buildings” (Lahiri, 2013, p. 131). Gradually, she was developing her personality in the new land in a newer way. She “liked spending time in the company of people who ignored but surrounded her” (Lahiri 2013, p. 133). In this personality development process, she had also studied her husband. She discovered that “she was not the only woman in his life. That she, too, was a replacement”. (Lahiri, 2013, p. 136)

Subhash’s life in America is not a flat one. He changed himself with the ideology of Americanism in course of time. According to Binod Paudyal (2017), he “feels that he has left the old country for his adventure in a new country” (p. 24). It is proved in his interactions and free mixing with different American characters. His adventure began with developing sexual relationship with his girlfriend, Holly. It was a great shift in his ideological belief as the Indian view regarding sex was embedded in him. He never believed that he could go in contrary to his traditions, but he changed his outlook in America. It inevitably gave birth to tension in him. Lahiri (2013) remarks:

Inside this room he was able to forget about what his parents would think, and the consequences of what he was about to do. He forgot about everything other than the body of the woman in the bed with him, guiding his fingers to the hollow of her throat over the ridge of her collarbones, down toward the softer skin of her breasts. (p. 72)

His change was like that of his brother Udayan. His physical relation with Holly can be marked as a revolutionary one like his brother’s joining the radical politics. Both of them came out of the web of their middle-class ideology. The former did it developing libidinal relation with his American friend, and Udayan by participating in the Naxalite politics. What is remarkable to explore in Subhash is that he went through the tension created by his two-world positionality. This tension becomes apparent when he failed to define his relationship with Holly. For this reason, when asked about their second meeting by Holly, he was not sure: “he felt uncertain; he saw that the encounter

of the night before might be a beginning, not an end. At the same time, he was impatient to see her again" (p. 73-74). This kind of dualism is a recurrent issue in his character. For example, he knew the detrimental aspects of his brother's extremist politics, but did not take enough measures to restrain him. Moreover, he could not participate in the anti-war procession in America because of the tension that his involvement might risk his stay in the country. He followed the same trend in his relation with Holly. He was predetermined that it was quite impossible for him to continue his relation with Holly, but never disclosed it to her. He waited for the suitable time to let his beloved come to the conclusion that their relationship should not go on. Lahiri makes Holly say it,

'You're young. You're going to want to have your own children someday. In a few years you'll go back to India, live with your family'.... She had caught him in his own web, telling him what he already knew. He realized he would never visit her cottage again. ... he could not blame her; she had done him a favor by ending it. (p. 82)

His dualism becomes clear in this statement. America is always a place of departure for him, but "though he looked like any other Bengali he felt an allegiance with the foreigners now. He shared with them a knowledge of elsewhere. Another life to go back to. The ability to leave". (p. 112)

Thus, he failed to define his relationship with Holly, which proved that he could neither be an American, nor an Indian. He developed a personality in which there was no absolute place for either India or America.

### 3.1 Tension

When Subhash came to India after his brother's killing, he was afraid of the fact that his parents might ask him to stay back leaving his American dream. Lahiri (2013) highlights it saying, "He wondered whether his parents would ask him to remain in Calcutta, to abandon his life in Rhode Island" (p. 95). His developing concern for Gauri was also responsible for the acceleration of tension between him and his mother. He was very critical about the humiliation that Gauri had to go through as a widow. He argued with his mother again and again about these rituals which he never did in his life. He was also able to discover negligence in his parents' behaviour with Gauri which created the eventual tension in him, "the more involvement had deepened, the more evasive he'd turned" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 115). His tension was mounting with the revelation that "His mother's coldness toward Gauri was insulting, but his father's passivity was just as cruel" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 115).

Subhash's love for his brother convinced him to be more lenient to Gauri. He wanted to know more about Udayan's activities for which he had to die. She became the only witness to his brother's world which motivated Subhash to take her into his confidence. He discovered in her "a shared awareness of the person they'd both loved" (Lahiri, 2013, p.115). Thus, Lahiri (2013) narrates an Indian version of family saga in which brothers are strongly tied to one another. They can replicate the lost one through another entity. Here, Gauri became the replica through whom Subhash wanted to rediscover his brother Udayan and thus, showed his strong affiliation with the Indianness. Ramraj (2000), in his essay, "Diasporas and Multiculturalism" has rightly observed:

Yet though diasporans may not want actually to return home, wherever the dispersal has left them, they retain a conscious or subconscious attachment to traditions, customs, values, religions, and languages of the ancestral home. (p. 215)

His marriage to Gauri, his brother's pregnant wife, can be argued for as an expression of his brotherly responsibility, but at the same time, it is contrary to his American identity. Paudyal (2017) justly shows that Subhash "breaks social mores and boundaries first by marrying Gauri ... and then years later, in his seventies, by ending up in another marriage with Elise Silva, ... Bela's teacher" (p. 25). To Paudyal, the old-age marriage was a reconciliation process for Subhash in America to posit himself in new "cultural and civic affiliations" (p. 25) to define his future identity. Thus, his life revolved round two worlds continuously.

### **3.2 Gauri's two worlds**

Gauri's world had been divided since her childhood. Her mother's sickness compelled her to live with her grandparents in Kolkata: "they were sent away to the city, cared for by their grandparents, in the company of their aunts and uncles" (Lahiri 2013, p. 56). She also did her schooling and completed her college in Kolkata. She developed a sense of freedom when she came to the town along with her brother Manash. Even in her youth, she maintained her freedom of choice. To Udayan's enquiry about her marriage, she clearly expressed her view that she did not care about what others thought of her. In her early life, she was left alone in the town which provided her an indispensable habit of living alone. This led her to accept the extremist politics in her college life. Her falling in love with Udayan was also an expression of her freedom. She chose him as her comrade in politics. If her marriage is considered

as the end of the first phase of her life, it can easily be argued that it ends without having any substantial changes. She did not become revolutionary as her husband; rather her activities reflected her conformity which is proved in her decision of marrying two brothers consecutively, Udayan and Subhash. Lahiri (2013) describes these two actions as brave, “When she’d eloped with Udayan, she’d felt audacious. Agreeing to be Subhash’s wife, to flee to America with him, a decision at once calculated and impulsive, felt even more extreme” (p. 127).

The second phase of her life began with Udayan’s death. With Subhash’s coming back from America after Udayan’s death, she discovered that both of the brothers shared many characteristics. She could not but claim that Subhash “had the same voice” (Lahiri, 2013, p. 94) of her late husband. That was the beginning of her second phase of life with Subhash, her brother-in-law. Her world was distinctive and unique. She could share it with her late husband, but it was not possible for her to do it with anyone of her husband’s house and her own house. Subhash came as a catalyst to relieve her affliction. It was possible for her to share her husband’s story with Subhash and thus to get relieved herself of her personal loss.

### **3.3 Gauri’s two worlds and her tension**

Gauri’s life in India and America puts her in endless dilemmas. Her identity encompassed these two worlds which, eventually, created tension in her. Lahiri reveals the tension Gauri underwent as she got married to Udayan. After Udayan’s death, his family would not accept her as she “ran off and married” (Lahiri 2013, p. 100) Udayan. Her tension could easily be perceived as she did not get anyone of her family to condole her after her husband’s death. Though her brother attended the funeral, he did not help her in any way.

Moreover, Gauri’s decision of marrying her late husband’s brother shook both the families. Paydyal (2017) describes it as a revolutionary decision through which she broke the long-existing Indian social and marital norm. They expected that she would be loyal to the memories of her dead husband, but reversely, she decided to marry her brother-in-law. It can be argued that both of them agreed to marry each other as they wanted to prove their love for Udayan. Moreover, it was Subhash’s resemblance with Udayan that attracted her very much, while the desire of knowing his brother’s untold stories about politics and life motivated Subhash to marry her. So, it is clear that Gauri’s decision of marrying her brother-in-law was influenced by a desire of rediscovering her

late husband in Subhash. In addition, she wanted to leave Tollygaunge because she “had never felt welcome” (Lahiri, 2013, p. 128) there. It can clearly be argued that her decision of going to the USA was not spontaneously made, rather she did it to escape the unwelcoming situation in her country.

Diaspora for Gauri was a way of forgetting her past and welcoming a new world. Her tension began with her “transformation” (Gogoi, 2020, p. 251) in America. Shameem (2021) adjudges that she “reverses the role of a wife and a mother by embracing the role of an individual devoted to academic pursuits and personal achievement” (p. 136). But it was quite difficult for her to go away from her former life. In response to Subhash’s kindness to her, she discovered an inevitable dilemma in her. Lahiri (2013) brings out her dilemma stating:

She was unable to express her gratitude for what he’d undertaken. She was unable to convey the ways he was a better person than Udayan. She was unable to tell him that he was protecting her, for reasons that would cause him to regard her differently. (p. 137)

What is true about her life is that she was not fully able to come out of her former life, which Subhash discovered one night:

Once, in the middle of the night, he heard her locked inside a nightmare. Her animal whimpering startled him; it was the sound of a scream stifled by a clenched jaw, a closed mouth. An articulate but wordless fury. He lay on the sofa, listening to her suffer, listening to her reliving his brother’s death, perhaps. (Lahiri, 2013, p. 138)

Moreover, both Gauri and Subhash felt a gap in their philosophy of life. She wanted to continue her study in America after her daughter’s birth, but Subhash wanted her to prioritise Bela’s care. She discovered a new person in him when he wanted her to be a traditional Indian mother in America. The tension between them began to mount with her decision of going to university for higher study. Her boredom with him became so acute that sometimes, she “was barely able to stand the sight of him, or to tolerate the sound of the voice that, in the beginning, had drawn her to him” (Lahiri, 2013, p. 163). The tension between them led Gauri to decide to leave for California for “a college has hired” (Lahiri, 2013, p. 211) her to teach and she compensated what Subhash did for her by leaving Bela to him, “In exchange for all you have done for me, I leave Bela to you” (Lahiri, 2013, p. 212). She realised that her days with Subhash would never be normal. Lahiri (2013) explains her complicated mental



condition in time of leaving Bela and Subhash for California: "She'd convinced herself that Subhash was her rival, and that she was in competition with him for Bela, a competition that felt insulting, unjust" (p. 232). Subhash was also confused about his relationship with Gauri. He tried his best to make her happy but sometimes, he felt confused about their conjugal life. His confusion became apparent in his thought: "At times he feared that his one act of rebellion, marrying her, had already failed" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 160). Moreover, when he wanted to strengthen his conjugal life with her having another child, she rejected by stating that "she would think about it in another year or two, that she was not yet thirty, that there was still time to have a child" (Lahri, 2013, 160). The differences began to widen between them which strained their conjugal life and ended with Subhash's harsh words, "the privilege was wasted on you" (Lahiri, 2013, p. 175).

#### **4. Conclusion**

What can finally be argued is that the geographically divided two worlds, Kolkata and Rhode Island, create unavoidable tensions in Subhash and Gauri. Udayan is also substantially affected because of this two-world idea in his life in terms of his changed relationship with his brother who went to American for higher studies. The division is experienced by these two brothers during their childhood when they visited the Tolly Club. The unbreakable fence around the club and the brothers' constant attempt to break it symbolically refers to the theme of the two worlds in the novel and its eventual tension. They experienced two worlds when they were politically divided. The tension emerges when Subhash discovered the futility of the Naxalite revolution and Udayan dedicated himself to its ideologies. Udayan's death creates turmoil in the family and it is intensified when Subhash decides to marry his brother's pregnant wife. Moreover, the tension is accelerated with his parents' disapproval of the marriage. The argument is furthered with Subash and Gauri in Rhode Island in which they built up separate worlds for themselves. In the USA, Gauri is moved tremendously by the new aspirations and demands of the new reality. Tension is eventually created with the breach of their conjugal life in America. Thus, the novel is a true portrayal of two worlds for Subhash, Udayan, and Gauri. The emergence of the two worlds can be traced in the divided personalities and political beliefs that the two brothers have developed, while diaspora is a recurrent issue to deepen the tensions between Subhash and Gauri.

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