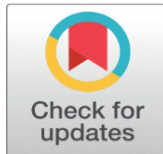
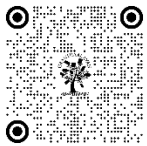


CONTOURS OF CHANGE: FEMALE (DIS) EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-REINVENTION IN THE LOWLAND

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ABSTRACT

Contours of Change follow the experience of Gauri, Jhumpa Lahiri's first-generation female heroine, through migration and cultural transition. Set in the politically heated milieu of 1960s Kolkata, the story tracks Gauri's development as she navigates the unsettling repercussions of her move from India to the United States. Gauri defies traditional gender stereotypes in her quest of intellectual independence and personal autonomy, making bold decisions that both empower and alienate her.

This study digs into the complex dynamics of female empowerment, (dis)empowerment, and self-reinvention in the context of migration, examining transcultural transformations and tensions between individual identity and cultural memory. Gauri's journey emphasizes the contrasts inherent in her change, providing a lens through which we may better grasp the broader themes of identity and agency in the diasporic experience.

Keywords: Migration, Gender Identity, Self-Reinvention, Female Empowerment, Transcultural Shifts, Jhumpa Lahiri

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of migration literature offers a useful framework for examining the intricate relationships between gender, identity, and self-reinvention, especially when viewed through the prism of cultural studies. Gauri, a first-generation female protagonist whose life spans the tumultuous sociopolitical landscapes of Kolkata and the US, is poignantly portrayed in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*.

From colonial remnants in post-independence India to the intellectual liberty she seeks in the West, this research examines how Gauri's traversal of transcultural spaces shapes her cultural and personal change. Migration, identity negotiation, and female empowerment are all deftly woven throughout the book, especially as Gauri deals with the generational legacy of gender roles, familial responsibilities, and social expectations.

The brothers Subhash and Udayan are born in Kolkata in the late 1940s, and the story takes place there as they grow up in a city that was greatly impacted by the fallout from India's freedom. The brothers' different trajectories as the narrative moves into the late 1960s capture the conflicts of postcolonial identity. While Udayan becomes fully involved in the Naxalbari movement, an intellectual revolt against feudalism and the persecution of peasants, Subhash, the scholar, travels to the United States to earn a Ph.D. (Mustafi 2012: 45). Udayan is executed as a result of the state's violent suppression of this political uprising, which was sparked by West Bengal's unfair land ownership and taxation laws (Gupta 2015: 62).

Udayan marries Gauri against the wishes of her family, leaving her to live in a society tainted by both political violence and domestic strife. After returning to Kolkata after hearing of his brother's passing, Subhash offers Gauri a chance at a fresh start in America after learning of her pregnancy.

Gauri's trip to the US, however, represents a difficult balancing act between cultural belonging and identity. Gauri gives birth to Bela, a daughter, upon arrival, but her relationship with Subhash breaks down. Gauri further distances herself from her family and her history by pursuing an academic career rather than becoming a mother, finally landing a teaching job in California. This physical and symbolic act of leaving represents her willful rejection of the conventional roles of mother and wife in favor of self-reinvention. Through her migration across continents and cultural domains, Gauri reinterpreted the bounds of gender and identity, demonstrating a profound engagement with the possibility of transcultural transformation.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework that connects gendered experiences of migration with transcultural processes serves as the foundation for the examination of Gauri's character. In order to understand how migration reconfigures female subjectivity, this study will look at Gauri's rejection of traditional gender standards and her embracing of intellectual liberty. Drawing on cultural studies, it examines the connection between identity alteration and cultural displacement, with literary texts serving as both vehicles for personal reinvention and archives of cultural memory (Ganser 2009: 20). The Lowland provides insightful information about the current cultural changes that go against strict gender norms, even though it cannot be entirely typical of the experiences of all South Asian migrant women. This study intends to illustrate the connections between migration, gender, and self-reinvention by examining Gauri's development, highlighting the ways in which migration both empowers and disempowers people.

Furthermore, Gauri's journey encourages a more thorough analysis of the intersectionality of her identity, which is characterized by her nuanced gender, political past, and family relationships. A foundation for comprehending how Gauri's rejection of conventional roles—particularly her preference for intellectual pursuits over motherhood—becomes an act of both transgression and self-liberation is offered by theoretical viewpoints on transcultural shift and nomadic identities. This study aims to examine Lahiri's work closely in order to examine the narrative as a means of comprehending changing ideas about female empowerment in a globalized environment. The research is in line with sociological views that emphasize individual experiences within the larger framework of cultural and gender development by using a biographical lens (White 1995: 10, 14).

Transcultural outlooks on cultures

Given its connection to current globalization and migration events, "transculturality" has long been seen as a crucial theoretical concept for the study of migrant literature. In an era of shifting boundaries and quick advancements in communication, transportation, and technology, the transcultural approach provides a sufficient knowledge of the necessity for individuals to navigate several cultural models. Crossing temporal and physical barriers and challenging the obvious dichotomies they imply are key components of transculturality (Alexander 2006: p. 141).

'A transcultural model begins from the assumption that an individual or a cultural identity is never complete in itself because of its relations in a field of differences.'

(Berry 1999: p. 134)

The transcultural paradigm implies, among other things, that civilizations are incomplete collections of customs that require interaction and enrichment through cross-cultural interactions: Because of its relationships in a field of diversity, As individuals realize that their familiar cultural spheres do not cover the whole set of human aspirations, they are more inclined to accept the validity of other cultural worlds. In this way, the need to transcend the boundaries of their own cultures shapes a transcultural perspective that frees them from a limited range of options

'Transcultural builds new identities in the zone of fuzziness and interference and challenges the metaphysics of discreteness so characteristic of nations, races, professions, and other established cultural configurations ...' (Epstein 1999: p. 25)

Consequently, a key transculturality principle that explains the need to recognize the significance of other cultural realms is the notion that cultures are self-transcendent entities.

Transgressive urges and transcultural changes

In the context of migrant relocation, transgressive mechanisms—strategies for challenging established cultural norms—may be intriguingly linked to the intrinsic transcendence of transcultural processes. Given its literal sense of "crossing a boundary," the concept of transgression itself has geographical connotations (Cresswell 1996: p. 21).

However, relocation involves a change to a position of being "out of place," which may lead to resistance (Cresswell 1996: p. 21). Gauri's method of challenging traditional identity roles can be examined with the use of the concept of transgression. The significance of transgression as a means of exposing "the historical and mutable nature of that which is usually considered 'the way things are'" is illustrated by the character's defiant attitude (Cresswell 1996: p. 26). The concept of "transiency of identity" (Ganser 2009: p. 25) is a useful conceptual tool that clarifies the epistemic conclusion of transgression at this point. Originating from the Latin *transire*, which means "to go across" or "to pass," the term combines the concepts of temporal and spatial change in connection to dynamics of identity.

On the one hand, essentialist viewpoints are impossible due to the concept's state of constant becoming, which encodes the ongoing flow of identity change along a temporal axis (Ganser 2009: p. 25). However, the concept also refers to identity change processes brought on by people's migration across "shifting borders and territorialities" (Ganser 2009: p. 25).

As a result, the term's dual meaning could facilitate a useful understanding of the complex character of Gauri's bodily transgression, which pushes her beyond accepted norms. Theories about the potential for women's empowerment as it relates to their access to a regime of mobility are presented in the section that follows.

Gender and Mobility

The relationship between gender, mobility, and place is a key element of the current approach, with an emphasis on the transgressive possibilities of women's movement. Since the 1970s, gender has been a focus of mobility research, leading to studies on immigration, employment, generational mobility, the relationship between gender and mobility, and space (Kronlid 2008: p. 18). Men belong in the public arena and women in the private sphere, according to the traditional binarism of the patriarchal perspective on gender relations (Ganser 2009: p. 68; Cattán 2008: p. 87; Creswell & Uteng, 2008).

This dual viewpoint has also been interpreted as a space/feminine vs. time/masculine conflict, according to Massey (2001: p. 6). In other words, men represent dynamic temporality, history, progress, civilization, etc. (Massey 2001: p. 6), but women are linked to a static state, "the antithesis of mobility" (Fay 2008: p. 70). One significant mechanism of subordination that has been linked to women's affiliation with the private sphere is the restriction of their mobility (Ganser 2009: p. 69).

Accordingly, women who have access to a mobile condition have the ability to challenge patriarchal norms by "acquiring new subjectivity" (Creswell & Uteng, 2008: p. 2), subverting normative gender discourses, and gaining "social mobility and sexual freedom" (Kronlid 2008: p. 24).

Notwithstanding the liberating implications of female mobility, theorists warn against the possibility of establishing a new binary that would place it ahead of a permanent state. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that not all forms of movement are necessarily advantageous (Kronlid 2008: p. 27) and that we shouldn't "trade the myth of the sedentary lifestyle, border and frontier, territory and proximity, for the myth of mobility, flows and networks" (Cattán 2008: p. 86). Instead, one should investigate how the concept of mobility is "layered" and "elusive," taking into consideration the ways in which it can be coded both favorably and negatively as "progress," "freedom," "modernity," or "restricted movement, vigilance, and control." (Creswell & Uteng, 2008) The core corpus analysis attempts to uncover the layered variety of valences exemplified by Gauri's nomadic position, acknowledging these varied readings of movement.

Nomadic itineraries and female (dis)empowerment

Nomadism has been glorified as a new paradigm for thinking subjectivity with a focus on deterritorialization, movement and connectivity (O'Sullivan 2000). This approach promotes nomadology as an epistemological condition of mobility that enables the crumbling of conceptual foundations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: p. 25), 'promoting a logic of the AND' (1987: p. 25), illustrating 'all manner of "becomings"' (1987: p. 21).

As a new way of thinking about subjectivity that emphasizes deterritorialization, mobility, and connectedness, nomadic lifestyles have been extolled (O'Sullivan 2000). This method illustrates "all manner of "becomings"' (1987: p. 21), "promotes a logic of the AND," and promotes nomadology as an epistemological condition of movement that permits the disintegration of conceptual underpinnings (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: p. 25).

A rhizomatic kind of movement that incorporates "discontinuity, rupture, and multiplicity" is linked to nomadic lifestyles (1987: p. 16). "As acts of resistance against hegemonic control over space as well as over the subject and its socio-cultural location," nomadic behaviors have been envisioned (Ganser 2009: p. 169). In order to emphasize the movement's "acute awareness of the non fixity of boundaries," feminism has supplanted nomadic terminology (Braidotti 1994: p. 36). More precisely, "nomadic transgression" is supported by feminist critics as a tactic for crossing boundaries to produce new subjectivities (Ganser 2009: p. 173). Put differently, the adoption.

Western individualism, South Asian interdependence

The current debate is based on a number of studies about particular facets of South Asian and American cultures in order to comprehend the mechanisms of transcultural transformation in the context of South-Asian American encounters. According to Harry C. Triandis' socio psychological research, some cultures—such as the USA and other English-speaking nations—tend to emphasize the individual as the fundamental unit of social perception, whereas other cultures—such as those in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—favor a more group-oriented approach to identity (1993: pp. 159-160). Similarly, Joan C. Miller comes to the conclusion that Hindu Indians value an interconnected aspect of identity, whereas Americans are more likely to advocate for an independent vision of the self (1994: p. 4). The promotion of a model of female identity as a collection of roles that incorporate the idea of dependence is a significant aspect that stems from a communitarian tradition: "The identity of Hindu women is not an independent notion, but a series of role relationships as daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, and mother" (Deka 1993: p. 124).

The main responsibilities of a pativrata, or Hindu faithful woman, are to cook, have children, and foster her love for her husband, according to the Hindu Brahmanical philosophy (Hermann 2011: p. 81). Due to the ongoing belief that Hindu women are "unfit for independence," they must be shielded and guarded by a male figure (Bose 2010: pp. 66-67). Additionally, women are restricted to the home because they are seen as incompatible with the characteristics of public life (Fuller 1990: p. 288).

After outlining the theoretical foundation for this chapter, the analysis of the main corpus will follow, emphasizing how Gauri's identity is woven together with transdifference, transculturality, and nomadism.

The Lowland: Disruptive Metamorphoses

Lahiri appears to be especially drawn to the logic of transgression in her most recent book, as she develops characters who adopt a trespassing attitude in an effort to challenge traditional norms. Subhash appears to have violated an ethical rule by proposing to Gauri, since Udayan's spectral presence haunts this union. Udayan crosses a line by getting married without his parents' consent because he puts his own desires ahead of the family's. When Gauri chooses to leave Bela in Subhash's care, she is committing possibly the most egregious social role violation.

Gauri, who is unable to commit to committed relationships, finally falls in love with a woman and leaves her heterosexual state. Young Bela, in response, tries to overcome her need for attachment and embrace her mother's gesture by fleeing all the time. Bela chose to become a single mother as a result of her trauma, aiming to find comfort in living a nomadic lifestyle

The majority of the first-generation Indian women immigrants are portrayed in Lahiri's earlier work as tradition-keepers, but *The Lowland* totally breaks this pattern. It appears that Jhumpa Lahiri wanted to take the process of cultural transgression to its furthest in Gauri. Gauri is a first-generation voluntary immigrant who aspires an identity that deviates from conventional Hindu ideals. Gauri is shown as a nonconformist young woman who is drawn to intellectual endeavors even before she leaves. I concur with Habib that Gauri's "unconventional life" (2015: p. 41) kept her "aloof from traditional social customs" prior to her marriage to Udayan.

Her choice to wed Udayan is the first unorthodox step; it is a free will decision rather than a customary Hindu arrangement. Additional violations are indicated by Gauri's acceptance of Subhash's proposal and her move to America. She views her marriage to her brother-in-law as a chance to recreate herself in a setting free from social pressure to fit in: She had been passively waiting for her destination among a large number of passengers. Like Gauri, most of them are yearning to be released in an environment different from their own. This was the location where she could go past her past. (Lahiri 2013: emphasis added, p. 99)

Gauri appears to view transplantation as a chance for self-reinvention in a new cultural context based on her sentiments when traveling to America. Therefore, the special distinction of the American context appears to provide the space required for self-reinvention beyond certain limitations.

Embracing academia, fearing motherhood

Gauri's desire to pursue her academic goals is the first sign of her rebellious reinvention. She attends classes in the university's philosophy department, where Subhash is employed, under false pretenses while she is pregnant. Gauri's abrupt decision to forgo outward symbols of heritage, such traditional Indian attire, further suggests her unorthodox position. Gauri's atypicality is further highlighted by her wish to stay away from female Indian immigrant community members, saying, "I have nothing in common with them" (Lahiri 2013: p. 109)

Gauri's attempt at centrifugal cultural reconfiguration is evident in her apathetic-hostile attitude toward conservative immigration. Gauri's hesitancy to fully embrace the motherhood condition is another feature that exemplifies her rebellious drive. Gauri lets Subhash take care of most of her duties after delivering birth since she feels overburdened by her new obligations.

Additionally, Gauri is eager to pursue her education, which subtly reminds Subhash of the vow he made prior to their marriage. Gauri sees motherhood as a barrier to her career goals, dividing her time between taking care of Bela and attending philosophy classes: "She was not only ashamed of her feelings but also frightened that the final task Udayan had left her with, the long task of raising Bela, was not bringing meaning to her life." (Lahiri 2013)

Gauri is envious of Subhash's work schedule, which frees him from parenting responsibilities, and feels trapped by the role of mother. When Bela gets to be six years old, she establishes a covert pattern that gives her alone time. She appreciates the independence of taking lonely walks while leaving her daughter alone at home every day:

"So it began in the afternoons." Not every afternoon, but far too frequently. Disoriented by the idea of freedom, eating the sensation as a beggar devours food.' (Lahiri 2013)

Gauri's desire for independence outside the home demonstrates her desire for empowerment as a result of her disengagement from her role as a mother. Bela is a symbol of the unbreakable and unquestionable relationship that unites Gauri and Udayan, a bond that endures beyond Udayan's passing. Her presence serves as a continual reminder of both Gauri's indirect role in the deaths of people and the loss of Udayan. Gauri consented to spy on a police officer and provide Udayan with his daily routine at Udayan's request. She needed an idea of the policeman's daily schedule and was unaware that Udayan's friends were plotting his murder.

Perhaps Gauri's reluctance to forgive herself and move on from her past is the root of her failure to form and sustain a relationship with her own child. Gauri's commitment to a profession in academia can be an example of her desire to suppress the hurt and shame associated with her Indian upbringing. Gauri shifts her focus to the field of research after realizing she is unable to be a good mother. Despite spending the majority of her time at home with Bela, Gauri's isolation in the spare bedroom, which she converted into her office, keeps them apart: "Hours would pass, the door not opening, her mother not emerging" (Lahiri 2013: p. 157).

"She spoke of it as she might speak of an infant, telling her father one night at dinner that she worried about the pages being blown out an open window, or being destroyed by a fire," illustrates Gauri's maternal attitude toward her research, despite Bela's apparent satisfaction with sharing the home space with her mother. (Lahiri 2013)

This particular element makes it abundantly evident that Gauri's interest in academia is a way for her to communicate her unspoken maternal concern for Bela. Gauri's decision to leave her family and the process of redefining herself as she embarks on a new life on the West Coast are covered in the next part.

Relocating for transcultural reinvention

The notion that Gauri is unable to separate Bela from her shared past with Udayan is further supported by her decision to relocate to California, which is in and of itself another violation. Gauri's refusal to play the role of mother could be an indication of her ongoing withdrawal as a coping mechanism for her trauma.

Because she chooses to ignore her family members' suffering in favor of concentrating on her own struggles, the character seems to be an example of individualistic beliefs. The only way she can resolve her internal struggle by increasing the distance between herself and the cause of her grief is to make this drastic decision:

"She entered a new dimension where she was granted a new lease of life. She was physically isolated from Bela and Subhash for three hours during her watch, which was as big as the mountains she had traveled over to get here. The worst thing she could have imagined doing, she had done it." (Lahiri 2013: emphasis added, p. 180)

Gauri's personal journey of uprooting in the cause of sovereign becoming continues with her resettlement on the West Coast. The character frequently avoids situations that bring up the unfortunate events of her early years. Gauri uses mobility as peregrination as a specific healing technique to try to control her suffering and shame. Gauri sees the ability

to move around freely as a way to break free from attachments and shield herself from more suffering. Her unfettered access to a mobile condition aids in her reinvention along strong individualistic lines.

This implies that Gauri maintains that the sole tactic that permits her transgressive redefinition is nomadic movement. Her ability to reject traditional feminine roles and familial ties demonstrates her desire to oppose dominant coordinates of identity by concurrently overcoming cultural and physical barriers. Gauri creates a new subjectivity through a series of nomadic transgressions, including her voluntary transplantation from India to America and her move from the East to the West Coast.

Since it encompasses the impacts of being created by the passage of time and modified by Gauri's move to a new environment, the character's metamorphosis emphasizes the "transiency of identity." It's interesting to note that Gauri adopts an ambivalent perspective on the potential for creating lasting relationships. Gauri's drive to establish some relationships suggests that she needs to stabilize her fractured life, even though a rooted existence undermines her feeling of freedom.

This conundrum leads to the formation of her fractured subjectivity, which is divided by the need to feel safe and connected to life's circumstances. Gauri is therefore open to having a number of casual relationships, but she is cautious not to allow them to become something that "might complicate her life" (Lahiri 2013: p. 184).

Gauri simultaneously learns to defend distance as a paradoxical mode of communication that honors what I would refer to as ghettoized individualism. Gauri refrains from forming any meaningful relationships as a form of self-punishment for leaving her family:

"Given what she'd done to Subhash and Bela, it felt wrong to seek the companionship of anyone else." There was a kind of friendship that came with isolation. She didn't want to get past it. Instead, it was something she had grown to rely on and had at this point entered into a more fulfilling and long-lasting relationship than the ones she had known in either of her marriages. (Lahiri 2013)

Gauri's choice to be reclusive demonstrates her preference for a cultural paradigm that values individual liberty and self-centeredness. Gauri remains steadfast in her disobedient position, rejecting interdependent identity formation factors. Her reliance on independence points to the development of a composite identity profile that combines the character's need to hold onto stable configurations with her escape from anchored structures. It appears that Gauri enters a state of self-sufficiency that condemns her to lifelong seclusion because her anchor is her own self.

Even though Gauri is always feeling guilty, her repeated transgressions show that her commitment to an individualist set of standards outweighs her capacity for selflessness. Gauri discovers that this sudden transition mimics the pattern of her vacillating between identity roles after splitting from her female partner Lorna:

'It was not unlike the way her role had changed at so many other points in the past. From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman. With the exception of losing Udayan, she had actively chosen to take these steps. She had married Subhash, she had abandoned Bela. She had generated alternative versions of herself, she had insisted at brutal cost on these conversions. Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end.' (Lahiri 2013)

According to her observations, Gauri's unusual perspective stems from her strong preference for autonomous self-definition. Her frequent actions of displacement are examples of transgressive positions against the constraints placed on her by cultural and physical restrictions. The primary principle behind the character's itinerant lifestyle appears to be her desire for autonomy. Furthermore, the fact that Gauri has control over her resettlement and transformational trajectory emphasizes how empowered she feels by her capacity to change identities and places. Gauri cherishes her freedom to direct her life more than the results of her actions, as the aforementioned quotation makes clear.

This implies that her cultural transformation prioritizes the standard of an independent self to the extent of giving up everything to achieve this goal. To the degree that Gauri exemplifies the transcendent desire to transcend boundaries of any type, we could contend that she possesses a transcultural profile. Lahiri includes very few (diluted) facts about her cultural distinctiveness in her portrayal of this character. Similar to the most of Lahiri's first-generation protagonists, Gauri's relationship with her Bengali heritage is not mentioned. The desire for freedom, which is linked to the urge to go beyond repressive rules, regardless of their origin, is the only indicator of Gauri's intentional transformation. Lahiri seems to suggest that the most significant catalyst for change is the power of transgression, the creative energy that creates new identity patterns while obliterating those that exert pressure.

However, Gauri's despair in spite of her wish for transcending attachments implies that any attempt to transcend all forms of loyalty fails to provide a harmonious combination. I now propose that Gauri's cultural perspective might be

seen as a meeting place of the dissonant consequences of transdifference and the forces of transcultural transgression. More precisely, it appears that her transgression of conventional roles leads to a bewildering variety of irreconcilable impulses. When the heroine abruptly decides to travel to India, it becomes increasingly clear that she is struggling with her own fragmentation.

Negotiating one's identity through international travel

As a result of her first unforeseen encounter with Bela since her abandonment, Gauri made the snap choice to reunite with Kolkata. Gauri is devastated by her daughter's complete rejection and decides to forego her original intentions to attend a conference in London in favor of a more intimate trip to India. Gauri's choice to travel to India highlights her realization that the past is an indisputable part of oneself, even though she has embraced Western identity patterns.

Bela's adamant rejection, however, is a voice of the past that downplays Gauri's significance. It's possible that Gauri's brief return to her childhood environment is an effort to go back in time. Her return to a drastically changed environment, however, suggests that Gauri is unable to reclaim the aspect of herself that she has been neglecting. The interpretation of Gauri's transdifference is supported by her sense of non-existence, which exemplifies the apparent collapse of her identity coordinates and her incapacity to make sense of her fractured self (Lahiri 2013: p. 247).

Gauri considers suicide when faced with these emotions, understanding that this is the unspoken reason she returned home: "The purpose of her return was to take her leave" (Lahiri 2013: p. 249). Her desire to take her own life implies that the painful memories of her early years have not been forgotten despite her career achievement. According to Bran (2014: p. 305), "immigration empowers her [Gauri] professionally, but not personally."

Gauri's personal crisis in full maturity is brought on by the "emptiness, husk of existence" (Lahiri 2013: p. 249) as a result of her unorthodox decisions. Gauri's identity issue serves as an example of the conflicting possibilities of mobility in connection to women's empowerment. On the one hand, Gauri's unhappiness implies that she has not found the fulfillment she had hoped for from her freedom to remake herself along independent lines. Furthermore, I contend that her impulse to transgress has left a void in her identity roles, which leads to sentiments of bewilderment and despair. From this perspective, Gauri's mobility opens a chaotic realm devoid of grounded references while offering the flexibility required for individual creativity.

This paradoxical feature of Gauri's mobility highlights the conflicting character of mobility with regard to the potential for empowerment. Gauri's perception of her scattered identity coordinates is impacted by the complex network of legendary symbols about gender that surround her when she arrives in Kolkata during the Durga Puja festival. Durga represents the divine female energy Shakti, the dynamic part of the Absolute (Zimmer 1990: p. 208) that drives the manifest creation (Rodrigues 2003: p. 18), as one side of the Great Goddess (Devi).

Durga, also known as Mahishasurmardini, is the Demon's Slayer and a terrifying representation of the destructive power of women (Rodrigues 2003: p. 32). The omniscient narrator emphasizes Durga's martial qualities upon Gauri's arrival in Kolkata, highlighting her "resplendent, formidable" position with the demon at her feet (Lahiri 2013: p. 243). This aggressive side of the Goddess, in my opinion, can be linked to Gauri's own transgressive self-definition, which is infused with a strong sense of cruelty toward Subhash and Bela. Additionally, the Durga Puja serves as a "subliminal reminder of Sita's faithfulness" (Rodrigues 2003: p. 302).

This feature makes reference to the Ramayana, in which the protagonist, Rama, calls for Devi to aid him in defeating Ravana, who kidnaps his wife Sita. From one perspective, Gauri's choice to leave Subhash may be seen as a sign of her wifely devotion to Udayan, whose cherished memory she upholds. However, the same act also leads to Bela and Subhash being treated cruelly, which breaks down family ties. Along with Devi, Gauri is a complex mix of paradoxical qualities because her academic success entails a creative parallel to her destructive deeds. Throughout her academic career, Gauri develops a "measured contact" (Lahiri 2013: p. 181) with her students that she eventually grows to love.

This feature emphasizes how Gauri's teaching attribution and her nourishing potential—which the motherhood condition has yet to fulfill—are related. Gauri makes a last-ditch effort to understand her dispersed identity coordinates by temporarily moving to India for the Durga Puja. She recognizes an identity gap as a result of her nomadic mistrust of ties, which is ironically shown in her despair when confronted with an empty existence. Gauri's desire to end her life can be an expression of her incapacity to deal with the lack of feminine characteristics she has purposefully created. She has divorced Subhash, is a mother who is not recognized by her kid, and demonstrates wifely loyalty in her love for Udayan. Gauri's deliberate transition to "a hyper-individualized life in America" is to be seen as the cause of this seeming void in her identity fabric (Bran 2014: p. 313). Maybe she wants to be with her late spouse again and share "the bond of not existing" (Lahiri 2014: p. 247), which is why she plans to end her life.

Accepting transdifference

Gauri eventually confronts her own ambivalence, though, as evidenced by the fact that she abandons her suicide preparations. Her fleeting return to her childhood environment serves as a stimulant for introspection, which leads to self-acceptance. She presents womanhood as a mysterious synthesis of conflicting traits through her brutality against Bela and Subhash, her unwavering love for Udayan, her lingering remorse, and her creative career. According to this perspective, she reflects another aspect of Hindu mythical womanhood, which is mahamaya, the ultimate mystery of the Goddess, her ineffable and impenetrable character (Rodrigues 2003: p. 312).

Gauri appears as one potential expression of the Hindu female energy, whose decisions seem to defy moral standards, inside the legendary framework of the Durga Puja. A Western reader, whose mythical representation of virginity, the Virgin Mary, contrasts sharply with the "horrific – beautiful India's mother," may find it challenging to understand this transcendence of ethics (Zimmer 1990: p. 215).

As Gauri moves to India amid the religious celebration of varied femininity, I understand her seeming pacification as an acceptance of her fractured female personality. Lahiri may be suggesting that Gauri's attempt to ignore her cultural roots by diving into a deterritorialized dimension is a futile tactic by situating her self-awareness inside the Hindu framework. Ironically, the Hindu legendary layer, which appears to support concepts of contradictory, fractured female selves, provides this contentious character with more appropriate identification references.

According to a transnational feminist interpretation, Gauri's "counter-cultural life" is expressed through her subversive and composite profile (Habib 2015: p. 21). Transnational ties, exchange patterns, affiliations, and social formations that transcend national boundaries are collectively referred to as transnationalism. Additionally, it indicates: "methods through which immigrants create and maintain multifaceted social ties that connect their communities of origin and settlement" (Basch et al., 2003: p. 7). Gauri's rhizomatic defiance of traditional cultural norms is seen as a representation of the "multiplicity of a woman's role" (Ibid.) as well as a celebration of a "liberated self" (Habib 2015: p. 21).

I concur with Habib that Gauri consistently rejects Hindu patriarchal ideals, which undoubtedly undermines the notion of a homogenous Third World woman. I would add, nevertheless, to Habib's assertion that Gauri's partial reliance on Hindu mythology that allow for the potential of a multi-layered feminine self parallels her rebellious position. This points to a fundamental contradiction in Gauri's transnational feminist approach, which selectively draws on Hindu traditional texts to dismantle the stereotypical representation of the Third World Woman. I understand the character's transcultural profile in this way as the phase of Gauri's identity negotiation intended to balance her disturbing transdifference.

More precisely, this tactic demonstrates her capacity to eventually control her internal disarray while eschewing the notion of a permanent cultural identity. Gauri eventually combines the complex dimensions of womanhood provided by Hindu myths with a vision of extreme autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Lahiri violates her conventional perception of Bengali spouses as possessing conservative outlooks by constructing a first-generation female Bengali immigrant who voluntarily deviates from traditional Hindu conventions. This theme shift, in my opinion, is intended to present the author's point about the significance of transgression as a tool that permits the redefinition of (female) identities along liberating dimensions. According to Bran, *The Lowland* is not essentially a book about cultural translation, assimilation, or hybridity (2014: p. 320).

The critic contends that "family secrets and unresolved past traumas" are the most prevalent motifs, overriding processes of cultural adaptation and transformation (Ibid.). My perspective, however, is a little different. I contend that Lahiri's fascination with family dynamics and tragedies is a subtle way of moving the emphasis away from the concept of culturally particular identities and toward a space that transcends fixed cultural loyalties. By developing characters who commit various transgressions, Lahiri emphasizes the value of transcending borders at the price of culturally specific attachments.

In some ways, *The Lowland* can be interpreted as a book on the value of transgression in a society where cultural boundaries are blurred and cultural identity is ambiguous. Surprisingly, however, violation in and of itself does not seem to be exalted; rather, it is shown as a first step that molds a broader cultural perspective. As this chapter has shown, Gauri's strong desire to transcend traditional limits does not inevitably lead to her transcultural transformation.

I would contend that a perceived multiplicity of characteristics that demonstrate the character's transdifference constitute an intermediate stage of her metamorphosis. Ironically, Gauri's multifaceted profile—which stems from her

sins as a nomad—does not provide a fair perspective. Rather, she experiences an identity crisis as a result of her attempts at redefinition against Hindu patriarchal traditions, which lead to a perceived void of roles. Gauri returns to her Hindu roots after experiencing the bitterness of her dissonant profile, as represented by her unexpected return home. However, Gauri's brief stay in India shouldn't be romanticized as a whole acceptance of her heritage that allows her to reconnect with traditional values. Rather, I contend that Gauri's journey to Kolkata exposes her to a Hindu perspective on female fragmentation, which aids in her understanding of her own hazy identity frame. Gauri's transgressive crossings may have prepared her for her brief return to Kolkata, which may be seen as the start of her transcultural odyssey. Bela's pacifying letter acknowledging Gauri as grandma implies a potential reconciliation, suggesting that Gauri's rhizomatic wandering eventually makes place for an appeasing of her tensions. In addition, Gauri's metamorphosis during her nomadic journey demonstrates the complex relationship between female mobility and the potential for empowerment. Gauri's quick move allows her to break free from constraining norms, but it also eventually indicates a lack of reliable references that must be met. The limit of a vision that prioritizes uprootedness or nomadic becoming over rootedness or established being is demonstrated by her paradoxical incarceration in a detached state devoid of conventional duties. Gauri's agonizing predicament implies that Jhumpa Lahiri wants to highlight the equal importance of fluid/nomadic/rhizomatic coordinates and grounded/rooted references in the fabric of modern, mobile identities.

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