Naming Culture and Trauma of Diasporic Existence

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘The Namesake’ and ‘The Lowland’ she discussed naming culture and trauma of diasporic existence. Lahiri remains a detached observer of the daily events in the lives of her fictional characters. She is a dispassionate chronicler of the lives in a global society, and delineates the mental void and ruptures in human relationships. She believes in existentialism and gives prime importance to the actual being of the individual, and not to essence. Her characters conceive of existence only by grasping their own immediate experiences. In ‘The Namesake’ a novel of uncommon elegance and poise. Lahiri is good at capturing the world in a language that is chiseled, unadorned, clear as crystal, as if her narrativve is a documentary of little lives, displaced and dour, floating in an anonymous island, far away from home, and her empathy is as transparent as her words. It is her deft narrative technique that helps her to reach at the inner weave of characters with unexpected twists in plot and human situations.

Dealing with the Bengali culture, idealism and liberal attitude to foreign influence in ‘The Namesake’, Lahiri makes the text a cultural hyper-text. She faithfully portrays the trauma of cultural dislocation, displacement, homelessness and immigrancy both in the native and the acquire selves of her characters. The novel narrates the saga of Ganguli family in Calcutta and Boston. The Gangulis as educated, cultured and elite Calcuttans are the lovers of Russian and English literatures. They love to read the authors like Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Dickens, Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham. Through their readings Gangulis have had an opportunity “to travel without moving an inch” (TN 16). Ashoke Ganguli is a doctoral candidate in Electrical Engineering at MIT, USA where he is engaged in earning a Ph.D. in Boston, researching in the field of fiber optics. The saga of Ganguli family began in the imperial times of pre-independence era.
Ashoke’s grandfather, former professor of European literature at Calcutta University, used to say, “Ganguli is a legacy of the British, an anglicized way of pronouncing his real surname, Gangopadhyaya” (67). Ashoke’s career in America made him a prospective groom in Calcutta where the Bhaduri family got attracted to this ambitious Ganguli as “he was slightly plump, scholarly looking but still youthful, with black thick-framed glasses and a sharp, prominent nose. A neatly trimmed mustache connected to a beard that covered only his chin lent him an elegant, vaguely aristocratic air” (8). After his marriage Ashoke moved with his wife Ashima Bhaduri to Boston. While he remained busy in career building as an architect, Ashima spent her days in nostalgia in a Boston apartment. Pregnancy was a hard time for her for there was no one to soothe her. Motherhood is glorious for woman but for a migrant in a foreign land, loneliness and strange surroundings nearly kill such feelings.

Ashima typifies the highly disturbing experience of a person away from home. The novel commences with her painful pregnancy and child bearing abroad and culminates in her final decision to divide the rest of her life between India and America. In the United States, she does her best to perform the role of a perfect homemaker in an otherwise alien place to become a cementing force in holding the traditional Indian values against the largely materialistic values of American life. However, the fear of losing her Bengali culture secretly torments her. The rumblings of the trauma emanating from such a fear are easily noticeable during her labour pain in the very first chapter.

During such a period of emotional unhinging, the only source of comfort for Ashima is th Desh magazine that she would brought to read on her plane ride to Boston and still cannot bring herself to throw away, in addition of course the supporting hand of her husband, Ashoke. Though her traumatic labour pain, her acute feeling of isolation
and her memories of Calcutta, Lahiri presents her at two levels, as a woman, and as a mother, the former is naturally linked with the latter particularly in the Indian cultural context where a woman accomplishes full womanhood after attaining motherhood. Such a feeling also endows her with a mysterious strength to endure the excruciatingly painful period of delivery. It is this strength, which supports Ashima during the traumatic period of delivery. She is determined to bear the pain of giving birth to a new life in an unknown land and to survive.

Little acquaintance with the place, people and culture of the United States augments Ashima’s agony of failure in performing her functions as her parents did. Her problem compounds when, after the baby is delivered but her grandmother who stays in India has yet not assigned a name to it, the couple confronts the immediacy of christening it. They are faced with the rule of recording the name of the boy in the hospital book before discharge. To get rid of this dilemma they temporarily christen the baby as Gogol; the name which harbours the secret of a traumatic event in Ashoke’s life. The whole episode reveals her intense desire for holding fast to the convention of the homeland and equally intense pain at the failure to do so due to circumstances.

Through the existential struggle of Ashima, Lahiri presents the pang of a woman as wife living in diaspora; a pang caused by sense of isolation. Here, the readers find isolation from both the local society and her-own society, which is further intensified by Ashoke’s inability to give more time to Ashima due to his professional assignments. Ashima is left with her children and with the children are away she engages herself in cooking, arranging clothes, reading or watching TV. She continues with her temporary work at library, but with ever increasing sense of being alone despite the presence of her husband and children. At the age of forty eight when her husband goes out of Boston for
nine months on a research project she finally seems to realize the enormity of solitary existence.

Her acquiescence in living in the empty house is suggestive of her going to spend the rest of her life alone which is starkly reinforced when Ashoke suddenly dies soon after his departure from Boston. The death of her husband changes the course of Ashima’s life and sets in motion a series of suffering for her she is saddened to see the break off of Gogol and Maxine a break off occasioned by Gogol’s growing awareness of filial duty and his sense of responsibility. Ashima cannot bear Gogol living a lonely life and so she endeavours towards engaging him with Moushumi; a girl whom Gogol knew in childhood. However, their marital bond could not last for long and this further adds to the agony of Ashima as she herself had taken initiative for their marriage. The initial fear of Ashima regarding the weakening of traditional ties in the second generation comes true. However, she feels somewhat reassured to know that Sonia will be happy with Ben whose marriage is to be solemnized in Calcutta.

Ashima tends to regard the past with nostalgia and the present American experience as alienating one. She is always nostalgic of her home and spends her leisure in reading Bengali poems, stories and articles. After eighteen months life in Cambridge, she is admitted to Auburn Hospital, Cambridge for her first delivery, her motherhood in an alien land. She feels restless being the only Indian in the hospital with three other American women in an adjoining room. Ashma is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one. Where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare. She realizes that Americans prefer their privacy to public declarations of affection. Eight thousand miles away in Cambridge, she is always nostalgic of her
relatives in India. After Gogol’s birth, she says to Ashoke that she doesn’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It is not right she want to go back.

When Ashoke realizes her agony he himself feels guilty for bringing Ashima into an alien country. Ashima suffers from a sleep deprivation in the silent house with a newborn Gogol in the absence of Ashoke, and visits the supermarket of Cambridge where all Americans are perfect strangers to her. At home she is disappointed for not receiving mails from Calcutta, and often recalls her paralyzed grandmother.

The restlessness of Bengalis in America where they cannot vote is revealed through their discussion about Bengali arts, music, drama, literature and politics. They experience the spatial, cultural and emotional vacuum in their efforts to settle and adjust in an adapted new land during these days of globalization. This novel is more than a book about a name; it is about finding an identity in a country that will treat the people as an alien even if the people were born there. But more than that, it is about rediscovering your roots, and the accidents of the universe that caused the people to be. And that is something all the people identify with. It is the painful anguish of diasporic identity and the sense of alienation that Lahiri focuses on in her novel. She yearns for individual identity for herself as well as for her imaginary characters. Major diasporic and immigrant writers in the Western world have experienced this anguish in the last two or more decades.

After six weeks trip to homeland due to the tragic death of Ashima’s father caused by a heart attack, the family returns to Boston. Ashoke has been hired as an assistant professor of Electrical Engineering at the University, they migrate to a
university town outside Boston, a historic district with colonial architecture. For Ashima this migration is drastic and distressing.

Her reaction is very poignant.

Being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy- a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that the previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect (49-50).

Equally problematic, if not more although in a different frame are the dilemmas confronted by Gogol, so named by his father in the likeness of the first name of the Russian fictionist Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol (1809-1852). He has all along been uncomfortable with this name and although presented a copy of the ‘Stories of Nikolai Gogol’ by his father on his fourteenth birthday, he has never opened that book over a number of years. He changes his name, legally and officially, and chooses to call himself Nikhil; but he later learns the reason why his father had named him Gogol. Ashoke, before marriage, was reading Gogol’s “The Overcoat” while travelling in Howrah-Ranchi Express to visit his grand-parents when he met with a serious train
accident. He was saved, most possibly because one of the rescuers noticed the flapping pages of the book and then saw part of his arm sticking out through the window, the smashed pages of the book grasped in his fist. With this knowledge, towards the end of the narrative the readers find the maturing Gogol reading the story “The Overcoat” by this Great Russian master story teller, probably with the image of his father flitting in and out of the pages. The identity crisis, as far as Gogol’s name is concerned, assumes somber hues when he contemplates without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Gogol’s growing consciousness of his twisted and confusing identity is simultaneously improved by the unnervingly contrasted and inconsistent experiences in his personal and private life.

Culture of naming a new born is a practice in every society. Lahiri narrates this practice with bicultural implications. According to Indian custom parents feel particularly privileged when the child is given a name by the grandparents and elder members of the family. But in American custom a name is chosen at Baptism or after the name of the family predecessors. In any case, the culture of naming is important for the parents in every community and religion. Parents become careful in search of a meaningful name for their children which may become symbolic of their actions, appearance and beliefs. In the novel celebrating a name carries deeper implications. As the letter of good wishes and proposal for an apt name for the baby from its grandmother doesn’t arrive on time, Ashoke and Ashima face the difficulty of getting the baby discharged from the hospital. In American context a new born must have a name before its discharge from the hospital. The American civil authority is not ready to accept a pet name for baby’s discharge, and an official name is mandatory for discharge. The
hospital complier of birth certificates Mr. Wilcox emphasizes on the requirement of an official name to discharge the baby. He does not wait for choosing a good name for the identification of the child in the outside world. In Indian perception good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities. Pet names have no such aspirations. Pet names are never recorded officially, only uttered and remembered. Unlike good names, pet names are frequently meaningless, deliberately silly, ironic and even onomatopoeic. Of course, parents choose an official name with pleasant or hopeful associations which the child may or may not live up to. Most of the names relate to the appearance of the child, name of a patron figure, name of a deity, good moral quality which he or she is hoped to attain in the natural world. In real life, however, parents would not know and cannot know the kind of development that takes place in a child. This is the reason why parents in the global context choose a name for their baby which is more a projection of their dream rather than a reflection of child’s personality.

Naming the baby Ganguli lends significance to the title of the novel, and consists of its evolving theme. Mr. Wilcox suggests following the European or American tradition to name the baby; “you can always name him after yourself, or one of your ancestors. It is a fine tradition. The kings of France and England did it” (28). As sign of respect to their predecessors, Ashoke appreciates the idea but does not like this tradition of choosing a name which would look ridiculous in India. He would prefer a name given by the grandparents in India. Since this is not immediately possible, he chooses the name of Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, the famous story writer, novelist, and playwright, and his favourite author who was also a friend of Alexander Puskin. He chooses ‘Gogol’ the surname of the author for his son. He had a “Tryst with Death”(19) in a claustrophobic experience in a train accident in India between Ghatshila to Dhalumgarh.
stations during his travel from Calcutta to Jamshedpur in his early twenties. Since he was awake, reading the short stories of Nikolai Gogol in the late hour of the night, he fortunately saved his life from the train accident by drawing the attention of rescuers. This convinced him that the author of the book was a lucky name, the saviour of his life. Instead of thanking God Ahoke thanked Gogol for his second birth. He preferred the author’s surname for his son’s name as a tribute to the writer Nikolai Gogol.

In the novel the name becomes a quintessential concern, a never-ending quest for Gogol Ganguli. In his keenness to learn more about Gogol, he comes to know that Nikolai was failure as writer, had renounced his literary activity, burnt his manuscript of the second volume of Dead Souls, and had unknown to his father, pronounced death sentence on himself by starvation. After attending a class of his teacher Mr. Lawson, Gogol Ganguli felt almost cynical about his name. his quest for the meaning of his name disillusioned him completely when he came to know that:

He (Nikolai) is celebrated today as one of Russia’s most brilliant writers. But during his life he was understood by no one, least of all himself. One might say he typified the phrase eccentric genius. Gogol’s life in a nutshell, was a steady decline into madness. The writer Ivan Turgenev described him as an intelligent, queer, and sickly creature. He was reputed to be hypochondriac and deeply paranoid, frustrated man. He was an addition, by all accounts, morbidly melancholic, given to fits of severe depression. He had trouble making friends.
He never married, fathered no children. It’s commonly believed he dead a virgin (91).

Gogol Ganguli discovers Nikolai’s photograph on the book ‘The short stories of Nikolai Gogol’ presented to him by his father on his fourteenth birthday and finds no resemblance in it of his own. He is dismayed that his name is not potentially romantically and sounds ludicrous to his ears, lacking dignity or gravity. His name may be his father’s preferred but it is a boring and strangest one for him. He does not like his father’s whimsicality and sentimental fondness for imposing a name on him which is meaningless and serves no purpose. He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, neither Indian nor American but all of things Russian. At times his name, an entity formless and weightless, manages nonetheless to distress him physically, like the prickly tag of a shirt he has been forced enduringly to wear. However, he concedes that his father’s choice of name is almost an emotional longing and it would mean paying tribute to his namesake. On his failure to understand his name, Chitralekha Basu, rightly remarks, “Gogol Ganguli, named after Nikolai Gogol, the Russian author his Bengali father adored, is a citizen of the world, connected to countries and cultures across centuries, in a bondage far more intense than he cares to understand ”(4).

The Indian immigrants in America are divided selves wavering between their loyalty to America and India. They are trapped in an ‘in betweenness’ and indeterminancy in choosing their names. Though names are an ‘utterly private’ affair they matter much in reflecting the cultural identity of the immigrants. In American context many Indian parents consult a good number of books like ‘Finding the Perfect Name’, ‘Alternative Baby Names’, ‘The Idiot’s Guide to Naming your Baby and what not to Name your Baby’ for perfect names for their babies. Amny rationalize the concept
that parents must not be impulsive to force a name on their child and think “human beings should be allowed to name themselves when they turn eighteen” (245). In Indian context parents hold that a name must express one’s character which should signify a virtue: Patience, Faith, Chasitity.

Gogol is not happy with name as it sounds simple, impossible, and absurd. The idea of changing his name first came to his mind when he read an article “Second Baptisms” in the ‘Reader’s Digest’. He realizes that a disenchanting name is a lifelong unhappiness, and it does not serve any purpose in its Indo-American or Russian hyphenatedness. He feels serious, tormented, afflicted, and embarrassed by his name. Before changing it he rationalises logically and thinks that plenty of people changed their names: actors, writers, revolutionaries, transvestites and even tens of thousands of Americans change their names each year by filling legal submissions. To him if important personalities could change their names like Bob Dylan from Robert Zimmerman, Leon Trotsky from Lev Dabidovich Bronstein, Gerald Ford from Leslie Lynch King and Englebert Humperdinck from Arnold George Dorsey, it stands to reason that he should look for a purposeful name.

He changes his name from Gogol to Nikhil through a legal process and conveys it to all concerned. But soon after his return to Boston house he discovers that Nikhil evaporates and Gogol claims him again. He understands his parents concern that no patents ever call their child by his good name. Good names have no place within a family. In this malady of naming, Lahiri projects the second generation Indians like Gogol, his sister Sonia and wife Moushumi who with their American accent behave like the mimics of central Americans.
Gogol is constituted as an apt epitome of an America-Indian hybrid who vacillates between his Indian identity and American nationality. Lahiri analyses the difference between the first and second generations noticing the cultural resistance of the former and cultural affirmation of the latter who attempt to homogenize their relation with the Americans in search of an autonomous life, dignity and prestige without nostalgia, prejudice, sentimentality, collective egoism and belongingness to their past.

Through cross-cultural references, Lahiri delineates with the cultural space available to the non-resident Indians in America. Debating the ideology, language and displacement of characters in “The Namesake”, she raises the basic issues of their immigrant sensibility. While the first generation immigrants feel proud of their cultural past, the second generation expresses its aberrations and deviations. In the process of self-actualisation the former do not like to violate the cultural dignity of their past while the latter neither demand it not demonstrate it living as they do in the American plenitude of cultural available. Celebrating the choice of his name, Ashoke favours its meaning. “he who transcends grief”(26) and Ashima fancies her limitlessness as she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere. Gogol’s conversion of name to Nikhil means he who is entire, encompassing all, and Sonali means she who is golden. She is also called Sonu, Sona and finally Sonia at home which in a wider sense means a citizen of the world. It is a Russian link to her brother, it is European, South American. Eventually it will be the name of the Indian Prime Minister’s Italian wife. Similarly Moushumi is a sort of their distant cousin whose name means a damp southwesterly breeze. Whatever may be the horosocopic implications of their names in sound and resonance they adhere to the Indian tradition.
The Bengalis as marginal community in America’s metropolitan environments enjoy their cultural activities with fervor. They are a scattered community, found in different professions and doing their best to enjoy life in America’s materialist society. Re-orienting their life in a new socio political environment they exude a cultural resilience and keep acquaintance with one another on family get-togethers, regardless of each other’s qualifications, professional engagements and economic status;

The familial drop by one another’s homes on Sunday afternoons. They drink tea with sugar and evaporated milk and eat shrimp cutlets fried in saucepans. They sit in circles on the floor, singing songs by Nazrul and Tagore, passing a thick yellow clothbound book of lyrics among them, they argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit ray. The CPIM versus the Congress party. North Calcutta versus south. For hours they argue about the politics of America, a country in which none of them is eligible to vote (38).

During Durga Puja they become nostalgic for Calcutta and wish to visit this city of joy, and some do. They visit Calcutta’s planetarium, Zoo Gardens, Victoria Memorial, Dum Dum airport, shopping centres at Chowringhee and Gariahat and which Hindi movies during their short sojourns. Their bicultural America – induced materialist consciousness does not undermine their love for Calcutta. In their trajectories experience and occasional visits they enculturate with Calcutta’s desi culture. They like
to board the double decker buses for tour, purchase Bata shoes, Cuticurra powder, Margo soap for use and prefer to eat pink tandoori, aloo gobi, syrupy mishit and have a flair for Marie biscuit and Lipton tea. On puja and marriage occasions women wear Banarasi sari, gold jewellery and men wear dhoti and topor, pajamas and Punjabis and both pose for countless photographs. Even when in America Gangulis celebrate Gogol’s annaprasan or consumption of solid food ceremony and miss their relatives from distant Calcutta. They get particularly closer on the family occasions. Some sari clad Bangali women become Gogol’s honorary aunts and dhoti clad Bengali men become his honorary uncles. Gogol is trained call them Dada and Dadu, Mama and learns to recognize the photographs of his grandparents and uncles in India. They practice their native culture on birth and death days, marriages, annaprasan and pujas. The first generation Bengali immigrants make their children learn Bengali language, literature and history by sending them to special Bengali classes. They are taught about their family lineage, religious customs, rites, beliefs, food and mannerisms. The first generation Bengalis feel fine when their children memorise Tagore’s poems, names of Hindi deities like Saraswathi, Kartik, Lakshmi and Ganesha who adorn goddess during Durga Puja.

The immigrant Bengalis thus have their sentimental journey to their homeland through cultural practices. But their Americanised children in unromantic comprehension experience a psychic separation from it. The older immigrants are reminded of the words of their family elders when they left India. Married women do not utter their husband’s first names for according to Indian custom it should stay unspoken by them for fear of committing a sin. They rather refer it cleverly in an direct and oblique manner. They use vermilion in the parting of their hair as a cultural symbol of the living status of their husbands. Ashima like many immigrant Bengali women is
not culturally immunized by America’s multicultural milieu. On the contrary an old –
world sentimentality ligers in her deep attachment towards her deceased parents whom
she had left behind in India, which is incomprehensible to her children.

She is always reminded of the words of her family elders in India “not to eat beef
or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family” (37). But the second generation
Bengalis do not obey these cultural dictates and codify their Indian past as a myth. They
are conflicted in America’s hybrid culture, and they do not feel the necessity of their
inherited cultural past. They make an easy conversion from the past Indian culture to the
materialist American culture and quickly shed it like clothes worn for a special occasion,
or for a season that has passed, suddenly cumbersome, irrelevant to their lives. Instead
of loving India’s culture they criticize Hindu fundamentalism, poverty of people, beggers
and heat with Americanised viewpoint. They like to celebrate Christmas, invite
American children on their birthdays and family occasions and prefer continental food
like other Americans. In friendship and love affairs they are familiarized to the
American way of life. Gogol does not accept his father’s choosing his name. He thinks
that names die over times, which they succumb just as people do. He keeps his
relationship with Ruth and Maxine and flirts with them knowing that his parents do not
support this cultural deviation.

While Ashima takes a long to recover after her husband’s death Gogol’s girl –
friend Maxine does not understand the intensity of her shock, she rather laughs at her as
gogol in his childhood laughed at the sight of his father’s shaving off his hair with a
grief-striken heart after his grandfather’s death, in India. The sum and substance of it all
is that when the people fail in understand the motive and emotion that a culture carries it
appears strange and thereby incites our laughter or disregard. In American plenitude
Gogol and Moushumi dream of marriage, profession, and identity. Though they practice their native culture, tradition, belief, custom, values and mannerisms at home for a brief time, they belong more to this New World in their habit and practices.

Trace of affinity, of some instinctive though slight bonding in Gogol’s consciousness, with Indian cultural practices, however, show up every now and them. He appreciates his mother’s building of a new home in Bongified Boston apartment where Ashima hangs a colour painting of a caravan of Camels in a desert of Rajasthan. After marriage he cherishes the same feeling when he discovers Moushumi’s love for a Kashmir’s crewelwork carpet on the floor, Rajasthani silk pillows on the sofa, a cast-iron Natraj on one of the book cases. Living in an emotional void he does experience a central - acculturation which enforces his identity as an Indian. His engagement with Moushumi, the daughter of his parents friends whom he calls honourably Shubir Mesho and Rina Mashi is an attempt to enculturate his Bengali identity even though it ends in failure.

Both Gogol and Moushumi are new generation Bengalis born and raised in America’s multicultural society. Moushumi’s education at New York University and frequent visits to England and France for her research work have depleted her native cultural consciousness. As a research scholar on French feminist theory she has developed an ultra feminist consciousness that goes against her native culture. She is a peculiar combination of Indian, America and French identities. She has little appreciation for both India and the Indians except Shashi Kapoor and a cousin in India. She is very much skeptical about India, America and about her marriage. In her conversation with Gogol she narrates how she has been brought up in a multicultural set-up with her parents shift from London to America.
She admits that she had hated moving to America, that she had held on to her British accent for as long as she could. For some reason, her parents feared America much more than England, perhaps because of its vastness or perhaps, because, in their minds it had less of a link to India. In her attitude she is more westernized. She has privately vowed that she would never grow fully dependent on her husband and had always been admonished not to marry an American. She knows that her father’s friend’s children had married Americans, had produced pale, dark haired half American grand children. This is the reason why she marries Gogol in a Hindu ritualistic way. The marriage was solemnized by a priest, a friend of Moushumi’s parents and anaesthesiologist who happens to be a Brahmin. This marriage seems like Moushumi’s attempt at sort of bridge building between two cultures.

Displacement and marginality in Sonia’s case, however, trigger a relatively much less sense of alienation and nostalgia. She seems to gradually assimilate the bits and pieces of American culture, and adapts herself to American common sense without much of hiccups and setbacks. She lives on her own in San Francisco, works for an environmental agency and studies for her LSAT. But when she hears the news of sad demise of her father due to massive heart attack, she files back from San Francisco to be with her mother. She stays with her mother and works as a paralegal, hoping to apply to law schools nearby. It is Sonia who takes care of her widowed mother. Compared to Ruth and Maxine, Sonia is of different cast. Unlike Moushumi, she doesn’t seem to have several sexual relationships. Like her own mother, she has sense of duty. Like the traditional Indian woman Sonia Marries her boyfriend a half Chinese boy, Ben and I happy in their shared world.
In the melting pot of this novel is what stands out is the premature and tragic death of Ashke Ganguli due to massive heart attack in Cleveland. He had received a prestigious grant and planned to spend nine months at the University of Ohio, leaving Ashima behind in Massachusetts. In his absence Ashima takes a job at the library just to while away the time; more so because as she watches her children’s independence growing from more to more, she feels she has given birth to vagabonds. She is understandably shocked beyond words to receive the news of her husband’s sudden death. Everything changes especially with her, at this unexpected news: “For the first time in her life, Ashima has no desire to escape to Calcutta”(183). The flat at Pemberton Road is sold and Ashima decides to spend six months in the States and six month in Indi. It is a solitary somewhat premature vision of the future she and her husband had planned when he was alive. True to her name, Ashima will now be without borders, a resident of everywhere and nowhere. Her ideal world is shattered to pieces, Ashima feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone and sobs for her husband. She missed her life in India for thirty three years and now she will miss the country in which she had loved her husband. She decides to move away desperately after the last celebration of Christmas together with her children.

This novel moves on from traces of contra acculturation to a complete contra acculturation through three major happenings in Gogol’s life. The first of these is the Maxine, episode. Initially of course, Gogol hurts his parents’ sentiments when he indulges in lady-hunting especially Ruth and Maxine, knowing little about marriage and love in American society. But his uncelebrated and disillusioning love affair with Maxine, slowly but surely, draws him towards Indian ethos and values in marriage;
Gogol had brought Maxine to the house; Ashima doesn’t want her for a daughter-in-law. She had been startled that Maxine had addressed her as Ashima, and her husband as Ashoke. And yet Gogol has been dating her for over a year now. By now Ashima knows that Gogol spends his nights with Maxine, sleeping under the same roof of her parents, a thing Ashima refuses to admit to her Bengali friends. She knows the relationship is something she must be willing to accept. Having been deprived of the company of her own parents upon moving to America, her children’s independence, their need to keep their distance from her, is something she will never understand (166).

However, and not unexpectedly, Gogol’s affair with this Manhattan girl, Maxine ends abruptly when;

Maxine is open about her past, showing him photographs of her ex-boyfriends in the pages of a marble paper album, speaking of those relationships without embarrassment or regret. She has the gift of accepting her life; as he comes to know her, he realizes that she has never wishes she were anyone
other than herself, resides in any other place, in any
other way (137-138).

Gogol’s second confrontation with the hard truths of life comes after his father’s
death in a massive heart attack. Gogol feels his father’s absence at their Boston
apartment. When he comes back from the hospital, ”he is terrified to see his mother
more than he had been to see his father’s body in the morgue”(179). All through his life
he was busy in a mindboggling business of selecting an elegant name for his mental and
emotional peace and tranquility, rejecting his parents cultural austerities. But now he
emphathizes with the penitentia ceremonies of the Hindu rituals. With his mother’s
erasing of vermilion from her forehead, discarding of bracelets eating mourner’s diet,
foregoing meat and fish for ten evenings, shaving off hair with a disposable razor on the
tenth day he is supportive in full.

In their new house on American soil it projects the kaleidoscopic picture of
Indian cultural practices. The priest’s chanting of Sanskrit verses for the purification of
Ashoke’s soul reminds man’s quest for salvation in this immigrant home. Gogol like
many second generation immigrants in America had tried to escape from his cultural
bonds but it is so much embedded in his flesh, blood and psyche that he just cannot undo
it. He observes his father’s birth and death anniversaries. He, his mother and sister stand
in front of the photograph and drape a garland of rose petals around the frame and anoint
his father’s forehead with sandalwood paste through the glass. It is the photograph more
than anything that draws Gogol back to the house again and again. It provides him
spiritual happiness and brings consolation.
The third episode that transforms Gogol psychologically is the failure of his marriage with Moushumi’s pre-and-post marital relationships with Dimitri Desjardins, a lover of the book, ‘The man without qualities’ and a Ph.D. in German literature from the University of Heidelberg devastates their married life. Her betrayal of Gogol comes to light when he discovers her bathing suit on top of the clothing on the bed. He is strangely panicked when she confesses that she had harboured the lengthy infatuation for Dimitri during her journey by bus to Washington D.C in order to participate in the university student coalition protesting against apartheid in South Africa. During the journey as Dimitri was sitting by her side, he broke her heart forever. Dimitri’s on-going affair with Moushumi, now twenty seven and married has had her full concurrence. She hates such cultural trappings in which she feels no sense of authority.

In a confused state they had both acted on the same impulse that was their mistake. Moushumi’s confession to Gogol is unforgivable and unacceptable. He discerns how, their shared world, perhaps for the sake of novelty, was slowly dying. While both the American and Indian cultures emphasise the ideals of fidelity in married life, the latter seems more rigid. Gogol Moushmi relationship developed in America’s multicultural milieu ends in divorce. The pull of contra-acculturation in Gogol is now firm and steady; it brooks little hybridization and less assimilation.

Despite their thirty years of living abroad the mother-son duo now lose all fervor to live in America, mainly after Ashoke’s death, Gogol’s divorce and Sonia’s marriage with Ben. Ashima plans to go back to Calcutta, leaving her job at the university library, to live with her relatives. It is her way to optimize the emotional peace for the rest of her life, and to find psychotherapeutic healing. Gogol discovers that of his family one is
dead, another widow, and himself a divorcée and his choice to lead his life in America a false step which he had once much eulogized.

Interestingly the novel begins with the departure of Ashima from Calcutta and ends with her anticipated arrival in Calcutta. In this sense, the novel seems to be an epic about the going away from home and also about homecoming. At the centre of this departure and arrival is the life of Ashima divided between home and away from home. Ashima’s trauma of living two lives of vastly different kinds, Indian and American draws attention to the true meaning of her name that is borderlessness or homelessness despite having a home. Probably a man’s life can never be put within a border but to live a life it is imperative that one has a particular place to call it a home. It is this home which is central to the existence of Ashima. As long as she is at Pamberton Road, she considers Calcutta as her home but when it is time to sell her house at Pamberton Road. She feels mysterious pain within her and is hurt to think; “they will knock down the wall between the living and dining rooms put an island in the kitchen, track lights overhead… listening to their plans Ashima had felt a moment’s panic…”(275).

The house that she has decorated for such a long period will now change and its past will be lost forever. The sense of loss torments Ashima, and its memory always stays as kind of trauma for her. It seems that Ashima is living a life of memory; the memory of Calcutta when she is in the states, and the memory of the states when she is in Calcutta. In this sense, she is a citizen of third space; a trishanku, neither of Calcutta nor of America. This trishanku existence is at the centre of diasporic trauma, and Ashima is a true representative of such an existence.
The traumatic experience of Ashoke is in the nature of a psychical wound; a process which took place over the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was the product not just of emerging mental sciences, but also of Victorian modernity. The shocks produced by railway accidents were first thought to be the result of direct physical jars to the nervous constitution, an illness termed railway spine. The train accident that Ashoke had at the age of 20 impinged on his psych deeply, apart from changing him physically for he had had a limp after the accident for the rest of his life. The train accident and its aftermath mysteriously establish a rapport between two strangers, Ashoke and Gogol for it is the latter’s book that saved the former. Ashoke’s lifelong remembrance of the story “The Overcoat”, his feeling of association with its protagonist and his realization that all human beings have an experience of pain one way or the other impact and haunt him for the rest of his life.

More significant is the fact Ashoke was reading this story when he was crushed beneath the railway debris and it was the dropping of this book from his hand that drew the attention of rescue team. Such an association of a man and a book may seem a coincidence, but its overbearing force cannot be ignored considering the magnitude of its impact on the psyche of Ashoke. In fact, Ashoke’s life seems to be the gift of the book and this intensifies the memory of the event and his consistent feeling of gratitude to the author.

For Ashoke to convey his gratitude to Gogol, nothing seems more befitting than to name his son after him, even as it is also occasioned by compulsion of circumstance. Be that as it may, his limp and his boy Gogol always remind him of the accident and keep his pang and fear afresh and his gratitude to the writer deep. That Gogol is named after the memory of such a traumatic event is kept secret from him. Ashoke also bears
hidden agony for nurturing this secret a secret that constitutes the essence of his being. However, when Gogol attains his 20th year, Ashoke lets out this secret to him, and the disclosing is as tormenting as the event was. Ashoke’s emotional state is so touching that Gogol psychologically goes through that traumatic event and feel the pain of his father’s.

The psychosomatic experience of Gogol reveals to him a new implication of his pet name. It is bound up with a catastrophe his father has been haunted by for years. The realization of the significance of his name in the life of Ashoke is so overwhelming that he asks his father:

Do I remind you of that night?
Not at all; his father says eventually, one hand going to his ribs, a habitual gesture that his baffled Gogol until now. You remind me of everything that followed (124).

In the representation of the trauma of Ashoke and Ashima, the first generation immigrants in the novel, the memory of events in the homeland holds the way. It is this memory that strengthens Ashima’s endurance to create her homeland in an alien land and induces Ashoke to perpetuate his obligation to Gogol through his son’s name. I is the creation of meaning for a traumatic event; a meaning which has universal implication for Ashoke and Gogol that is Man’s life is uncertain and a displaced entity makes aggravates the pain of life.

The second generation immigrants trauma links up with such crisis of identity and obstructs in the development of effective relationship between self and place. When
Gogol and Sonia visit Calcutta as children they do not feel Calcutta to be their home for they have grown up in Boston. However they soon develop an attachment for the place and the people and when they return to Pamberton Road after their vacation they have a feeling of being a stranger. Though they are home they are unsettled by the space, by the inflexible silence that surrounds them. They still feel somehow in transit, still disconnected from their lives. This attachment with the place has been at the centre of the suffering of diasporas. They long for their home where they can stay only in sojourn, and the home they live in throughout their lives somehow remains alien; they do not think of it as home nor the land they live in as their homeland. Gogol’s unsuccessful love affair with Ruth and Maxine can also be accounted for as a conflict between two alien cultures; his break off with Maxine comes about mainly because of his adherence to the familial values and filial duty.

Gogol’s metamorphosis is triggered by the death of Ashoke. Earlier he was living an American life, now he thinks as an Indian and comprehends the values of his family. Behind his racial reawakening lies his recall of the traumatic accident of his father, the ceremonies like the tonsuring of his father’s head according to the Hindu beliefs, and the struggle of his father. Gogol realizes the significance of all these and chooses to side with the family. When Maxine asks him to get away from all this he answers. “I do not want to getaway” (182).

No doubt in taking such a step, Gogol involvements the pain of losing his love. The trauma of finding a suitable companion for Gogol becomes an impossible situation and his wedding with Moushumi eventually turns out to be a disastrous one. In matters of love Gogol’s is a sufferer’s lot. His break off with Moushumi is symbolically indicated in the beginning of their conjugal life when she refuses to accept Gogol’s
surname. In fact, her marriage with Gogol is a kind of replacement or negotiation; he is a physical substitute of Graham whom Moushumi was supposed to marry. Gogol understands his substitute role in the life of Moushumi when she devotes more and more time among her friends.

Their relationship continues only till Moushumi encounters her first love. Her return to her first love dismisses her association with Gogol and deeply smashes him for he never predictable it from an Indian woman. His failure with Ruth and Maxine too has been the outcome of cultural conflict and so it is, in an extended sense, in the case of Moushumi. The staggering experience of failure in relationships lights up the true significance of Dostoyevsky’s statement on Gogol. “We all come out of Gogol’s overcoat” (133) that is life is decidedly undecided and rotates on the axis called suffering.

Moushumi’s suffering however, is personal and is the outcome of the kind of person she is. True to her name Moushumi is the name of a period which is subject to change she is adjustable and changing in nature. Same weather does not last forever, and like monsoon she comes in the life of Gogol and leaves his life shelter. Like the several past loves of Gogol she also involvements love for three man-Graham, Gogol, and Dimitri, and in the face of her is desire for the first love the strong point of her marital bond proves to be too brittle. A successful continuation of relationship depends on the couple’s obligation towards the sensitiveness of relationship. Gogol has understood it though the experience of his parents but Moushumi goes by her accultured ideology.

These differences between them can well be noticed during the discussion of Moushumi’s friends over the naming of the child of Astrid and Donald. However, more
than circumstances and temperamental differences, the memory of past love plays a
greater role in the breaking off the marriage of Gogol and Moushumi. Moushumi had
had the stirrings of her first love when she met Drimitri years ago in the final month of
her high school days. It was in a bus journey for a demonstration that they had come
closer. As the bus grew quiet, as everyone began to fall asleep, she had let him lean his
head against her shoulder. Dimitri was asleep, or so she thought. And so she pretended
to fall asleep too. After a while she felt his hand on her leg, on top of the denim skirt
was wearing. And then slowly he began to unbutton her skirt. It was the first time in her
life a man had touched her. At seventeen for the first time. But he had not kissed her.
He had only looked at her, and said, “You are going to break hearts, you know ”. (258).
And then he leaned back in his own seat this time, removed his hand from her lap, and
closed his eyes once again. She had stared at him in disbelief, angry that he assumed she
had not broken any hearts yet, and at the same time flattered. For the rest of the journey
she kept her skirt unbuttoned, hoping he would return to the task.

After this momentary encounter, they met for some time but Dimitri left for
Europe abruptly, terminating their unfulfilment relationship. Since then Moushumi had
nurtured the memory of her first love and suffered the pang of its unfulfilment; a
memory so strong and poignant that it was awakened by the very sight of Dimitri again.
The fearful awakening of the past restlessly compels her to find Dimitri and their
subsequent meetings revive the dormant desire for him in Moushumi despite her
awareness that it will wreck her marriage; an awareness not the less tormenting for fear
of losing her love again: “she wonders if she is the only women in her family ever to
have betrayed her husband, to have been unfaithful. This is what upset her most to
to feel strangely at peace, the complication of it calming her, structuring her day.

In contrast Moushumi’s revelation of her affair of Gogol in a train shocks and torments him: He felt the chill of her secrecy, numbing him, like a poison spreading quickly through his veins. He’d felt this way on only one other occasion, the night he had sat in the car with his father and learned the reason for his name. That night he had experienced the same incomprehension, was sickened in the same way. But he felt none of the tenderness that he had felt for his father, only the anger, the humiliation of having been deceived. The association and dissociation between Moushumi’s secret and Ashoke’s harrowing trauma is at once enigmatic and revealing for Gogol.

To get rid of this he turns a recluse for some time, visits Venice but when he returns after a year, though the shock has worn off, a sense of failure and shame persists, deep and abiding and there has to be a parting of ways: it is as if a building he’d been responsible for designing has collapsed for all to see. And yet he cannot really blame her. They had both acted on the same impulse that was their mistake. They had both sought ease in each other, and in their communal world, was slowly dying. Still, he wonders how he’s arrived at all this; that he is thirty two years old, and already married and divorced. His time with her seems like a permanent part of him that no longer has any relevance, or currency.

The life situations of Ashima, Ashoke and Gogol, despite being emotional and psychological, and triggered by past experiences and encounters, are also linked up with their immediate environments. Their diasporic existence highlights their acute sense of loss, pain and nostalgia for the native land, its people and culture, and heightens their
feelings of alienation and at times of deep despair. Often enough they take recourse to
memory Ashima recalls Calcutta, Ashoke recalls the train accident Gogol recalls his
father. This presence of the past in the present in this novel weaves a charged and
challenging pattern of figurations and refigurations, and of the problematic of both the
land of promise and the native land.

Lahiri’s ‘The Namesake’, thus viewed, projects Ashima and Gogol as cultural
survivors in America’s multicultural milieu. They demonstrate the lives of hybridity,
inbetweenness and liminality. It is difficult for them to maintain cultural insularity, and
like millions of immigrant Indians they essentialise their life in the cultural availables of
America. But finally it is their contra-acculturation and rooting for India that allows
them peace and consolation in moments of catharsis. To the extent that contra
acculturation has increasingly become a major trend of the postcolonial societies,
Lahiri’s Gogol is every Indian immigrant in America and Europe who suffers from
alienation, impatience and isolation, and searches for a spiritual consolation in contra
acculturation. The east west divide is fundamental of Lahiri’s characters but the truth is
people everywhere today inhabit mixed orders of reality in which no culture is sacrosanct
and every culture exists with its survival strategies.

In this novel Lahiri seems to be carrying forward the theme of the suffering of the
individual because of the fanciful and fond wishes of one’s family and the working and
doings of the society at large. Equally, Lahiri raises the question of the identity of the
individual as it is constructed in the society through the interplay of forces beyond his
control. This seemingly irresponsible exercise of the authority of society heaps
unintended problems and pitfalls on the individual and leaves one tainted and wounded.
She also underlines, that identity of the individual, consistenly affected by society, is
something which one has to accept through a process of reflections and negotiations. One wonders if the novel is interested to secularise an Indian religious tradition that is generally associated with name. to put it differently if the novel considers that the Indian insistence on Name is all is that very important a cultural practice, or it Name is nothing or it does not matter or does not matter at all, is equally important a practical formulation for an individual’s happiness and successful social existence.

It brings out the distress as well as the discomfort that lies there in a name. it is assumed that one’s name as something utterly comforting and gratifying. The individual as bearer of a name ought to appreciate his name and thus gratefully acknowledge the great gift that his loved ones have bestowed upon him. He ought to divine the distinctness the elderly in the family affectionately confer by assigning him a ‘name’. Though the logic of finding somebody a name could be convincing as asserted by those who practice it through an arduous and painstaking exercise, equally convincing are the disturbing responses that on occasions are triggered by these names.

Names are intended to be an attractive labels or style tags with which people often express a personal liking. But at times these are visibly or conceivably upsetting and unsettling stickers one cannot wish away pleasure. Like birth or parentage is a divine accident, being assigned a name, being christened is also an instance of accident. The difference however is that while the accident of birth or parentage could not be rewritten however much it might be resented against, name could be both resented about and a preferred alternative could always be sought through personal initiative and could finally be stuck to.
However, it is always important and interesting to explore the perspective, the very situation or set of circumstances that make a thorough nightmare of putting up with a name. When, why and how a name loses its charm and how then the whole warmth involved in a naming ceremony is at a single stroke dismissed as meaningless are questions that are thoughtfully viewed in Lahiri’s novel. Emotion involved in finding a child his name is examined at length, as also the real life inconveniences, embarrassments and psychological pain issuing from it in practical encounters. The novel suggests that actually there is much meaning surrounding a name and thus to give somebody a name is a responsibility and a challenge that parents and elderly people in a family need always realize in terms of both magnitude and consequences involved.

The example of the name of Nikhl Gangui/ Nikolai Ganguli/ Gogol Ganguli is problematized at length in Lahiri’s this novel and all attention is fixed on the need to carefully evaluate what risk a casually picked up name from a whole world of available and coinable names could ultimately lead to. For quite sometime the reader is confronted with the insistent question to skillfully raised in ‘The Namesake’, namely, how indispensable is a name in the recognition, success and satisfaction in one’s life.

The pertinent question, then is about how misplaced are the traditional Indian expectations of parents from their America-born younger generation Indian children, located in a different (post-colonial post-modern) time frame of the first world environment and geography. In these expectations lie the uncritical adherence of a people to traditional prescriptions, and their simplistic insistence on transforming their cherished dream of one world one family ideal of India, into a reality. But this insistence stays blissfully oblivious of the practices and values their children are exposed to on a daily basis in a new land, and of the radically different ground realities and contexts they
are nurtured in. Both Nikhl and Sonia, as representatives of this younger generation America born Indians, fail to find any practical significance in the values and ideals of their parents, and the oppositionality of their land attitudes and responses with that of their parents lands them in an identity crisis.

At the same time far more confusing is the subtle but persistent oppositionality these children of migrant Indians face from native children in the school where mixed racial presences are simply a matter of circumstantial inevitability. The experiences of Gogol Ganguli in the school of the land of his birth force upon him the embarrassment and distress he suffers even about such as innocuous matter like his name, and further augment his identity crisis. Jhumpa Lahiri thus captures the ugly and bizarre consequences of cultural differences, and tends to imply that antagonism of cultures must cease, and mutual accommodation and cross fertilization of cultures encouraged. What is called for is the nourishment of cultural identities, not through appropriation, or even assimilation of one culture in another, but through a forward looking hybridization and integration of cultures.

Interestingly therefore, besides raising the issues involved in naming as a cultural activity with social and transnational import, ‘The Namesake’ also brings in the far more disturbing questions about place or the places. The equation thus is not any more of ‘my name’ whose name categories, but rather in Nikhil’s experience it is of ‘my place’ ‘whose place’ category. The novel subtly probes the issue of what exactly should be a person’s place or his land- where he is born, where he desires to be brought up, where he lives or desires to live or where his roots lie. It portrays the tangled and complex issues faced by the indigenous subject as migrant subject in the context of Indianness as a
cultural construct. The indigenous subjects of the colonies, with the culture of Indianness are to be found not only at a definite geo political boundary.

As subjects with a distinct cultural orientation they are to be traced throughout the world in the first world and should not be present only in the third world. They are a culturally dispersed and displaced community which in their encounters with various other European or Non – European races, have given birth to a complex culture, out of their filiation and affiliation. It is a mixed culture more acquired than original, in which the subjects neither have a comfortable feeling nor have an alternative culture to embrace. Through the depiction of Nikhil’s experiences Lahiri seems to stress the need for this alternative culture, more important now than ever before, and draws attention to the inherent inadequacy of mixed culture. She effectively employs the aesthetics of the in-between by raising the issues of bicultural ambivalence which Nikhil as one originally belonging to India, faces.

As in the case of all major writers, the critics of Jhumpa Lahiri include both admirers and detractors. Among her detractors the most hostile seems to be Vennila Kain whose review of “The namesake” is particularly harsh if not damning. She observes, “Lahiri’s India and Indians are clumsy, awkward, desperately out of place even in their own country, as are Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli in ‘The Namesake’. These transplants never strike root in America”. She finds Lahiri’s characters over educated and under developed and adds that the novel may possibly be titled, ‘The model minority’s guide to social climbing’ or ‘The model minority’s attempts at sophistication
and the resulting angst’. To her mind, Lahiri has a muddled sense of India and indulges in the depiction of an exotic India.

Not exactly in contrast, but quite differently Kate Flaherty makes strong positive comments on ‘The Namesake’, not unmixed with strains of serious critical reservations. She explicates how the novel has a paradoxical capacity to voice the general experience of displacement and how the cultural remnants of Russian, Bengaly and American and the immediate sensuality lend force to the typically nebulous experience of heterogeneity. The novel’s preoccupation with names and titles and the freight they carry, gives it a fable like quality.

All culture and identities are based on some other exclusionist practices and on culture heavily depends upon both an appropriation, and more often and more visibly, rejection, inferiorization, forced ignorance of another culture. Sometimes some distant cultures are so ignorant of the practices and customs of their ‘others’ that any possibility of transaction seems to be denied. Such a situation in the text is when Gogol is taken to kindergarten, where he is supposed to have a new name. The situation is doubly complex, firstly because Gogol has no taste for a new name or identity; and secondly the principal, Candance Lapidus, does not understand the nuance difference between a good name and what is in Bengali, to be literal called ‘call name’. This is not quite the same as nick name.

Representation of cultural encounters like clinically rupture the proposed site of unity of cultures of east and west, of India and America, Europe and seem to point towards polaric positions like ‘East is east West is west.’ There is no clear indication of any solution because novelists have long ceased to be therapists. However the
intrusion of a Russian name may be seen as suggestive of a third alternative between India and America – beyond India and America.

**The Lowland**

In September 2013 'The Lowland' was placed on the shortlist for the 2013 Man Booker Prize, which ultimately went to the Luminaries by Eleanor Catton. The following month it is also long – listed for the National Book Award for Fiction, and revealed to be finalization on October 16, 2013. It won the DSCPAN for the South Asian Literature.

Jhumpa Lahiri in the novel 'The Lowland' breathlessly recounts the diasporic lives. She is in this novel in fact made the readers accept the view that alienation-isolation as the necessary qualification for diasporas. Her women manage the diasporic settings differently compared to that of their partners. This acculturation looks slightly painful. All the diasporas share and carry a common history of unfinished shifting and setting. In most of her writings, she seems to be obsessed with the questions of identity, alienation and isolation. Her writings mostly travel from alienation to isolation. Her characters sole problem is to make a balance between internal and external mental conflicts that the lost setting brewed up.

Jhumpa Lahiri in 'The Lowland' takes readers right away to the lowland to the east of Tolly Club located in Tollygunge, a suburb of Calcutta. Past 'The Lowland' there existed an open space where Mitra brothers used to go for playing football. Subhash and Udayan were two brothers’ of similar appearance, height and voice though born at the difference of right fifteen months. Subhash Mitra was thirteen years old. Though he was older brother yet he never felt anything without Udayan. They were sons to a simple
clerk in Indian Railways department and a seamstress named Bijoli, their mother. Both started their formal schooling from a Bengali medium School. Once, Udayan listened to Bismillah a caddy of the club telling that over the club field, so many golf balls lay simply that he used to sell off. Under the impression, Udayan took the initiative to enter the Tolly Club. By the help of putting iron and kerosene tin both managed to climb over the fence.

'The Lowland' is similar to the other works that Lahiri has written, beautiful sparse accounts of people lost in new worlds. The reader is always stuck by how she writes about the particulars of feeling strange, for instance, the bated breath of watching one’s children grew up in a world so terribly different from one. Her writing is an outflow of her own life born to Bengali parents, raised one East Coast of India. As one has learnt except from any Lahiri novel, ‘The Lowland’ revolves around a Bengali immigrant family in the United States and the Indian sections serve as a background to the story as it develops.

The book begins with the description of lowland itself, lowland that was to be a monumental place for the Mitras in the future. The opening lines reads like the way one would guide a new traveller to reach the place: “East of the Tolly Club, after Deshpram Sashmal splits in two, there is a small mosque. A turn leads to a quite enclave. A warren of narrow lanes and modest middle-class homes, once within the enclave, there were two ponds, oblong, side by side. Behind them was the lowland spanning a few acres” (TL 3).

Geography is destiny in ‘The Lowland’. Her title refers to a marshy stretch of land between two ponds in Calcutta neighbourhood, where two very close brothers grown up and where one of them is killed. In monsoon season, the marsh floods and the
ponds combine; in summer, the floodwater evaporates. The reader does not need any decoder ring to figure out that the two ponds symbolize the two brothers, at times separate; at other times inseparable. But there is still more meaning lurking in this rich landscape. The features of the lowland given deft matter of fact strokes have a telling impact on the characters of the novel.

Sketched in Bengali blood, ‘The Lowland’ is a tale of two Bengali brothers preternaturally closes in their youth, who forge very different paths for themselves as they grow up in Calcutta during the 1950s and 1960s. They look and sound alike but are very different from each other. When the novel begins, Subhash was thirteen older by fifteen months. But he had no sense of himself without Udayan. From his early memories at every point, his brother was there.

Subhash has shown himself to be very cautious from his early childhood and his favourite moments were when he alone preferred to live in his own world. Their relatives at large gatherings sometimes said, “While Subhash stayed in clear view, Udayan was disappearing, even in their two-room house” (10). When he was a boy, Udayan hid compulsively, under the bed, behind the doors in the crate where winter quilts were stored. He played this game without announcing it, spontaneously vanishing, forcing their mother to stop what she was doing to seek him out. When they were old enough, they were permitted to leave the house but were asked not to lose sight of one another.

They were also taught to honour their parents and observe the old customs. While Subhash jelled wonderfully with his ambient, Udayan, the more daredevil brother, was always in search of new pastures. Subhash in contrast, dutifully dedicated himself to personal, rather than collective, improvement. The readers are shown much mundane
details about their day-to-day lives to let them conclude that the two brothers, close in age, were very different—one, angry, restless, protesting loneliness and that they remained different; they did not change or learn or grow or develops as human beings, and their motivations for doing anything was felt thrice-removed.

Yet, in spite of their differences one was perfectly confused with the other, so what whe either name was called both were conditioned to answer and sometimes it was difficult to know who had answered, given that their voices were nearly indistinguishable. They were similar enough in build to draw from a single pile of clothes. Their complexions, a light coppery compound derived from their parents, were identical. Subhash is a passive conformist who has pre-defined limits that adhere to the laws of society. Subhash’s conduct is contrary to that of Udayan’s, who loves to take risks and challenge the conventional and compared to whom Subhash considers himself inferior.

After their successful school years, they were admitted to two of the city’s best colleges, Udayan would go to Presidency to study Physics and Subhash for chemical engineering to Jadavpur. They had their unique preferences in matters of study or play. When asked by their parents what they wanted as a gift, to acknowledge their achievements, Subhash suggested a marble chess set to replace the worn wooden pieces they’d always had. But Udayan wanted a shortwave radio. He wanted more news of the world than what came through their parent’s old valve radio.

Both the brothers were speechless and shocked when they heard over the radio how the government arbitrarily brought the rebellion to its end. Udayan by nature a dynamic idealist, Charismatic and impulsive, finds himself propelled by social
conscience into the Naxalite movement, a rebellion waged to eradicate inequity and poverty; he will give everything, risk all, for what he believes. He was affected so much by the police action against the sharecroppers that he was reacting as if it were a personal affront. True to the spirit of the movement, Udayn becomes convinced that he should set himself on to better the living conditions of India’s poor through violent uprising.

His vision of life and reality was born a new in the new ideology of the Naxalbari movement so much, so that, if he happened to pass through the Tolly Club, where he had once sneaked in to play golf on his way to or from the tram depot, Udayan called it an affront; “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” (25). Udayan now considers golf as the pastime of the comprador bourgeoisie. He said that Tolly Club was a proof that India was still a semi-colonial country, behaving as if the British had never left the place. He used to be out for meetings in a neighbourhood in North Calcutta, to hear a wispy haired medical student named Sinha, who asserted with emphasis; if history is to take a step forward, the parlour game of parliamentary politics must end. But Subhash was never convinced that an imported ideology could solve India’s problems,

Yet Subhash often went with his brother because, he was sick of the fear that always rose in him, that he would cease to exist, that he and Udayan cease to be brothers were Subhash were to resist him. Yet all these hectic activities and rampant student boycotts and unrest against prevailing system going on did not prevent them from pursuing their studies, both brothers began postgraduate studies, Udaya at Calcutta University, Subhsh continuing at Jadavpur. After their studies ended, Subhash and Udayan found themselves among so many others of his generation, overqualified and
unemployed. Udayan turns to radical politics because of the injustice and poverty he sees around him. But the more Udayan becomes involved in politics, the more Subhash feels alienated from him.

Subhash decided to apply for a few Ph.D. programmes in the United States while Udayan thought that by such a decision Subhash was being quite irresponsible to the issues of people. He said quite thoughtfully, "How can you walk away from what's happening? There, of all places?" (30). It is quite characteristic of him to impose his notion of social ethics on others particularly on Subhash. Here the reader will find Subhash retaliating in the same coin posing a few questions to Udayan: "This isn't a game you're playing. What if the police come to the house? What if you get arrested? What would Ma and Baba think? ... They're people who raised you. Who continue to feed and clothe you? You amount to nothing, if it weren't for them." (30) Though Udayan got flared up initially, he comes to acknowledge the worth of his gracious presence for the first time in his life: "You're the other side of me, Subhash. It's without you that I'm nothing. Don't go. It was the only time he'd admitted such a thing. He'd said it with love in his voice. With need." (31)

Subhash's dream of doing PhD in America is soon materialised when he gets a scholarship to settle in Rhode Island, for his research. He thus steps out of Tollygunge "as he had stepped so many mornings out of dream, its reality and its particular logic rendered meaningless in the light of day" (34). Life in Rhode Island was entirely different. He breathed a sense of freedom because unlike his days in Tollygunge, life ceased to obstruct or assault him. "Here was a place where humanity was not always pushing, rushing, running as if with a fire at its back" (34) He lived at the top of a house, sharing a kitchen and bathroom with another PhD student named Richard Grifalconi, a
student of sociology. Subhash learned to settle down quietly without joining in any of the student protests against the government's policies on Vietnam. He knew "he'd been invited to America as Nixon's guest... He knew that the door could close just as arbitrarily as it had opened. He knew that he could be sent back to where he'd come from, and that there would be plenty to take his place" (36).

For a couple of lonely years in a student boarding house, he learns to live without the voices of his family. He was in a sense proud to have come to America alone to study oceanography. Soon he learned to live here "as he once must have learned to stand and walk and speak. He'd wanted so much to leave Calcutta, not only for the sake of education but also he could admit this to himself now... to take a step Udayan never would" (40). Yet his motivation had done little to prepare him. He felt quite uncertain though he was happy to escape from a city he sees disorganised and violent. "Here in this place surrounded by sea, he was drifting far from his point of origin. Here, detached from Udayan, he was ignorant of so many things" (40). He found in the beaches of Rhode Island a resemblance to the delta lowlands surrounding Calcutta and he learned to live by this association with his homeland.

Udayan Mitra, gets pulled into India's nascent communist movement that kicked into high gear in the 60s, especially in the state of West Bengal where a fair portion of the novel is set. The World's largest democracy has had brushes with communism for decades now, the origins of which can be traced to two farmer-driven movements in the 1940s right around the time of India's independance.

From Subhash's earliest memories, at every point, his brother was there. In the suburban streets of Calcutta where they wandered before dusk in the hyacinth strewn
ponds where they played for hours on end. Udayan was always in his older brother's sight. So close in age, they were inseparable in childhood and yet, as the years pass as U.S tanks roll into Vietnam and riots sweep across India. Their brotherly bond can do nothing to forestall the tragedy that will upend their lives.

Udayan will give everything, risk all, for what he believes, and in doing so will transform the futures of those dearest to him, his newly married pregnant wife, his brother, and their parents. For all of them, the repercussions of his actions will reverberate across continents and seep through the generations that follow.

In wake of Partition, many Hindus from Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong came to Tollygunge looking for shelter here and there, many additional walls were erected and some were raised high to prevent any intrusion into the club. Having entered the club, their eyes surprised to see the dashing lush greenery. Though they were apprehensive of being caught, slowly they mustered courage to walk and look around. They stuffed their pockets with golf balls. On one evening they were caught by the policeman. He beat Subhash badly. Udayan could not bear his brother being beaten by someone. He blurt out not to bear and shielded him. Both boys were highly sharp and they proved their talent at their schools.

In 1967, they began to listen about Naxalbari movement to radio. Naxals were demanding ownership rights for sharecroppers. They were staging demonstratins, putting in hoardings, banner etc, at Presidency College and Jadavpur in support of naxalbari. They once broke on a cop and killed with bows and arrows. Consequent upon, eleven people were shot dead by police. Eight of them were women. Udayan blamed the United Front, the ruling party led by Ajoy Mukherjee. The United Front came into power that it
would abolish large-scale land holdings having with few people. Landowners were being abducted and killed.

In July the Central Government baned th carrying of bows and arrows in Naxalbari. The same week, authorized by the West Bengal cabinet, five hundred officers and men raided the region. They searched the mud huts of the poorest villagers. They captured unarmed insurgents, killing them if they refused to surrender. Ruthlessly, systematically, they brought the rebellion to its heels (23).

Udayan and Subhash both took it altogether as a shock. But Udayan took it emotionally. He said, “People are starving and this is their solution… They turn victim into criminals. They aim guns at people who can’t shoot back” (23). Udayan approves of Naxalbari for its demand of the abolition of arbitrary ownership. He even criticizes central government’s slackness and looking for solution and support from the United States of America and USSR. Udayan felt India still in the bondage of the British slavery.

Later on Udayan actively involved himself into the uprising against the government. He made many posters and affixed them here and there in the city. Subhash who was practical minded, applied for doctoral award in America. He first consulted and asked Udayan to go there. He also tried him make out that America is a land of opportunities. Udayan denied flatly and told Subhash that he could never come back if he went there. Udayan took a job of tutoring.

By early 1968, Subhash set out for Rhode Island America. He missed too much the company of Udayan. In Rhode Island he initially felt isolation. He identified
Tollygunge with Rhode. Here in the University his room-mate was Richard Grifalconi, an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi. He also asked Subhash about Indian politics, poverty, caste-system etc. Another man named Narsimhan from Madras India, the professor of economics married to Kate, an American whom he met there. Narsimhan still know few words of Bengali. Meanwhile, Udayan married his college girl of philosophy department whom most probably his parents had selected for Subhash. It was not an arranged marriage.

They stayed at one of his professor’s residence for some time. Udayan informed Subhash about his marriage with Gauri via an aerogram. He took it a little shocking but moderated. After some time in 1970, he sent a snap of Gauri. Subhash kept it as a proof. Subhash also got entangled with a lady holly. She was an abandoned lady having a son of nine years named Joshua. In her that Holly was suffering from isolation and distance between her and her husband. He even did some adultery with her. He wished to tell all about to Udayan but could not dare.

In the autumn of 1971, Subhash came to know that Udayan was killed in a police operation against Naxalbari. The letter also requested to return soon. Subhash returned home. After funeral rites and rituals, Subhash talked to Gauri everything in detail. Subhash also saw Gauri who was barely twenty three at the time of Uayan’s death, vermillion washed, bangles removed from her wrist, too withdrawn, too aloof to be a mother. The house was altogether lost in mourning and seclusion though it was the time of Duga Puja.

Subhash came to know that Gauri was pregnant for one or two months. She also told him that a day before his murder, he told her that he did not want a family before his
elder brother. Anyhow, Subhash brings round her and parents. Finally, he landed in along with Gauri. Gauri was grateful to him but she was not at peace. From now on she was being haunted by Udayan. She says,

She felt as if she contained a ghost, as Udayan was. The child was a version of him, in that it was both present and absent. Both within her and remote. She regarded it with a sort of disbelief just as she still did not really believe that Udayan was gone, missing now not only from Calcutta but from every other part of the earth she’d just flown across (124).

Gauri gradually with new environment and began to attend the lectures of philosophy professors at the institute where Subhash was completing his doctoral programme. As far as Subhash’s decision getting married with Gauri again soon after Udayan’s death, was taken by all in-laws unchaste. Perhaps, she married Subhash to remain in touch with the memories of Udayan.

However, 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” (127-28). She terribly recalls her brother Manash who was at the airport bidding by. She recalls her belongings at Uayn’s house:

She left Tollygunge, where she had never felt welcome, where she had gone only for Udayan. The furniture that belonged to her, the teak bedroom set, would stand unused in the small square room with strong morning light, the room where they had unwittingly made their child (128).
Gauri kept using her Indian clothes and ways of life. Subhash as a dear and dutiful husband helped her lot feel happy and comfortable. He even suggested a name Bela for would-be baby. Although they formally live a married life, Subhash often feels guilty of inheriting younger brother’s wife. He never dared approach her amorously. In due course, Gauri bore a female baby whom they named Bela.

Few days later, Subhash wished to have a baby of his own with her. But she never allowed him except mechanically. She has little emotion for him. Slowly time passed, Bela began learning language and admitted into a school located nearby, having an identity card bearing the name of Subhash Mitra and Gauri Mitra. Subhash has a dream of his own baby with Gauri which to the lost remained merely dream. Gradually, get between them began increasing. None prefer to tease anyway. No doubt, their relation was not based on emotion.

It was a connection at once false and true. Meanwhile, Gauri got a chance for doctoral programme in Boston. Subhash did not oppose her anyway. Few months later, information came to Subhash that his father passed away. This way or that he was cremated. After his death, Bijoli soon lost her balance of mind. She turned into a beggar often went to the lowland where Udayan was shot dead. There, she used to talk to herself. Three months later to her husband’s death, a letter from Subhash came to Tollygunge mentioning his possible visit to Calcutta to deliver few lectures along with Udayan’s child named Bela. Gauri was not in condition to accompany him for some necessary work. Deepa simply stored the information.

Subhash along with Bela arrived at the start of monsoon season. Bijoli offered Bela few precious gifts. She also taught her few tips for eating daal, rice and lentils.
Bela learnt from her making braids, wearing mirrored bangles so on and so forth. After a week, Subhash began to stay outside in the name of few lectures. Deepa took Bela to market for shopping and moreover for a walk. She even wanted to stay for more time and walk around the club. Time was over.

Finally, they returned to Rhode Island finding Gauri absent. Bela found a letter which was telling about Gauri’s departure for California where she was hired to teach students of a college. She there settled with least remorse. About her address she just mentioned that she can reach on the care of university. Gauri’s departure not only baffled but also broken them emotionally. He received such a deep emotional injury that was never to be reasons.

She in this way adapted American pattern of life. She by nature was not family loving lady. She had saved and shaped the life of Subhash if she would have decided seriously. To her, life was not more than a game to be played fair or foul. She left even her daughters Bela on the ground that she was old enough to forget her. And Subhash love Bela not her. These were her foolish excuses. Bela and Subhash anyhow live together. Gradually, the emotional rift between them widered, “isolation offered its own form of companionship; the reliable silence of her rooms, the steadfast tranquility of the evenings” (237).

Here in California, Gauri recalls her haunting past relation with Udayan without that there would be nothing to haunt her. No grief. She takes California her home. Ironically, she still carries her green card that proves her Indian citizenship. She could not overcome her Indianness altogether:
And yet she remained, in spite of her Western clothes, her Western academic interests a woman who spoke English with a foreign accent, whose physical appearance and complexion were unchangeable and against the backdrop of most of America, still unconventional. She continued to introduce herself by an unusual name, the first given by her parents, the last by the two brothers she had wed (236).

Gauri admits that Subhash “had done nothing wrong. He had let her go, never bothering her, never blaming her, at least to her face. She hoped he’d found some happiness. He deserved it, not she” (242). After many years gap, one day he came to know Richard Grifalconi his University friend, passed away. Like him, he would also leave everything except one thing as a secret which he should reveal immediately. The secret that Bela was daughter of Udayan not his was like a heavy stone put on his chest. Subhash began thinking about his property to be handed to or sold off. He was the master of two abandoned homes, one in Tollygunge where he had not returned since his mother’s death another in Rhode Island in which Gauri had left him.

Home in Tollygunge still bears names of Subhash Mitra and Gauri Mitra. It was managed by their relatives and the rent was deposited into a bank account. Bela later on conceived with someone about whom she did not intend to tell. Subhash thought it another version of Gauri. In due course, she bore a female baby whom she named Megha. In this way the past is there, appended to the present.

Subhash via web searched Gauri’s address and sent a letter asking for few signatures. Gauri thought that he was asking for divorce. Actually he was planning to
sell off his Tollygunge home which still bore Subhash and Gauri. Meghna so far turned four began her school. Subhash in the morning used to drop her to the school. In the evening Bela used to bring her home. She even told whoever asked about her mother that she was dead. Later on Bela also left Subhash for supporting the poor people.

To the conclusion, it can be said that Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘The Lowland’ is a narration of the agony and anguish her characters undergo. Alienation is focal point in the development of her themes. She breathlessly recounted three generation’s alienating history. In fact she directed alienation into her character’s veins. Alienation runs along with their blood circulation. Subhash Mitra is more sinned than sinning. His parents were obliged to live emotionally fractured life.

Gauri appears sheer selfish and opportunist. She tried hard to shun all her Indian ethnicity but failed largely. Bela is just victim to her parents’ unhappiness and estrangement. Her all characters are emotionally broken. It seems that alienation is part and parcel of their lives. It circulates into their veins constantly. The trio of trauma, exile and alienation pervades the entire novel. Epic in its canvas and intimate in its portrayal of lives undone and forget a new, ‘The Lowland’ is a deeply felt novel of family ties that entangle and fray in ways unforeseen and unrevealed, of ties ineluctably define who the people are. With all the hallmarks of Jhumpa Lahiri’s achingly poignant, exclusively empathetic story-telling, this is her most devastating work of fiction to date.

Displacement in all the cases proves painful. It always bears smell of agony and anguish. In this way, any kind of break away from a unitary body happens always painfully. In the cases of diasporic and nomadic folks, the situation usually gets grim time to time. They painfully manage the emotional pendulum of their lives across the
borders. They constantly try to negotiate with centre from the periphery, but occasional
disturbances cause emotional breakdown rising up to the level of trauma. Displacement
occurs due to some disturbances and it carries all the way the memories of things either
seen or thought at the mind’s level.

The Lowland is a melancholic tale narrated with restraint and distance. There are
books that depict through gestures, symbolism and impeccable details, the subtlety with
which people encounter life. This is one such book. It tells the story of a family
shattered and remade in history’s darkest hour. As shocking complexities, tragedies, and
revelations multiply over the years, Lahiri astutely examines the psychological nuances
of conviction, guilt, grief, marriage, and parenthood and delicately but firmly dissects the
moral conundrums inherent in violent revolution.

A variety of themes and sub-themes turn the novel thematically complex. Lahiri
explores how love can still be constant though people’s lives and thoughts become
divergent. In Udayan’s and Subhash’s case they are tied by not just blood and their love
for one another but through devotion to their parents and their shared homeland. Lahiri
also explores how doing what seems like the right and honourable thing can have mixed
results. As always she also delves into the clash of cultures and the expectations for men
versus those for women. Another constant theme of her is love and how it is expressed
and what it means to individuals and their unique way of expressing it. Silence is
important to watch for in her writing. Doing and saying nothing can be as telling as a
shout or a hug. She raises the theme of brotherhood between individuals as well as
countrymen and likeminded individuals. As others do in adulthood Udayan and Subhash
realign themselves to other people and larger causes moving beyond their childhood
alliance of two but the past continues to have an iron grip on them.
Yet, The Lowland is a timeless tale of emotions, people's beliefs, their vulnerabilities, their needs and struggles all woven together and brought to life by the simplicity of expression, a fluid pace of narrative and multi-dimensional perspectives. All in all, this ambitious book warrants a serious reading, considering the economy of detailing that has been put into the narrative. The richness of the emotional complexities involved make for a rewarding reading experience. With a sweeping, addictive plot, 'The Lowland' still peels naked the identities brother, lover, father, and mother, often with just a small, simple gesture. It challenges the politics of nationality with both pathetic desperation and revolutionary zeal. It makes the readers want and hope and despair with devastating stories of passion and indifference.

Lahiri’s sense of history and its consequences is as insightful as her grasp of the human heart. She weaves her tale with a sure hand around the threads of the two brother’s intersecting lives, moving swiftly back and forth from one continent to the other and ranging across the seven decades from Subhash’s birth in 1943 to the present day. It sounds epic in sweep, especially when combined with the laden, potent themes, the intertwining of politics and sexuality, the cauterizing of emotional wounds and grievances, and the repetition of places and personalities. Although it plays with secrets and emotional turning points, it seems to possess no singular trajectory and no dominant idea beyond that of generational drift.

The novel is both personal and historical, but Udayan’s sudden brutal death in action, 'The Lowland' becomes another kind of novel altogether. Fearing the long future of joyless widowhood that now stretches before Udayan’s pregnant wife, Gauri, he takes the drastic step of substituting himself for his dead brother. Gauri is pregnant, though and in order to save her from an unhappy life in the home of her disapproving inlaws.
Subhash marries her and brings back to Rhode Island. He lives there with his young wife, Gauri.

Following the tradition, Gauri marries Subhash, the brother of her dead husband Udayan, at the brother’s request and Gauri knows from the beginning that she will never love her new spouse, Subhash. Though Subhash probably knows that but hopes he and Gauri might be able to build a marital life. Also in India, a widowed daughter in law must live with the parents of the late husband. Gauri’s in laws never cared for her. So Subhash’s marriage often saves Gauri from a life of domestic persecution and there Gauri gives birth to Udayan’s child a girl named Bela. But Gauri’s indifference as a mother is at the heart of the story.

It begins during her pregnancy, with her sitting in on philosophy classes at the university where her husband is studying. In this circumstances, Gauri soon discovers a desire for freedom and independence consuming her, ravaging her mind and body. After her daughter, Bela, is born, philosophy begins to absorb her entirely and she officially signs up for classes. When Bela is a little older, she begins to leave her daughter alone for increasing stretches of time. Subhash whom Bela does not know is not her biological father is the family’s nurture. He does not let himself get trapped by the past, as she does and instead learns to adjust the present what happens to a family in which there is a reversal of traditional gender roles, with an ambivalent mother and a flexible gentle father is a crucial part of what Lahiri is exploring in the book.

A woman who loves her family, ready to sacrifice her future for the sake of other, believe in togetherness and being there for one another through good and bad, but in the novel Gauri appears starkly egoistical. She becomes a heartless woman, seems to care
little or not at all for those closest to her. Lahiri draws a woman who makes a life on her own, alone, full aware of the intense pain her desire for independence causes those in her immediate entourage. The experience she has gained in America that makes her either a fully Indian woman or her independence instead of doing her duty and following tradition like by Indian mothers in our country. The family saga in this country makes an Indian woman to find happiness for her family, but in case of Gauri, though she was innocent, but by staying in America, she finds independence and neglects her daughter to forget her husband’s death, free herself comfortably.

Lahiri has given the reader this woman, unpredictable, breaks a character of a good Indian, a mother or a daughter-in-law. But Gauri’s daring, her willingness to trample on the life that tradition and custom demand. Without fear, she strives out to live on her own terms—a truly American notion. America liberates Gauri into intellectual confidence and academic fame, yet it renders her incapable of parental feeling towards her daughter; meanwhile Subhash grows as close as any biological father to Bela, even while the threat of the inevitable revelation hangs over many years. Belonging and alienation, place and displacement--; these have long been Lahiri’s abiding fictional concerns, but in 'The Lowland', they are more alive than before, in the very shape of her sentences. 'The Lowland' is a novel partly about personal ambition and how that squares with motherhood. It is not simply a novel about immigrants. It is a novel about finding the right place and the right people--- and about whether there are such things at all or if life is a matter of adjusting to circumstance.