

THE NOTION OF 'NATION' IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S THE LOWLAND

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Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* has truly emerged as one of the contemporary era's finest literary works. The narrative is deeply reflective of themes like nationhood, displacement, fractured belonging, where the idea of the nation is not fixed or heroic but intimate, contested and somewhat emotionally charged. Jhumpa Lahiri situates the novel at the intersection of postcolonial India and immigrant America, using the Naxalite movement and the Bengali diaspora to question how national ideals shape, burden, and unsettle individual lives. The nation emerges not merely as a political entity but as a lived experience that enters homes, relationships, and memories, leaving lasting marks on personal identity. Through the contrasting lives of the two brothers, Udayan and Subhash, the novel presents the nation as both a call to collective responsibility and a force of irreversible loss. Revolutionary nationalism, driven by ideals of justice and equality, collides with quieter forms of allegiance rooted in family, survival, and ethical care. As the narrative moves across generations and geographies, Lahiri reveals how migration transforms national attachment into a space of longing, ambivalence, and reinvention. The immigrant experience in America further complicates the notion of the nation, replacing singular loyalties with hybrid identities shaped by exile, adaptation and cultural negotiation. Drawing upon postcolonial and diasporic theory, this study argues that *The Lowland* reimagines the nation as an unstable and evolving construct, one that is continuously rewritten through memory, trauma, and intergenerational conflict. Lahiri's novel ultimately suggests that the nation is not only imagined collectively but endured privately, where its promises and failures are carried within ordinary lives struggling to belong across borders.

Keywords - Novel, fiction, English literature, postcolonialism, displacement, nation, nationalism, diaspora theory, Indian culture.

INTRODUCTION

Historical upheavals and global migration have played a decisive role in shaping new Indian identities, particularly within the context of settlement in the United States. From a postcolonial perspective, diaspora is not merely a movement across borders but a prolonged cultural process involving confrontation, adaptation, negotiation, and transformation. Indian immigrants and their descendants are required to engage with unfamiliar social values while carrying the cultural memory of their homeland. This encounter gives rise to hybrid identities that emerge through acculturation, conflict resolution, and the gradual blending of Indian and American cultural practices. Within this framework, the presence of a large Indian diaspora in the United States becomes a central social reality. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* places cultural hybridity at the heart of its narrative, using the experiences of immigrant families to examine how identity evolves across generations. The novel raises important questions about the time and emotional effort required for Indian descendants to adjust to a new land, overcome cultural differences, and participate fully in the host society. These concerns are not addressed through simple answers but through the complex lives of characters shaped by history, memory, and generational change.

The Notion of 'Nation'

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* offers a complex and layered exploration of the idea of the nation, not as a fixed or unified entity, but as a deeply contested, emotionally charged, and often fragmented concept. The novel situates the notion of the nation at the intersection of political ideology, family loyalty, historical violence, and diasporic displacement. Through the intertwined lives of two brothers, Udayan and Subhash Mitra, Lahiri examines how the nation is imagined, lived, resisted, abandoned, and reinterpreted across generations and geographical spaces. The narrative demonstrates that the nation is not merely a political boundary or a legal structure but a lived experience shaped by memory, sacrifice, and loss. At the core of the novel lies the Naxalite movement in Bengal, which serves as a powerful representation of nationalist discontent and revolutionary politics. For Udayan, the nation is an unfinished project. Independence has not delivered justice, equality, or dignity to the marginalized sections of society. His involvement in the Naxalite movement reflects a radical reimagining of the nation, rooted in Marxist ideology and inspired by global revolutionary currents. Udayan believes that the nation must be reshaped through violent resistance if necessary, as the postcolonial state has merely replaced colonial rulers with a new elite class. His participation in underground activities, bomb-making, and targeted assassinations reveals how nationalist idealism can transform into militant extremism. In this sense, Lahiri portrays the nation as an abstract ideal that demands absolute loyalty, even at the cost of personal morality and familial bonds.

In contrast, Subhash represents a more cautious and pragmatic engagement with the idea of the nation. While he shares a deep emotional attachment to India, his understanding of national responsibility is shaped by duty, stability, and gradual progress rather than revolution. Subhash's decision to pursue higher education in the United States reflects a different form of nationalism, one that values personal development and intellectual contribution over direct political action. His belief that service to the nation can take multiple forms aligns with a liberal nationalist perspective, where nationhood is not defined solely by sacrifice or rebellion. The ideological conflict between the two brothers thus mirrors broader debates within postcolonial theory about the legitimacy of violence in nation-building and the ethical limits of revolutionary nationalism. Lahiri further complicates the notion of the nation by embedding it within the domestic space of the Mitra family. The parents, who belong to an earlier generation shaped by the freedom struggle and the immediate aftermath of independence, view the nation as a completed achievement. For them, India is already sovereign, and further upheaval appears unnecessary and destructive. Their faith in state institutions and bureaucratic order reflects what political theorists describe as the normalization of nationalism, where the nation becomes an unquestioned backdrop to everyday life. Udayan's rebellion, therefore, is not only against the state but also against a generational understanding of what the nation represents.

The brutal execution of Udayan by the police in the lowland behind his family home marks a turning point in the novel's representation of the nation. The state's violence exposes the coercive power underlying nationalist authority. The lowland itself becomes a symbolic space where personal memory and national history collide. It is both a domestic landscape and a site of political execution, suggesting that the nation intrudes violently into private life. Lahiri does not romanticize revolutionary nationalism, but neither does she fully endorse the state's response. Instead, she presents the nation as an entity that produces victims on all sides, leaving behind unresolved grief and moral ambiguity. The theme of the nation is further expanded through diasporic experience, particularly through Subhash's life in the United States. Migration introduces a sense of distance that reshapes national identity. In America, India becomes an emotional and symbolic presence rather than a lived political reality. Subhash carries the nation within him through memory, language, and familial obligation, even as he adapts to a different cultural and social order. This reflects the idea, articulated in diaspora theory, that the nation persists beyond territorial boundaries as an imagined community sustained through affect and remembrance. However, Lahiri also shows that distance weakens ideological certainty. From abroad, the revolutionary fervor that once consumed Udayan appears both tragic and futile.

Gauri's character provides a particularly unsettling perspective on the nation. Initially connected to nationalist politics through her marriage to Udayan, she gradually withdraws from both national and familial identities. Her rejection of motherhood, marriage, and community norms can be read as a refusal of all imposed structures, including the nation itself. In postcolonial feminist terms, Gauri's trajectory exposes how nationalist movements often marginalize women by assigning them symbolic roles as bearers of tradition rather than as autonomous subjects. Her eventual immersion in academic life and philosophical abstraction suggests a retreat into intellectual cosmopolitanism, where national belonging loses its emotional hold. Lahiri thus presents the nation as a gendered construct that demands different sacrifices from men and women. The next generation, represented by Bela, embodies a transformed notion of the nation. Raised in the United States yet deeply influenced by the legacy of her biological father, Bela rejects both Indian nationalism and American consumerist culture. Her choice of a nomadic, environmentally conscious lifestyle reflects a post-national ethical framework that prioritizes global responsibility over national allegiance. Bela's life suggests that the idea of the nation may be losing its centrality for later generations, replaced by transnational concerns and individual moral commitments. Yet, traces of Udayan's idealism persist in her desire to work for the marginalized, indicating that nationalist values can be inherited in unexpected and indirect ways.

As a writer of Bengali origin who belongs to the second generation of immigrants, Lahiri brings an informed and balanced perspective to diasporic experience. Her fiction avoids romanticizing either the homeland or the host country. Instead, it presents ordinary Bengali characters whose lives reflect common struggles within immigrant communities. Through these characters, Lahiri highlights the emotional distance, hesitation, and uncertainty that mark the lives of first-generation immigrants. Their attachment to tradition, language, and cultural norms often makes assimilation a slow and painful process. Letting go of familiar practices can feel like a loss of self, leading many to remain socially and emotionally distant from the larger population. For these first-generation immigrants, returning to the homeland may appear desirable, though it is not always possible or necessary for resolving diasporic tension. What truly enables adaptation is not physical return but the development of meaningful relationships in the host country. Friendship, love, and shared experiences play a crucial role in easing cultural conflict and fostering a sense of belonging. Over time, these interactions contribute to the formation of a hybrid identity that allows immigrants to function within the host society without entirely abandoning their cultural origins. The second generation experiences migration differently. Having grown up within the host culture, they tend to adapt more easily to its social norms and values. Cultural assimilation often comes naturally to them, as their sense of identity is shaped as much by the host society as by inherited traditions. In *The Lowland*, this is reflected in characters who feel comfortable identifying as American while maintaining only a loose connection to their ancestral past. For them, cultural hybridity is not a struggle but a normal condition of life. Despite this apparent ease, tension frequently arises between the first and second generations. Parents who remain rooted in traditional values often struggle to understand the choices and attitudes of their children, who prioritize individual freedom and social integration.

This generational conflict becomes a defining feature of diasporic life, revealing differing ideas about loyalty, belonging, and cultural responsibility. Lahiri presents this disagreement not as a moral failure on either side but as an inevitable outcome of living between cultures. Reconciliation within immigrant families often emerges through later generations. Those who immigrate as children or are raised by parents who themselves arrived young occupy a unique position. They are more capable of balancing cultural inheritance with social adaptation, acting as mediators between tradition and change. In *The Lowland*, this role is associated with the third generation, whose lived experience allows for greater emotional flexibility and understanding. Through them, family bonds can be repaired and cultural conflict softened. By portraying the lives of successive generations in the new land, Lahiri illustrates how assimilation is neither immediate nor uniform. Each generation faces distinct challenges shaped by historical context, emotional memory, and social environment. Cultural hybridity emerges not as a fixed identity but as a gradual and evolving process. *The Lowland* ultimately reveals that belonging in a postcolonial, diasporic world is achieved through time, relationships, and the willingness to adapt, rather than through the complete rejection or preservation of any single culture.

Negotiating Identity and Belonging in the Indian Diaspora

The experience of migration has played a crucial role in shaping new Indian identities, particularly within the context of settlement in the United States. Immigration often involves more than physical movement; it initiates a prolonged cultural process marked by adaptation, resistance, negotiation, and transformation. Indian migrants encounter unfamiliar social norms, racial dynamics, and cultural expectations, which compel them to reassess inherited traditions while engaging with the values of the host society. This condition produces a complex form of cultural struggle in which identity is neither entirely preserved nor completely abandoned but continuously reshaped through acculturation, conflict resolution, assimilation, and cultural blending. Within this broader diasporic context, contemporary Indian English literature has emerged as a powerful medium for exploring questions of belonging and cultural hybridity. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* stands as a significant example of this literary engagement. The narrative foregrounds the emotional and psychological tensions experienced by Indian immigrants and their descendants as they negotiate life between inherited cultural memories and the demands of American social life. Rather than presenting identity as stable or singular, the novel highlights hybridity as an ongoing condition, shaped by displacement, generational conflict, and personal loss. Cultural identity in such texts appears as layered and fluid, formed at the intersection of homeland traditions and host-country influences.

The challenges faced by Indian immigrant communities raise important questions about the duration and nature of cultural adjustment. Generations born or raised in the host country often experience a different relationship to culture than their immigrant parents. While the older generation may attempt to preserve language, customs, and social values, younger members frequently adopt the cultural practices of the society in which they grow up. This generational gap can lead to tension but also creates new cultural forms that combine elements from both worlds. The process of overcoming cultural difference is therefore not linear or uniform; it unfolds gradually across time and varies according to social class, education, community networks, and personal experience. India's long history of migration has significantly influenced the development of Asian diasporic writing. Indian communities abroad have formed under different historical conditions, which have shaped the nature of their cultural expression. Early movements of South Asians were largely connected to colonial labor systems, where migrants were sent to other parts of the empire under conditions of economic necessity and political control. Later migrations followed the emergence of India as an independent nation, when mobility became more closely tied to education, professional opportunities, and global economic structures. These differing migration patterns have produced diverse diasporic identities, ranging from communities marked by nostalgia and loss to those defined by ambition, mobility, and transnational belonging.

The period following the end of colonial rule brought profound changes to national and cultural self-understanding across many formerly colonized regions. Independence offered a renewed sense of political and cultural identity, yet it also exposed societies to new forms of global influence. For many postcolonial nations, the process of nation-building occurred alongside continued engagement with Western political, cultural, and economic models. As a result, identities formed during this period often carried elements that felt unfamiliar or disconnected from indigenous traditions. This condition of hybridity became especially visible among migrant populations, who embodied the tensions between national heritage and global modernity. In diasporic contexts, hybrid identity does not merely signify cultural confusion; it also represents creativity and resilience. Indian immigrants and their descendants develop new ways of belonging that challenge rigid ideas of nationality and culture. Literature such as Lahiri's reflects this reality by portraying characters who live in between worlds, neither fully anchored in the past nor entirely absorbed into the present. These narratives suggest that cultural hybridity is not a temporary phase to be resolved but a defining feature of diasporic life. Through such representations, Indian diasporic writing contributes to a broader understanding of identity as dynamic, negotiated, and deeply shaped by historical movement and cultural exchange.

Diasporic Conflict and Hybrid Identity in *The Lowland*

Diaspora emerges from the tension between different cultural worlds, where individuals are shaped by more than one tradition and are compelled to negotiate multiple identities at once. For immigrants, this condition often results in emotional conflict, as complete assimilation into the host society remains difficult and, at times, unattainable.

The inability to be fully accepted as members of the dominant culture deepens feelings of alienation and marginality. Jhumpa Lahiri addresses this delayed and often painful process of integration with remarkable sensitivity, especially in her portrayal of first-generation immigrants who struggle to find a sense of belonging in American society. Her narratives focus on the everyday challenges her characters face as they attempt to adjust to unfamiliar social norms while remaining emotionally attached to their cultural roots. A persistent feature of immigrant life in Lahiri's fiction is nostalgia. Many characters resist abandoning their inherited traditions, languages, and values, as these elements offer emotional stability in an otherwise uncertain environment. To ease their sense of displacement, immigrants often seek out others who share similar backgrounds. This leads to the formation of ethnic communities and cultural organizations that recreate fragments of the homeland within the host country. Such spaces function as sites of comfort and cultural continuity, yet they can also limit deeper integration into the larger society. In this sense, diaspora becomes both a shelter and a boundary.

The *Lowland* can be understood as a post-emigrant novel because it highlights generational conflict within immigrant families who appear, on the surface, to have successfully settled abroad. Beneath this apparent adjustment lies a deep tension between parents who remain culturally rooted in the homeland and children who grow up influenced by the values of the host society. The search for identity is therefore central to the novel, reflecting a broader concern in Indian American literature. Lahiri does not present identity as fixed or inherited but as something shaped by experience, loss, memory, and adaptation. Identity in the diasporic context is always in motion, continuously shaped by personal struggles and social circumstances. It is not imposed from the outside but formed through lived experience. In *The Lowland*, identity is repeatedly reconstructed as characters attempt to align themselves with the expectations of the host culture while carrying the emotional weight of their past. This ongoing process reflects the instability and openness that define diasporic subjectivity. Lahiri frequently writes about Bengali intellectuals who leave India for academic, professional, or personal reasons. Subhash represents this figure clearly. His journey to the United States is motivated by a desire for education, professional growth, and economic security. At the same time, as the elder son, he remains deeply connected to his family's traditions and responsibilities. His sense of duty toward his parents and brother reflects a strong emotional bond with his homeland. Although he initially feels out of place in Rhode Island, he gradually learns to live independently, maintaining a careful distance that allows him to exist between cultures. His continued attachment to India, sustained through memory and family ties, reveals the enduring pull of the ancestral home even after long years abroad.

Subhash's efforts to adapt include finding familiar elements in the new landscape. The lowlands near the American coast remind him of the wetlands of Calcutta, allowing him to emotionally bridge the distance between past and present. His return to India after many years, accompanied by Bela, underscores the persistence of familial obligation. In contrast, Gauri refuses to revisit India, as it is tied to memories of trauma and confinement. Her decision to remain in the United States reflects her desire to sever connections with a painful past and to rebuild her life through intellectual independence. Gauri's experience represents a different mode of assimilation. Unlike Subhash, whose identity remains anchored in transnational ties, she gradually aligns herself more closely with the culture of the host country. While retaining traces of her origin, she adopts American academic and social norms with greater ease. Her marriage to Subhash offers her stability and a means of escape from an oppressive family environment, yet it does not provide emotional fulfillment. Her isolation within the Mitra household and her earlier suffering as a young widow shape her restless pursuit of self-definition. Lahiri portrays Gauri's identity formation as fragmented and deeply conflicted. Her relocation to the United States becomes a form of refuge, offering physical distance from her traumatic history. Yet memories of her former life continue to haunt her, even as she builds a new academic identity. Her decision to distance herself from motherhood in favor of intellectual ambition reflects the extent of her inner dislocation. Education and philosophy become her means of survival, providing structure and meaning where emotional bonds have failed.

Hybridity, a central concept in postcolonial literature, plays a significant role in this narrative. It represents a space between cultures, neither fully rejecting nor fully embracing either the homeland or the host society. Gauri's struggle illustrates this condition clearly. Her nostalgia initially prevents her from fully integrating into both her marriage and American life. India, for her, is not a nation or tradition but a deeply personal memory shaped by her relationship with Udayan and the political violence surrounding him. Her attempt to erase this past drives her academic ambition and her desire for intellectual recognition. As Gauri advances professionally, she adopts new cultural practices and distances herself from inherited customs. Her growing presence in academic circles symbolizes her movement from the margins toward the center of the host culture. Yet this transformation comes at the cost of emotional isolation. By severing ties with her family, she gains autonomy but loses intimacy. Her eventual solitude reflects the unresolved tension between personal freedom and emotional responsibility that defines her diasporic experience. In contrast, Bela represents a more visible form of integration associated with second-generation immigrants. Unlike her mother, she shows little concern for ancestral history and navigates life within a culturally mixed environment. Her identity is shaped by interaction rather than inheritance, reflecting the reality of growing up in a multicultural society. Bela's rejection of traditional expectations highlights the generational shift that occurs within immigrant families, where cultural continuity weakens over time. Although *The Lowland* is narrated through multiple perspectives, its dominant framework remains postcolonial. The novel explores how histories of colonialism, political violence, migration, and cultural displacement intersect within personal lives. Lahiri presents diaspora not as a resolved condition but as an ongoing negotiation, where identity is continuously reshaped by memory, loss, and the pressures of belonging in a globalized world.

The Diasporic Self in a Postcolonial World

Identity has become a central concern in contemporary cultural studies, especially in discussions related to ethnicity, class, gender, race, sexuality, and subcultural belonging. The question of identity arises most sharply when ideas once assumed to be stable and coherent are disrupted by uncertainty and change. Rather than being fixed or permanent, identity is now understood as fluid and constantly evolving. It is shaped over time through experience, social interaction, and cultural negotiation. Identity is closely tied to desire, particularly the desire for recognition, belonging, continuity, and protection across time and space. These desires emerge not from free choice but from lived circumstances, as individuals are shaped by social and cultural conditions beyond their control. Identity does not exist as an essential or universal truth waiting to be discovered. Instead, it is constructed through cultural representation and social meaning. It is made rather than found. In moments of crisis, identity is often claimed as a form of defense against loss, erasure, or displacement. This struggle for identity becomes especially intense in diasporic contexts, where individuals must continually redefine themselves in relation to unfamiliar environments. For migrants, identity is deeply tied to the idea of the self, which is formed through memory, culture, and lived experience rather than isolation.

The search for selfhood is inseparable from culture. Cultural identity involves reflection on personal subjectivity as well as the values, traditions, and meanings shared within a community. The idea of the self was once understood as autonomous and self-contained, independent of external influence. However, contemporary thought challenges this view by emphasizing that the self is always shaped through interaction. The existence of the self necessarily implies the presence of the other. Identity gains meaning through difference, dialogue, and recognition. The self becomes understandable only in relation to what it is not. In this sense, otherness does not threaten identity but strengthens it. Cultural identity cannot be understood solely within national boundaries because cultures are never isolated or pure. Difference is a fundamental reality of cultural life. For Indian immigrants in the United States, identity often develops through an internal dialogue between inherited traditions and the cultural expectations of American society. This tension becomes particularly visible within immigrant households, where children raised in the host country experience a daily negotiation between two cultural worlds. The home becomes a site where Indian customs coexist with American social practices, creating a space of cultural overlap and confusion.

For second-generation immigrants, identity is often defined by this in-between position. Their understanding of home is shaped by the merging of two cultures, both physically and emotionally. Their relationship to their parents' homeland can resemble that of temporary visitors rather than natives. At the same time, American culture itself is deeply multicultural, which further complicates the process of identification. The conflict between cultural influences does not occur only in society but within the individual, as different aspects of identity compete for recognition. Coming to terms with this complex identity takes time and, in some cases, remains unresolved. Cultural identity is inseparable from national and ethnic belonging. Nations function not only as political entities but also as cultural communities that provide a sense of continuity and shared meaning. National culture offers emotional grounding and historical depth, making it a powerful force in identity formation. However, cultural identity cannot be reduced to shared origins or fixed traditions. While one approach views identity as rooted in common history and ancestry, this essentialist understanding has been increasingly challenged. Identity is better understood as a process, shaped by history, power, and representation.

Cultural identity involves both continuity and change. It is defined not only by shared similarities but also by important differences that reveal how people and communities have transformed over time. Identity belongs as much to the future as it does to the past. It carries historical memory but remains open to reinterpretation and renewal. This understanding is particularly relevant to immigrant experiences, where cultural transformation becomes unavoidable. Migration places individuals within global networks of movement, communication, and power that reshape how they relate to both home and host societies. Cultural transformation often occurs in an in-between space where interaction between cultures produces new forms of identity. This space allows negotiation rather than domination, enabling different cultural meanings to coexist and influence one another. Instead of preserving rigid boundaries, this process creates hybrid identities that challenge ideas of purity and fixity. Hybridity represents a space of possibility, where new cultural expressions emerge through dialogue and exchange. The concept of hybridity has evolved significantly in postcolonial thought. Once associated with impurity or loss, it is now understood as a creative and dynamic process. Hybridity does not imply confusion or disorder but reflects the reality of cross-cultural interaction. It contests rigid divisions and allows for fluid identities that resist hierarchy. Rather than tracing identity back to pure origins, hybridity emphasizes the productive space where new meanings are formed.

In the contemporary world, increased mobility and technological connectivity have intensified cultural exchange. This has expanded the relevance of hybrid spaces beyond colonial contexts to include modern multicultural societies. Such spaces offer opportunities to challenge existing inequalities and reimagine social belonging. Contemporary immigrant writers often use literature to create these alternative spaces, allowing their characters to negotiate identity and belonging within new cultural landscapes. Jhumpa Lahiri's work exemplifies this process by linking personal lives to broader historical and political realities. By returning to postcolonial India, she highlights the social conditions that shaped a generation of young intellectuals who believed radical change required extreme sacrifice. Poverty, inequality, and injustice pushed them toward revolutionary ideals, often with tragic consequences. Lahiri's narrative stretches across decades and continents, moving from India to the United

States, and follows characters bound by family ties yet divided by choices and beliefs. The relationship between the two brothers at the center of the story illustrates the complexity of identity formation. Though physically similar, they embody opposing temperaments and values. Their shared childhood memories anchor one brother emotionally even after migration, while the other's political commitment leads to irreversible loss. The memory of early life, shaped by place and family, continues to influence identity long after physical separation. Through this intergenerational and transnational narrative, Lahiri demonstrates how identity is shaped by history, culture, loss, and movement. Identity emerges not as a stable essence but as a continuous negotiation between past and present, self and other, home and exile. In doing so, her work reflects the broader postcolonial understanding of identity as fluid, hybrid, and deeply rooted in cultural transformation.

Revolution and Exile in The Lowland

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* presents a layered narrative that moves between political upheaval in India and personal dislocation in the United States, showing how large historical forces shape intimate human lives. The novel situates its story against the backdrop of the Naxalbari uprising, an event that enters public consciousness through news and radio reports and gradually transforms from a distant name into a symbol of unrest and resistance. Naxalbari, a remote cluster of villages near the Himalayan foothills, becomes the site where long-standing exploitation of tribal peasants erupts into open revolt. These villagers, bound for generations to an unequal feudal system, face displacement, debt, and hunger, conditions that eventually push them toward militant protest. The uprising reflects deep structural inequalities in post-independence India, revealing how freedom from colonial rule did not automatically lead to social justice for the rural poor. The rebellion gains momentum through the involvement of urban intellectuals and political activists, especially communists from Bengal who frame the peasants' struggle within a larger revolutionary ideology. Demonstrations in Calcutta express solidarity, while clashes with state forces expose the violent limits of dissent. Although the movement is quickly suppressed by police action, its symbolic power lingers. For Udayan, one of the novel's central figures, Naxalbari represents moral awakening and political purpose. He is deeply disturbed by the way the state criminalizes the oppressed and becomes increasingly convinced that radical action is necessary to correct systemic injustice. His transformation from an idealistic youth into an underground militant illustrates how revolutionary movements can absorb personal anger, ethical concern, and youthful idealism into violent struggle.

The novel contrasts Udayan's revolutionary zeal with the cautious temperament of his brother Subhash. While Udayan believes that armed resistance can reshape society, Subhash doubts the effectiveness of primitive weapons against a modern state and remains skeptical of ideological extremism. This difference creates a deep rift between the brothers, reflecting a broader generational and ideological conflict within Indian society. Their father, representing a generation that witnessed independence, believes that nation-building has already been achieved and sees no need for further turmoil. Udayan's defiance of this belief highlights the gap between the promises of independence and the lived realities of inequality and exclusion. As Udayan commits himself fully to the Naxalite cause, Subhash chooses a different path by leaving for the United States to pursue higher education. This decision marks not only a geographical separation but also a philosophical one. Subhash's migration reflects a quieter response to national crisis, seeking personal growth and stability rather than collective upheaval. His arrival in America exposes him to a social world sharply different from his upbringing in Bengal. The pace of life, interpersonal relations, and attitudes toward intimacy challenge his inherited values. Over time, this exposure alters his sense of self, making him critical of both Indian traditions and American individualism. He inhabits an in-between cultural space, neither fully rooted in his homeland nor completely at ease in the host society.

Subhash's emotional involvement with an American woman reveals the complexities of cross-cultural relationships. While such intimacy is normalized in the American context, it clashes with the emotional and moral expectations shaped by his Indian background. The relationship ultimately ends, leaving Subhash emotionally unsettled and more aware of the limits of cultural translation. This experience underscores the novel's exploration of diaspora as a condition of partial belonging, where freedom often comes at the cost of emotional dislocation. Meanwhile, in India, Udayan's increasing militancy leads to devastating consequences. His involvement in violent acts and covert operations brings tragedy not only upon himself but also upon those around him. His execution by the police, carried out brutally near his family home, becomes the defining trauma of the novel. It exposes the harsh reality of political violence and the ease with which revolutionary ideals can be extinguished by state power. The lowland itself, once a childhood refuge for the brothers, is transformed into a site of death and memory, symbolizing the irreversible loss of innocence. After Udayan's death, Subhash returns to Bengal and encounters Gauri, Udayan's widow, whose life has been reduced to social isolation and ritualized mourning. Her condition reflects the rigid expectations imposed on widows in traditional Indian society, expectations that deny them individuality and future possibility. Moved by responsibility, compassion, and a sense of moral duty, Subhash marries Gauri and takes her with him to America, even though she is pregnant with his brother's child. This decision represents a radical break from convention and signals how migration has reshaped Subhash's ethical framework. His action is neither romantic nor self-serving but rooted in care and obligation.

In America, Gauri's life takes an unexpected turn. Freed from the oppressive norms of widowhood, she gains access to education and intellectual independence. However, this freedom comes with emotional detachment. She remains distant from her daughter and from Subhash, retreating into academic life. Gauri's character emerges as complex and unsettling, shaped by unresolved grief, suppressed desire, and a relentless need for autonomy. Her withdrawal challenges idealized notions of motherhood and exposes the uneven emotional labor within families

shaped by trauma and migration. Subhash, in contrast, assumes the role of a devoted caregiver, raising the child with patience and affection. His life is defined by compromise and quiet endurance, standing in sharp contrast to Udayan's radical intensity and Gauri's emotional withdrawal. Over time, the marriage between Subhash and Gauri collapses, revealing the limits of relationships built on sacrifice rather than mutual emotional engagement. Gauri's eventual disappearance deepens the sense of abandonment felt by her daughter, who grows up resentful and critical of her mother's choices. The novel ultimately shifts its focus to the long-term consequences of these fractured relationships. The daughter inherits traces of Udayan's rebellious spirit, choosing a life marked by mobility and social concern rather than stability. In this way, the ideals that drove Udayan's political commitment resurface in a quieter, less violent form. Lahiri suggests that resistance and empathy can survive across generations, even when their original contexts are lost. The *Lowland* presents political movements not as abstract ideologies but as forces that penetrate domestic life, shaping identities, relationships, and moral choices. The Naxalite movement serves as a catalyst rather than the central subject, triggering events that ripple across continents and decades. The novel portrays characters who are uprooted from cultural certainties and forced to navigate new worlds without firm anchors. Their vulnerability stems from this distance from roots, making them susceptible to loss, misunderstanding, and regret. Through restrained prose and emotional depth, Lahiri captures the lingering emptiness left by revolution, migration, and broken bonds, revealing how personal lives are often the silent casualties of historical change.

CONCLUSION

It can very well be said that Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* presents itself as a profound exploration of nation, identity, and belonging within the intertwined contexts of postcolonial history and diaspora. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel demonstrates that the nation is not a stable or unified concept but a shifting and contested idea shaped by political ideology, historical trauma, generational memory, and personal choice. By situating the narrative against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement and extending it into the diasporic spaces of the United States, Lahiri reveals how national consciousness is lived differently by those who remain within the homeland and those who depart from it. Through the contrasting figures of Udayan and Subhash, the novel exposes two divergent responses to the post-independence Indian nation. Udayan's revolutionary zeal reflects a deep disillusionment with the promises of freedom and equality, while Subhash's quieter, reformist approach suggests an alternative mode of national responsibility rooted in stability, education, and ethical care. The violent suppression of the Naxalite movement and Udayan's death underscore the nation's coercive power and its capacity to intrude into the most intimate spaces of family and memory. At the same time, the novel resists simplistic judgments by showing how both revolutionary nationalism and state authority generate loss and moral uncertainty.

The diasporic dimension of the narrative further complicates the notion of the nation by revealing how distance transforms national identity into an emotional and symbolic inheritance rather than an immediate political reality. Characters such as Subhash and Gauri illustrate how migration can weaken ideological attachment while intensifying personal reflection on belonging, responsibility, and freedom. The generational shift represented by Bela points toward an emerging post-national sensibility, in which ethical commitment and global consciousness begin to replace traditional forms of national loyalty. Yet, the persistence of Udayan's ideals in Bela's life suggests that the nation continues to exert influence, even when it is no longer openly acknowledged. So, *The Lowland* presents the nation as an incomplete and often inadequate framework for understanding human experience. Lahiri's narrative shows that while the nation powerfully shapes lives, it cannot fully account for individual suffering, moral choice, or emotional loss. The novel thus moves beyond political history to offer a deeply human meditation on how people negotiate the burdens of inherited ideologies and fractured identities. In doing so, *The Lowland* affirms that belonging is not secured solely through national affiliation but is continually reconstructed through memory, relationships, and ethical action across time and place.

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