
Defiance of Convention: A Silent Repulsion on Patriarchal Decree for self-empowering in *The Lowland*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyze Jhumpa Lahiri's defiance of convention with particular reference to the main female characters Gauri and Bela of the novel through their self-empowering. This study shows how the female characters develop their sense of defiance through their action and behavior more than their words, and how they empower themselves in course of their life proving their potentials. The role of a mother in context of Gauri and the meaning of mother in regards of Bela goes on changing when they begin to denounce the conventional practices of the related spheres. The similar types of instances are the focusing concerns of this study. It uses qualitative methodology and takes existential feminism as a theoretical tool to interpret and analyze the primary texts. Instead of focusing on the analysis of the theme of the text, the article focuses on analysis of the text in concern with female characters' relation, practices and notions on the existing social beliefs and traditions particularly in women relation. The paper discusses how the personality of Gauri and Bela get changes across the novel based on identity transformation. This study argues that these female characters challenge the existing conventions only when they come to feel self-empowered. It also makes an important point to make women empowerment a cursory discourse for the change in many social constraints imposed by patriarchal belief system.

Keywords: Defiance, self-empowering, self-identity, patriarchy, confinement, existence.

Introduction

The major concern of this study is to analyze self-empowerment of women through the close textual reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*. The paper mainly focuses on digging out the characters' attempt at making them self-aware, committed and self-reliant in the decision they have made in the course of their life. How this self-empowerment possible through deviance of the long existing convention is mainly watched through the lenses of two generation of women using a feminist theoretical framework. Gauri and Bela are from the same family, who are directly and indirectly affected by the war ridden society but grasp the diverse way to tackle the existing social norms and values and move ahead in search of own existence.

The immigrant females, Indian by birth and Anglo- American freedom seekers by

nature, diversely engage themselves in the process of self-empowerment while staying in and away from their native country. When Gauri becomes a widow after Udayan is killed in police encounter, she decides to free herself from various types of emotional entrapment and social constraint by accepting the marriage proposal of her brother-in-law Subhash. Bereaved Gauri is somehow relieved and lightened due to his consolatory approach.

The popular feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (1742) also believes that women should struggle to work out their salvation in every sphere of life. According to her, change has slowly happened in the situation of human beings, as the various social constraints and human follies are affecting the modes of living. In the case of male-female relations too, she has opined the similar spectrum stating that it is not instinctive impulses rather it is an inclusion of reason and its increasing effect in the course of history. But a woman's commitment and dedication to change by self-empowering is prior here. She remarks:

If a man of sense loves a woman like that, it can only be on account of her sex, and if he respects her it is because she is a trusty servant. To preserve his own peace he lets her scold the servants, and go to church in clothes made of the best materials. A man with only her level of understanding would probably not suit her so well, because he might wish to encroach on her territory and manage some domestic concerns himself. Yet women, whose minds are not enlarged by cultivation, or in whom the natural selfishness of sensibility has not been expanded by reflection, are very unfit to manage a family. (p. 45)

Lahiri's writing mostly travels from alienation to isolation having traces of empowerment identity and existence. Clarke Blaise (2011) highlights the specific substance of his novels. According to him, Lahiri explores the subtle connection between individualism and alienation. Primarily, the immigrants face the agonizing sense of alienation when they develop an extreme sense of existence and imagination. His cursory survey illustrates:

The portrayal of communal hatred and violence has occupied the forefront of Lahiri's major works. Lahiri presents darkness as a rich exploration of homelessness and loss of identity in the tradition of authors such as Naipaul and Malamud. Her focus on female protagonists was welcomed by women who recognized in Lahiri's stories unusual empathy for the monumental struggles faced by immigrant women. (p. 72)

Blaise compares Lahiri with some of the leading writers of the West. Like them, Lahiri brings into focus the troubled psyche of immigrants when they have to encounter strange culture. The lack of immediate adaptation to the strange culture weakens the psychology of the third world migrants. This is why, Mayur Chhikara (2009) treats *The*

Lowland as the “parable of nostalgia”. Sometimes the “nostalgic sickness overwhelms characters” like Gauri, too, who is already on the way to the cultivation of identity (p.4).

Lahiri’s characters’ sole attempt is to make a balance between internal and external mental conflicts to be empowered. Her story mostly dwells on political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, knowledge-seekers, ethnic minorities and so on. They strongly feel and maintain emotional relationship with their land of origin and their own existence being a human being through various ways of life. The critic TK Pius (2014) has witnessed similar grounds and he states:

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*, traces the fate of tender women ...bonds torn asunder by violent politics. Lahiri's delineation of the narrative events purports to show how the absence of loved ones becomes covertly a portent haunting presence within the subconscious mind of the affected characters directing their overt actions to their own consequential ways of life through which they are goaded on. (p. 1)

The observation traces a cultural gap, loss of love and the traumatic plight of an Indian migrant to America. The characters in the story face lots of problems due to cultural dualism as well as the loss of roots. The similar nuances are put forward by another critic Raj Kumar Mishra (2012), as he traces the issue of acculturation in Lahiri’s *The Lowland*. He believes that immigration and diasporic settlement create the vast possibility of acculturation. Mishra opines:

Jhumpa Lahiri in the novel *The Lowland* breathlessly recounts the diasporic lives. She in the novel in fact made us accept the view that alienation-isolation is the necessary qualification for Diasporas. Her women manage the diasporic settings differently compared to that of their partners. Their acculturation looks slightly painful. All 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. (p. 2)

Immigrants often suffer causes even their children to feel a similar sense of alienation. Lahiri’s writings also pick up similar stances where her characters attempt to pass through the period of triumph and tragedy. But their spirit remains intact and undamaged as Gauri in the novel.

Culture, identity, quest for freedom and the other troubles of the Indian Diasporas and immigrants are the current thematic concerns of Lahiri. Gauri is tortured and mistreated by the other members of the family. She needs care and affection in this situation. She is struggling to cope with the double shock. Udayan’s death leaves irreparable shock in her. In addition, discomfort, and harassment from her parents-in-law weaken her steadily. Having seen her miserable condition, Subhash decides to

take her to America. He says that the safe and certain way to free her from various psychic and social tortures is to take her to USA by marrying. He marries her. He had to convince her a lot so that she could be ready to marry him.

After that she decides to accept the marriage proposal of her brother-in-law. Bereaved Gauri is somehow relieved and lightened due to the consolatory approach of Subhash. It is Gauri's keen sense of going beyond the limits of femininity that paved the way for her empowerment. Empowerment gives her voice in predetermined development strategies. It helped to achieve its intended goal without giving her the power to challenge existing narratives of development.

Although different critics and reviewers have studied *The Lowland* from multiple perspectives, none of them has mentioned the issue of women's defiance on existing conventions for self-empowerment. The existential feminist issues especially the self-empowerment of women has not induced much attention from scholars. Hence, this paper aims to deal with the issues of self-empowerment with textual analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*.

While dealing with various aspects of self-empowering in the leading female characters, some research questions are brought into the discussion. The questions – what makes the female characters defy the convention they are followed by; how are they empowered themselves and stand being self-reliant in their decision; and how their defiance stands as a sign of repulsion on patriarchal practices- are kept on sight when research is undergone. The paper parallelly deals with the concept of self-empowerment that is a mode of experience in which an individual is sustained for his/her own choices.

In this stance, the scope of this study aims to strengthen solidarity among women with common struggles where women's struggles for autonomy over their presence and choices often need to contend with male-constructed hetero-normativity. Similarly, it makes an important contribution in analyzing women writers' representations of females in a different sphere and angle either as rebellious or prepared for self-identity overcoming the male chauvinistic social conventions.

Methodology

This paper uses qualitative research method for the textual analysis of the selected primary text i.e. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*. This involves a close reading of the novel to identify passages for analyzing the thematic aspects of self-empowerment and discusses the main female characters' activities and its effect on changing their condition in then and now context. It also entertains other resources such as research journals, research articles, and reviews on the related topic to serve as the secondary data for the research purpose.

Theoretical Framework

This paper aims to draw the existentialist feminists' concept of defiance as silent rebellion against male chauvinism and apply this in advancing the argument as regards how the selected texts bring the feminist ideas of defiance through two leading characters Gauri and Bela. The famous feminist scholar Simon De Beauvoir (2010) claims that there is no unchangeable feminine essence. There is no essential feminine character which is predetermined, but a woman is the product of a civilization. Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft (1974) envisions how women have been "a toy of man" in almost all social spectrums. She believes that social grouping and harmony among women belonging to any community and culture is instrumental in actualizing some of the long-cherished visions of freedom and prosperity. The study applies the mentioned theorists' ideas to examine, analyze and interpret the selected text.

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The possibility of change through activism and insurgency lies at the core of the novel. The impulsive characters like Udayan and Gauri are excited by the appealing doctrine of communism which fosters the necessity to have faith in the radical politics later such faith helped Gauri to abdicate everything for the sake of identity and self-empowerment. *The Lowland* is the story of two generations of women who are directly and indirectly affected by the Indian Naxalite Movement which took place in the lowland where Udayan was killed. Gauri, who got married to Udayan and to some extent involved in Naxalite Movement, has to forsake her family and beloved country, and has to tie herself with unwanted marital cord with Madhav. This never gives her inner happiness, and eventually in order to get her own identity, she leaves her conjugal life and lives alone.

The very idea attracts Gunjan Aggarwal (2010) who happens to trace the fatalistic nature of Gauri despite her struggle to empower like an American lady. According to Aggarwal, two different faces of Gauri are clearly found in the novel. He asserts:

In her life she had come so far that it was hard for her to return to her family, the roles that the destiny had assigned to her have been left merely from a lover to a colleague of people in an alienated land with whom she is hardly concerned and is similar to them, it was not unlike the way her role had changed from sister in law to wife, from mother to a childless woman. Except for losing Udayan, she had actively chosen to take these steps. Layering her life only to strip it bare, she is fated to be alone in the end. (p. 7)

Aggarwal notices the fact that various traces of fatalistic thinking operate when she struggles to get around plenty of setbacks and shocks. Even in the society which

is increasingly modernistic, she allows herself to be conquered by fatalistic thinking temporarily. Gauri wonders if she is free or in bondage. Only the flying bird reminds her that she is at least free. So she eventually decides to leave the house.

Gauri is attracted to the new individual life, orientated towards career. She step by step comes to realize the value of being liberal and career conscious. The independent and career conscious women of Rhode Island push her to the path of self-empowerment. But that does not mean her journey to self-empowerment is not free from challenges. Her excitement to embark on the path of independence and autonomy is alternately followed by fear, seclusion and silence. The lingering typical mindset slows her movement towards the process of empowerment. She tends to be outspoken and extrovert. She is portrayed as:

She intended to remain anonymous, to go unnoticed. But one day while she was immersed in the lecture, her hand shot up. The professor was speaking about Aristotle's rules of formal logic, about the syllogisms used to distinguish a valid thought from an invalid one. She made a little routine of it, following the wave of students after the class let out to eat her lunch at the cafeteria of the student union, ordering French fries at the grill, bread and butter and tea, and sometimes treating herself to a dish of ice cream. (p. 159)

Slowly, Gauri steps into the glamorous American life. That gives her the courage to come out of her limited spheres and envision to world around her. She attempts to make her inner self equipped with the beauty of individuality, freedom, career and good prospects of life.

In the same way, Bela, who is reared and brought up in abroad thinking of Madhav as her own biological father, has to face a fatal tragedy. Her mother left her forever. After that, she could not resist herself and went into depression. She has a sexual relationship with a familiar man and becomes pregnant. She becomes single unwedded pregnant, and wants to live in her father's (Subhash) house as a single mother. Then again, she comes to know the truth that Udayan was her biological father not Subhash. This pathetic truth trembled and scattered her but she confidently overcomes the situation. She decides to become a single mother and lives in Rhode Island, helping her foster father and engaging in organic farming in America.

Bela chooses free liberal but family and society oriented independency. She has to leave the house for work so early but she is conscious to her duty and responsibility towards her family. Bela picked Meghna, her daughter, up from "school to home when her shift was done" (p. 362). Contrary to Gauri, her excitement to embark on the path of independence and autonomy is alternately followed by happiness, confidence and full of life.

Subhash always welcomes Bela after her work in his home but later days, he

rejects the presence of Gauri in his life. Before marrying her, he used to tell her that she could go on with her studies, but now he told that her priority should be Bela. However, despite his rejection, she registered for the classes. "She begins dinner early with Bela, leaving Subhash's portion on the stove so that Gauri was able to pack up her tote bag and go" (p. 196). At first, it was just the evenings she had class, but then "it was every evening of the week that she spent at the library, away from them." (abid). The professor and the other students in her class were men but very soon they became familiar with each other. They liked to argue about "anti-positivism, and praxis" (abid). They never solicited Gauri's opinion, as she begins to contribute to the discussion they listened, "surprised that she knew enough, at time, to prove them wrong" (p. 198).

After all, Subhash demands a divorce letter. He writes to Gauri saying "whatever lies ahead, I would like to begin to simplify things, given that, legally, we remain tied" (p. 349). He says that he didn't want to drag her to Rhode Island in the event of an emergency. He does not want to burden her and affect her career in case he dies earlier than her. Contrary to this, he believes Bela is different from her mother in the case of pregnancy and child bearing, he compares "...she would be a different mother than Gauri." (p. 321). He took a sense of comfort, the ease, with which she fostered her child.

Asking various questions to herself, she could not control herself. She tries to forget her past and immerse herself in the present life full of gloss and glitter. She kept on watching herself:

She was Subhash's wife instead of Udayan's. Even in Rhode Island, even on the campus where no one knew her, she was prepared for someone to question her, to condemn her for what she had done. Still, she liked spending time in the company of people who ignored but surrounded her. Who went to the terrace to unwind and talk and smoke in the sun, or who gathered indoors, in the lounges and game rooms, watching television, or playing pool. It was almost like being in a city again. (p. 160)

Gauri is obviously dissatisfied with the traditional role; she is expected to play in India. So long as she lived in Calcutta with Udayan, she had to exert a lot to do what she was expected to do in the domestic life. The death of Udayan in a police encounter invites more misery in her life. Again the arrival of Subhash as her second husband puts more pressure on her life in case of family matter. Even though he recommended that she gives priority to family rather than her career, she chooses vice versa.

On the contrary to this, Bela is never sad and dissatisfied with her past and she never recalls her boyfriend. She wants to live as a single parent with the company of her father continuing her job, and also wants to move on if found a man with understanding. She begins to dream as:

She started to keep him company on certain Saturdays, standing beside him

under a white tent at an outdoor market in Bristol, slicing tomatoes for customers sample. She drove with him to make deliveries to restaurants, dropping off boxes of produce for his subscribes. She walked on the beach on him, helping to collect Seaweed he used for mulch. When he sat still he kept busy, working with wood. He started making things for Meghna. Furniture for her dollhouse. (p. 365)

The slow inclination of Bela to the man becomes familiar who is attentive, calms and knows that she is a single unwedded parent. Moreover, her daughter Meghna likes him and he is also fond of her and takes care of her happiness and minor things. Bela feels comfortable with this man who has got divorced from his wife and who was, too, disabled to be a biological father. So, she feels happy to be together and work with him.

As the process of self-empowerment heightens, Gauri presents herself in a new form. She gets her hair bobbed. She casts off her old Indian clothes. Instead she puts on slacks and a gray sweater. Subhash knocked on the door to the bedroom and opened its partway when she did not answer. The room was dark, but he did not see "her resting on the bed". He called out her name, wondering if she had gone for a walk, since "she had mentioned nothing about going out" (p. 169). Her silence and nonresponsive attitude are expressive of her dissatisfaction with the way Subhash treats her. She was faded up of Subhash's interference in almost every moment of her life:

Where were you? I took a bus from the union, into town. I bought a few things. Why did you cut off your hair? I was tired of those, too. He watched as she went into the bedroom, not apologizing for the spectacular mess she had made, just putting away the new clothes she had bought, then throwing the old things into garbage bags. For the first time, he was angry at her. But he did not dare tell her that what she had done was wasteful, or that he found it disturbing. That such destructive behavior could not have been good for the child. (p. 169)

Subhash wants to keep Gauri on limit whereas the vow of Gauri was already sewn in her mind that she anyhow had to get rid of such constraints. When Subhash sees Gauri imitating what other ladies do there in Rhode Island, he gets angry with her. But at first he does not give vent to his anger. He inwardly does not like Gauri getting her hair bobbed and wearing slacks. The sudden change that Subhash sees in her makes him uncomfortable.

Even at his home Subhash begins to dream a dream in which Gauri goes on the fashionable spree of cutting her hair short and wearing slack. "That night, asleep on the couch, he dreamed of Gauri for the first time. Her hair was cut short. She wore only a petticoat and a blouse. He was under the dining table with her. He was astride her, unclothed, making love to her as he used to make love to Holly" (p. 169). It shows that Subhash is obviously troubled and disturbed by Gauri's new choices and preferences. Gauri does not tell her parents the man she chose for her as her ideal groom has raped

her mentally and physically. She inadvertently disappears from the suburban area and goes to the heart of the metropolitan area. It is rash of her to take such a risky decision. Her situation is portrayed as:

She slipped off the bed and walked through the house, staring down at her parents in their oblivious helplessness. She wandered like a ghost. She dropped her stained sari in a corner of the bathroom. Let her mother discover the traces of her glorious Jamai. Nothing had changed in her house, but the world was different. She took Sonali's old red Samsonite from the cupboard and threw her two best sari and all her T-shirt and Jeans into it. She stuffed her backpack with underwear and toiletries. (p. 64)

Gauri makes a rash and a dreadful decision to leave her house. She wants to get rid of the increasing sense of confinement and entrapment. She thinks that confinement and entrapment are hurdles on the way to self-empowerment. She is totally reckless of the forthcoming consequences of going to an unknown place without any solid support. She is exposed to take such a crucial decision.

The decision taken by Gauri to reject the traditional gender role is caused by her exposure to and interaction with American society. No matter how conservative and traditionalist she initially was, she felt the urge to conform to western society. When Gauri visited her hometown after the decades, the neighborhood people were "glancing at her now that she was out of the car" (p. 241). "Rejecting Indian clothes and customs in the metropolitan location" to some extent enables women to empower themselves socially (abid).

How Subhash and Gauri raise their daughter, Bela, also exemplifies their rejection of Indian practices. Bela is allowed to live separately from her parents, and travels around the country. She has been living the life of a homeless person. Subhash never interferes with Bela's marriage. He had raised her in a "place free from meddlesome, out-of-bounds stigmas" (p. 243).

Gauri spends all of her time on "her studies and neglects her little daughter" (p. 186). She speaks of her Ph.D. dissertation "as she might speak of an infant", telling Subhash that she was "worried about the pages being blown out an open window, or being destroyed by a fire". She said it "worried her, sometimes, to leave them unattended in the house" (p. 188). Now Subhash comes to know the difference between what he expected from Gauri and what she really gave him. The more Gauri turns away from her motherly role and responsibility, the more embittered Subhash is. At first, Gauri lives in the residential area of Rhode Island comfortably. She did as Subhash told her. But as time passes by, she begins to cast off her Indian outlook and mannerism. She increasingly turns away from her docile and submissive nature and begins to acquire a more assertive and outspoken disposition.

Gauri not only goes away from Subhash's life but also thinks about betraying him. In the name of studying philosophy, she runs after a German professor of philosophy. She longs for sexual relation with him. Though the man does not seem to be appealing to her, she longs for sexual relation. Even after becoming a mother, she hankers after her professor obsessively. She becomes aware of a man who looked at her, turning his head slightly as she passed by. His glance shifted, though he never stopped to introduce himself-there was no reason for him too. She knew "there were not too many women who looked like her on the campus. Most of the Indian Women wore saris. But in spite of her jeans and boots and belted cardigan, or perhaps because of them", Gauri knew she "stood out" (p. 206). Even while sleeping with Subhash, she mentally envisions as if her German professor is in the place of Subhash. She gives priority to her than the family norms and values.

In the preliminary phase of her adjustment to the social life in America, Gauri is excited to raise her level of knowledge, capacity and confidence. With the passage of time, she starts learning plenty of things about how American media covers events, change and other phenomena of global importance. She is surprised to know why American media hardly covers even the changes and great upheavals that take place in the outside world. She ponders upon plenty of things appear to her in a strange way.

The critic Jennifer A. Marquadt (2009) finds Gauri's stand as a "hybrid cultural influence in women's self-empowerment" where two different "aspects of cultural binaries are dramatized" in the novel (p. 13). As she does not hesitate to know about new things, new environment and circumstance, she intuitively grows aware of the importance of knowledge in the life of an individual. To cut the entire matter short, she develops steadily a sense of self-importance, self-esteem and hindrance that affects her struggle for those things.

Such self-realization leads Gauri to a complete sense of ownership in her every decision. But it is vital that efforts should be made to unite the fragmented voice, unacknowledged experience and unidentified expectation. Only then, the differences or the distinctness come to the fore to have a specific identity. Wollstonecraft (1974) insists women not to ignore their distinct gender traits. She makes a call to respect those qualities which make woman a distinct individual. Social grouping and harmony among women belonging to any community and culture is instrumental in actualizing some of the long cherished visions of freedom and prosperity. Wollstonecraft spotlights:

Just because a woman's conduct is subservient to public opinion, her faith in matters of religion should be subject to authority. Every daughter ought to be of the same religion as her mother, and every wife to be of the same religion as her husband. Even if the religion she acquires is false, God does not see her acceptance of it as

wrong behavior, because of the docility that induces the mother and daughter to submit to the order of nature. (p. 59)

Nothing related to women is left as irrelevant and negligible. Everything appears to be equally important so far as the object of analysis is concerned. Thus, critical attention should be directed by the gender feminists to the specific object of analysis.

A similar fate is there in Gauri. Subash supplies the things that she needs. In terms of necessary things, there is no shortage. Every now and then, she feels misled and distracted. But Subash always comes to her aid. To come out of this confinement, she thinks about changing her immediate objects of preference. She comes out of her confined life in an apartment and begins to explore the neighboring surrounding. In the afternoon, after the rain ended, Gauri with a bold look:

“... walked along the damp sidewalk, up the hill, turning by the student union. She saw students going in and out, men in jeans and jackets, women in dark tights and short wool coats, smoking, speaking to one another. She crossed the quadrangle, past the lampposts with their rounded white bulbs” (p. 157).

Gauri's preference to explore the new surroundings is an index to her assimilating tendency and the willingness to relate oneself to the new social world. Awareness of individual selfhood arises in Gauri soon she tries to adapt to the strange surrounding and social life in Rhode Island.

The freedom which both teacher and students enjoy in the vicinity touches her positively. The professor smokes while lecturing class. Even boys are found putting their hands around the waist of their female classmates. The liberal prospect of campus life tempts her. She also attends class secretly. Gauri seems attracted towards the prospect of freedom to choose and to act:

There was a couple at the back, with their legs pressed together, the boy's arm draped around the girl's waist, stroking the material of her sweater. But Gauri found herself paying attention. Eventually, wanting to take notes, she searched in her bag for a sheet of paper and a pen. Finding no paper, she wrote her notes in the margins of the campus newspaper she had been carrying around. Later, on a pad she found in the apartment, she copied over what she had written. Surreptitiously, twice a week, she began attending the class. She wrote down the titles of the text on the reading list. (p. 158)

Gauri learns that identity can be formed through academic interaction and achievement. Her fascination with the academic and career oriented life often clashes with what her second husband expects from her.

Gauri has developed the notion that existential feminist forecasts in general. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir's puts forward the claim that "one is not born,

but rather becomes, woman” (p. 1) could rightfully mark the birth of an existential feminism. Existential feminism takes as its point of departure the notion that woman is the product of social and cultural construction. Its essence is that woman is other. But this approach also explores how freedom can only be achieved through the freedom of all human beings. Gauri’s belief in academic interaction and achievement makes her stronger than before and has developed the self-confidence that fascinates her in different spheres than what her husband thinks about. Subhash’s expectation on her as being a good mother and Gauri’s move on proving her distinct identity showing her potential clash in such a way that she is now really on the way to her femininity in real. This is what Beauvoir expected to happen.

Subash expects that it would be better if Gauri gave plenty of time to nurturing and upbringing of Bela. He expects her to be a responsible mother solely devoted to the nurturing and parenting. This expectation on the part of Subash often clashes with the new preferences and priorities of Gauri. Over time, monotony and the sense of being confined in the domestic duty disturb her. However, the realization of gradual empowerment encourages her to overcome these disturbing ailments. Women should struggle themselves to work out their salvation in every sphere of life as Wollstonecraft (1974) ascertains:

If a man of sense loves a woman like that, it can only be on account of her sex, and if he respects her it is because she is a trusty servant. To preserve his own peace he lets her scold the servants, and go to church in clothes made of the best materials. A man with only her level of understanding would probably not suit her so well, because he might wish to encroach on her territory and manage some domestic concerns himself. Yet women, whose minds are not enlarged by cultivation, or in whom the natural selfishness of sensibility has not been expanded by reflection, are very unfit to manage a family. (p. 45)

Men are tempted to get unpaid service from women. To get continuously the unpaid service of women, men have created several myths and tales about women. These images and myths about an affectionate mother serving altruistically to her husband and children are ploys to exercise power and influence over women.

Hence, the central concern of *The Lowland* is to highlight how valuable identity becomes in the moment of dire crisis. At every moment in our lives, identity does not become significant. It acquires value at a specific moment. So, Anjali Tripathy (2012) claims that “identity is a matter of becoming as well as of being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture (p. 3).” Similar nuances are put forward by Archana Verma Singh (2014), too. She has seen some “radical initiative” on Gauri (p. 261). But it is

pretty tough to decide if Gauri intentionally breaks tradition or not. It appears that she has not realized the importance of love and family instead of alone self-existence. She takes delight in refusing what saves life in crisis, and that after all undergoes constant transformation in her character, too.

Conclusion

Even occupying a tremendous space in scholarly eyes, *The Lowland* has not got ample spaces in scholarly articles looking through the aspects of defiance and self-empowering. So, this study may fill such gap and may open spaces for the further study. It comes to the point that the leading female characters of *The Lowland* – Gauri and Bela – are inspired by various incidences happened to their life to stand against the so-called convention which always stands as a barricade in their freedom. The societal constraint, the ill treatments of the families, the unwelcoming and fluid behavior of the male character Subhash, liberal social practices in American society, etc. motivated them to forsake conjugal, parental and cultural responsibilities etc. for the sake of self-identity and self-empowerment. They listened to their soul and focused on their individual existence denouncing what the male dominated society says and expects.

Even if gender differences are almost abolished these days, women may not be totally free from the pitfalls and hazards set by patriarchy. It is understood as the convention that has been creating a trap for those women who are on the way to securing the prospect of liberation and individual dignity as Gauri has to sacrifice her family for her own dignity and existence. Even Bela had to conceal her child's father's name in course of having a dignified and free life.

Gauri and Bela have to face countless obstacles, but still their willpower and determination to be self-reliant do not quiver. All of these troubles dwindle away and they feel self-empowered. Somehow they succeed in challenge male roles and rights, however, it is undeniable fact that the contribution and some liberal mindsets of Subhash are indispensable to the successive empowerment of Gauri and Bela. Though some frustrations, disappointment, and alienation arose in their process of self-empowerment, they successfully coped with these challenges and opened a golden space and avenue for the economic, social, and psychological empowerment by challenging the network of male oriented and dominated societies.

Although both female characters are closely connected to Subhash, however, he only seems liberal towards the social, academic, economic and psychological empowerment of Bela rather than Gauri. No matter he was very thoughtful towards Gauri that's why, he dared to marry his own widowed sister-in-law. But his inherited male superiority could not permit him to let Gauri go to university and to enhance her further career, that makes Gauri rebellious.

This proves that women must have a big heart to sacrifice everything for the sake of empowering themselves. It is not an easy task for women to get back their rights as an equal human. They have to fight and must have to face ups and downs. Bela also has to go through family trouble. Her beloved mother left her and his father not seems to convince her mother to come back home. This situation led her to mental shock and it changed her normal life.

This study concludes that Gauri embodies a femininity which is exceptional and self-empowered. The secret of her power lies in her capacity to go beyond forces of confinement and entrapment. Gauri becomes a powerful character in whom the researcher sees the struggle of self-existence and tries to escape stereotypes. In addition, such an independent trend is similar to the radical feminist trend which is still mostly remaining to accept by most of the societies of the globe. Regarding to Bela, she embodies a femininity which is least exceptional and mostly accepted. The secret of her power lies in her capacity to go back to the roots, norms and values of family, and go beyond forces of confinement of the single mother concept which are highlighted as she tries to accept their stereotypes.

Hence, the research comes up with the point that the long rooted convention and the practices are the main hurdles to getting equal and liberal status for women in the society. A strong and bold determination of defying such convention is required to achieve that goal which is not so easy and welcoming in the reception of it. The self-empowerment is only a key weapon to face such challenges. But after all it gives a pleasing end if such daring practices prevail and transfer from one generation to another opening the spaces of all kinds of possibilities.

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