Chapter I:

Concept of Rhetorical Devices and Kairos

This research work examines the use of rhetorical devices in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland (2013).* This research mostly analyzes Lahiri's concept of logos, pathos and ethos bringing Naxalite movement as Kairotic situation. It also illustrates Lahiri's use of kairotic situations to deliver the intended idea in an effective manner in this novel. Kairos of the text includes surrounding condition of discourse such as cultural, political, economic, social or technological context which provide meanings to the novel.

Lahiri's *The Lowland* describes the Naxalite movement. Importantly, the novel links this movement with the world of migration, dislocation and alienation which the characters have to go through in India as well as USA. Moreover, the novel presents this experience across two generations. The first generations of character are Gauri and Subash who were brought up in Indian traditional and patriarchal, practices and political revolution. They tolerated the brunt of living at such times. They also experience the American individualistic and materialistic culture. Both of them struggle hard to get adjusted in the American society, and fail to feel security and happy in their lives. Like the Naxalite movement that did not reach to a logical conclusion, the characters also do not reach to a final end. They do not achieve what they had desired long back. Similarly, there are second generation characters that have to go through different form of journey and sufferings. But without elaborating the tremendous difficulties which the first generation characters did go through in their journey from India to America, the one that the second generation goes cannot be explained.

The novel starts out in the Tollygunge area of Calcutta in the 1950s, in a middle-class family with two little boys. The two brothers, Subhash and Udayan, share close bond. But the bond breaks in the late 1960s as Udayan involves himself with the Naxalite uprising and Subhash finds himself unable to fully relate to the movement. Pursuing his further studies, Subhash leaves to Rhode Island. He returns home after receiving news of Udayan's death that he was killed by the police for his involvement in the Naxalite movement. While in Calcutta, Subhash meets Udayan's pregnant widow, Gauri, whom he then marries and takes her back to Rhode Island with him. Their relationship never works, and Gauri is unable to connect even with her daughter, Bela. Subhash, however proves a tender father to the girl. When Bela is twelve, Gauri moves to California to pursue an academic career, by leaving both her daughter and husband. After decades of separation and angst for all characters, a secret from the past concerning Udayan and Gauri's role in the Naxalite movement is revealed.

Winner of Pulitzer prize for fiction, Lahiri is a renowned writer particularly famous convincing her audience. She debuted from *Interpreter of Maldives* which brought many other awards for her. Meanwhile it brought confidence in her writing. Many critics believe that readers get mesmerized by her writing. She mainly demonstrate her issue by merely mentioning the issue that a character is facing. In her narrative she intensely establishes relationships with her audiences. Brina Finchono state:

> Jhumpa Lahiri has weaved together stories of sadness yet, has her readers leave feeling positive about her character. Although short in length, each story is powerful from start to finish and has the readers desiring to know

> more about the characters' lives. A collection worthy of the Pulitzer, I look forward to reading more of Lahiri's work. (21)

Despite the fact that, Lahiri possess Indian origin, she was brought up in America. She never experienced what was the life in India. As a result, Indian society and culture become a matter of imagination and subject of contemplation and research for her. In this novel, she makes Naxalite movement as a subject matter. This very subject matter is a subject of great many researches and contemplations for common people as well as researchers. *The Lowland* can be taken as a work that Lahiri uses to look at Indian society and its changing morals and values. No doubt, Naxalite movement was a real movement. It brought significant changes in Indian politics. Indian people did go through lots of turbulent times out of it. It was a communist movement started by Charu Majumdhar and his comrades. Lahiri takes this historically real event to evoke the changes which have happened or are happening in Indian society after the movement. This research aims to aruge that Lahiri has used it as a material or rhetorical devices to articulate the kind of emotions and ideas she aims. It tries to explore how this rhetorical device functions.

It is believed that a text either a novel or conversion or a joke becomes successful only after it is able to persuade audiences. To achieve this, writers and artists or text producers for that matter uses different techniques to decorate the text. Jhumpa Lahiri cannot be unique in this case. *The Lowland* contains various devices used by its creator to create the kind of emotions and ideas in the mind of the audience. Lahiri seems to be using or employing logos, pathos and ethos along with other rhetorical devices in a balanced manner. This makes one believe that Naxalite movement for Lahiri is a device. It is not exclusively historical event. It is a catalyst that helps to bring characters and plot on move. Her characters’ actions are shaped by

the movement though Lahiri cannot gather much sympathy for her characters. This failure, however, is less connected to the political movement. In fact, there are characters who are the immediate experiencers of the movement. Those who experience from distance also feel the consequences of the movement. The researcher believes that the powerful means of persuasion in *The Lowland* is the presence of right rhetorical devices such as logos, pathos and ethos. Naxal movement comes as reference and it justifies the central idea of text. As an immigrant writer, she has a big challenge to appeal audiences by bringing the local issue of Naxalite movement and its consequences which she never experienced.

On other hand, the publication of *The LowLand* has been arousing interest in a huge number of readers as they find the novel diverse from her previous one. This novel unlike the first one, tackles with history, politics and the movement. The Naxalite movement, central to its plot, has been seen in terms of the relationship that the characters go through. Before going into the text, it is necessary to introduce this movement in brief.

Naxalite movement began in 1967 with a peasant uprising in Naxalbari, a village in northern Bengal near the Nepali border. Initially led by armed members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the movement later broke away to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). It has largely followed Mao's doctrine of "people's war." The movement, born in the countryside, spread to the cities during the 1970s, attracting mainly educated, unemployed youth energized by the peasants' struggle for rights and recognition. Dilip Simeon in his discussion mentions

> The Naxalite movement is not a movement of landless peasants and tribals seeking to overthrow state power. It is a project defined as such by those who

> are neither peasants nor workers nor tribals, but who claim to represent their interests.(34)

This research aims to explore how Lahiri has employed the rhetorical devices mainly of ethos and spirit types to achieve the goal she wants to do. Since the subject matter itself is of political in nature, she does not treat it as a political matter. She deals it as a subject to arouse imaginative curiosity in the mind of her readers. She does not deal it from the perspectives of the initiators of its movements. Neither she deals it with the experience of those who are involved into it nor does she deal it as a subject that has brought changes in the life of the characters. Her characters live the brunt of this political movement. The movement works as a driving force in the novel. It works as a catalyst.

Thus the political plot of the novel is skillfully woven centering two assassinations- one by the Naxalites and other by the establishment power. Readers are almost made to believe that Udayan's death is the novelistic indictment for the "crimes" that he and his comrades had done by executing the unarmed policeman from the belief that "they were symbols of brutality, trained by foreigners" and that "each annihilation would spread the revolution. Each would be a forward step" (Lahiri 337).

Lahiri mentions her understanding of the Naxalite movement on acknowledgement part. As naxalite movement was the real event, she needs a lot of research to understand it from top to bottom so that she could project her ideas better. In an interview, with Cressida, she reveals that the author "wanted to understand the history completely and digest it" before she started to write. Her research thus helped her to develop the right kairos in formation and coherence of the kairos along with the central idea of the novel.

> Periodically I would read them. And I would take notes, and I would put them away. And I felt that I had to keep doing this over a period of many years…The initial phase was a lot of research, but it remained opaque, and then slowly the research, the history, became more clear to me, and the clearer it became, the less I felt that I needed it. (35)

Lahiri intend to sketch the response of the youths to the call of Charu Majumdar through the portrayal of Udayan's character. Nina Martyris in her seminal article "The Naxal Novel" comments, "Trapped as he is between India's new elites and the squalor of the lowland, Udayan is a fitting recruit for the movement- Marxist in philosophy, guerilla in practice that is the main subject of Lahiri's novel" (32).

In contrast, *The Lowland* is thick with historical details; Lahiri has not denied family and the aftermath of history on her characters. Nandini Dhar, "How to Solve the Problem of Udayan: Lahiri's *The Lowland* argues, "No historical event−whether it is slavery, indenture, rebellion, revolution, civil war, or even a natural disaster− is safe from writers' scrutiny right now. The most catastrophic the history of a particular place, the better it is for writer" (67). Dhar further writes,

> So honestly, I was a little taken aback when I came across an early review of JhumpaLahirs novel 'The Lowland ' which supposedly deals with Naxalbari. Is there a way one can write the story of Naxal Bari without writing about characters who engage in deliberate, political resistance? Even before I completed reading 'The lowland' I was aware of the fact that in this novel Thumpo had to push against her writer boundaries. In fact she pushed them quite a bit. She is not writing her, writerly comfort zone. (58)

A Marxist study of Lahiri's novel, *The Lowland,* affirms that the narrative is pitted against a political, historical and economic background. It is more of a historical

document than a fiction hovering around the characters, ambience and culture of two different parts of the world. Prasun Majhi explains,

> Lahiri's path-breaking novel, The Lowland is somewhat different from a major number of contemporary works in the sense that in this fiction, history and fictional representation merge into one another. Lahiri has develop deep into history, nurtured and fostered the historical details and finally set them free through her novel. (97)

In the ultimate analysis, the novel reverberates the Naxalite movement in Bengal− right from its birth to the predicament of the movement in the contemporary Bengal. But Lahiri has also dealt with a number of other issues or rather histories (though not as prominently as its depiction of the agrarian revolution of the 1967s) − the Partition, history of Tollygunge, Indian Independence, the 1943 riot between the Hindu and the Muslim, and so on.

Thus, the critics have studied the Naxalite movement in the text politically, economically and culturally. This research therefore is a departure. It believes that this novel can be studied as a use of best kairotic situation, as rhetorical devices to appeal the text. The presence of Naxal movement is a catalyst to the text however; it has succeeded to appeal the audiences as it makes the plotline real. Writer has intellectually linked the movement with her issue which she never experience. We can take the text to the next level by studying the rhetoric that Lahiri choose to appeal audiences by the use of pesties (pathos, ethos and logos).

Rhetoric is an art of persuasion. Finding the available means of persuasion is rhetoric but it is not persuasion in itself, rather is an act of the finding how the text is working. Rhetoric has become the necessary part of human interaction so we can neither avoid it nor remove it. Aristotle in his book rhetoric describes "Rhetoric then

may be defined as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever.” (26)

Rhetorical analysis is done for two purposes to find out how effective the argument is and to judge the quality of the argument. Kairos is also one element of rhetoric. Kairos,an ancient word, basically means time. That refers to ‘right time’ ‘Opportune time’ or appropriate time. This time can be of any size. It may mean something as short as just movement or as long as a season a year or even a long historical era. Kairos also includes the surrounding condition of discourse such as cultural political economic, social or technological context. According to Aristotle:

> But what is most important of all is that the judgement of the legislator does not apply to a particular case, but is universal and applies to the future, whereas the member of the public assembly and the dicast have to decide, present and define issues, and in their case love, hate, or personal interest is often involved, so that they are no longer capable of discerning the truth adequately; their judgement being obscured by their own pleasure or pain. (93)

Also, pesties means three main parts of communicative act, Ethos, Logos and Pathos. We analyze these aspects in argumentation. Argumentation is about argument itself which is most important element of argumentation. In each argumentation there is a speaker, there is his message and there are his audiences. Speaker related aspect of argumentation is called Ethos, message related aspect of argument is logos and audience related aspect of argumentation is called pathos. Aristotle further describes:

> Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on

> the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.(25)

The language of persuasion is believed to be natural. It should spontaneously come to audience so that he appears like a real speaker. Otherwise he will fail to generate proper pathos in audience. Artificial language also is taken as new language deception in argument.

The aim of this research is to examine critically how writer has used Naxatile movement to create the right rhetorical situation. Also my research will move towards the analysis of the ethos, pathos and logos used and offered in the text created by naxalite movement. Mainly, kairotic situation which is used to pursue the audiences will be looked after in order to justify whether such devices succeed to appeal audiences. The narrative of the text will also get some insights, which help to critically examine the success of the use of such rhetorical devices.

The analysis of use of rhetorical devices will be the basic tool to study Lahiri's *The Lowland*. The basic concept of rhetorical devices such as logos, pathos and ethos will be examined in coming parts of the research. Also, she will be critically examined whether she did justice to rhetorical devices (logos, pathos and ethos) in the text by bringing Naxalite movement.

Chapter II:

Naxalite Movement as Kairos in *The Lowland*

Any discourse always lies in a situation or a context. We call it rhetorical situation. The main elements of rhetorical situation are producer of the discourse, the discourse itself, the audience of the discourse, purpose or motifs of discourse, occasion or delivery and audience interpretation. Thus rhetorical analysis begins with an understanding of all this situation of discourse. In a broad sense collectively for this entire rhetorical situation are called Kairos.

Lahiri discusses Naxalite problem in *The Lowland* in which Udayan, being a college student, actively participates in the Naxalite movement in the 1960s, an uprising waged to eliminate injustice and poverty. Here, writer tactfully uses the Naxal movement to tie up the audiences to know its rise and consequences, which help the story to move on. The immigrant experience is always fertile ground for fiction, has built her literary career exploring this territory as it relates to characters of Indian origin in America, with all the attendant questions of identity, loyalty, memory and reinvention.

In particular Kairos, an ancient word, basically mean time, is timeliness, appropriateness, decorus, symmetry, balance- awareness of the rhetorical situation or circumstances. It is open moment of opportunity that also to ‘right time’, ‘opportune time’ or ‘appropriate time’. This time can be of any size. It may mean something as short as just a moment or as long as season, a year or even a long historical era. Kairos also includes the surrounding condition of discourse such as cultural, political, economic, social or technological context which is a name for the occasion and surrounding circumstances in which the discourse occurs. In each discourse the rhetor gets certain opportunities and constraints of way in presenting the things, ides or

arguments. Such opportunities and constraints situation are called kairotic or timely. The novelist tries to reproduce the spirit of the youths of Naxalite period by means of simple narration only. The load of direct information is sometimes too heavy here. There are the descriptions of Udayan's student life. The romantic involvement of Udayan and Gauri has also appeared in due course. But sadly we find no remarkable dialogue or situation to typify the era itself. All these episodes appear to be flimsy and superficial. Lahiri only vaguely names some of the places favourite to the youths of that time. "Because she went to Presidency, and Calcutta University was just next door, she searched for him on the quadrangle, and among the book-stalls, at the tables of the Coffee House if she went there with a group of friends" (52). This rather seems to be a dull and monotonous narration without any vibrant details of the places either through actions or through dialogues. The affair of Udayan and Gauri on the background of Naxalite movement pales into insignificance. She may feel she has "put everything in this story that needed to be there" (36). But a reader will realize that it is not unjustified to conclude Lahiri is more at home in her depictions of the lives at Rhode Island than the lives in Calcutta. Perhaps, she cannot be altogether held liable for her portrayal of the movement in such a superficial and opaque manner. It is really a difficult feat on the part of an expatriate writer to penetrate the souls of the youths of Calcutta of 1970's and the Naxalite movement. To accomplish this, a great deal of hard work and research for years are required and just some visits to Kolkata will not amply meet the requirements of this Herculean task. The work demands to be a part and parcel of the city at least for a time being. Undoubtedly, this kind of diligent and meticulous research was beyond the reach of the author simply for the geographical barrier. Thus the novel hardly appears to be a representative fictional counterpart of the Naxalite movement which is supposed to be intrinsic and

instrumental to the plot. Rather the novel seems to be a masterpiece accomplishment in depicting Bengali expatriate experience in America. However, Lahiri may be thanked for enkindling the interest of the international elite readers to the Naxalite movement in India that was self defeating in its tactics, its lack of coordination, it is unrealistic ideology. Whether this multigenerational story will pass the touchstones of time as one of the forerunners of a faithful study in English of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal or whether that position will be held to another one, lies on the hands of posterity.

Kairos also means the immediate moment by moment opportunities and constraints in presenting the argument. The skilled rhetor uses best opportunities and constraints in presenting the argument. The rhetor may face an audience initially uninterested in what the rhetor wants to say but if the rhetor is skillful, he will attempt the audience to be more receptive first by creating kairos(situation) when the kairos is created the rhetor can deliver the intended statement more effectively. We can relate Naxalite movement in the novel as kairotic situation. To show the actual sentiment of people towards Naxal movement, Lahiri *The Lowland* explains: “Among the communists in India there was dissent over the border war with china two years before.A breakaway group, sampathetic to china called itself the communist Party of India, Marxist: CPI(M)” (20).

In response to the brutal repression of peasant uprisings, the Naxalite movement in urban areas adopted what was called the “annihilation program,” which targeted people in uniform such as police officers and paramilitary personnel. Udayan’s involvement in the assassination of a policeman, we are given to understand, is part of this Naxalite strategy. He is a participant in the planning of the act, in procuring crucial information; he is present when the police constable was stabbed to death and

he painted a slogan with the blood of the dead man. We learn of Udayan's attempt at escape from the authorities, his haunting remorse for his action, his capture, and his family's bearing witness to his execution without trial by the police. The manner of Udayan's execution is consistent with the history of a draconian anti-insurgent operation which included on-the-spot shooting of known Naxalite cadres.

While the reader is offered thorough representations of Udayan's militant act and subsequent execution, the narrative is empathetically invested in only one of these events. There is a clear narrative distinction in the way the two deaths are treated. Udayan's execution by the police is presented as objectionable, even regrettable. But Lahiri does not dwell on the incident, she offers little to elicit the reader's sympathy for Udayan, nor does she encourage our moral outrage. While we know that Udayan participated in the assassination of a policeman, the text does not allow us to relate to the motivations behind that act. There is no depiction of the world and inner lives of Udayan and his comrades that could embed the assassination in a political and emotional framework. In sharp contrast, the policeman is located in an identifiable and sympathetic milieu. Prior to his death, we are given an intimate portrait of him as father to a young child, someone for whom policing was merely a job.

Lahiri has brought the context of murder of Udayan for engaging the reader's mood. Unless, writer grave the attention of reader he/she cannot share the thing they want to say. She in the starting of novel brings the naxalite movement for better understanding of the situation. Without credientiality reader merely trusts the writer as she was very far from the context of naxalite movement. Writer here uses different minute detail for explaining the situation. Some classical rhetoricians argue that the art or rhetoric is effective if it can create motif and kairos. The argument must start in right moment to deliver intended message. For example, in case of telling a joke , it

should start with proper set up to the level of punch line. If situation is not properly handled the joke won't arouse laughter in the audience.

Pisteis means three main parts of communicative act: Ethos, Logos and Pathos. These are the aspect of argumentation which should be closely analyzed to identify the proclamation of argumentation. Argumentation is about argument itself which consist of a speaker, his message and his audience. In short, speaker related aspect of argumentation is called ethos, message related aspect of argumentation is called logos and audiences' related aspect of argumentation is called pathos.

Aristotle elaborated on his definition of each of these types.

> *Ethos* has to do with who you are and how you come across. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others. An example of an ethical appeal: "I've served at this university for 28 years"—an appeal from the speaker's experience.(34)
>
> *Pathos* involves stirring up people's emotions. It includes appeals to people's pity, anger, fear, hope, and the like. An example of an emotional appeal: "For-profit colleges are destroying higher education"—as stated here, an appeal to the listener's fears and values.(56)
>
> *Logos* is the use of argumentation. This category includes arguments, data, statistics, and all types of reasoning. An example of a logical appeal: "Research data demonstrates that students who have attended for-profit colleges have a much higher debt load than students at private or public colleges"—an appeal to statistics.(69)

In ethos, the speaker should be trustworthy having trust inspiring qualities. Such qualities are good reputation, intelligence, fair mindedness and honesty. Speaker

needs to have sufficient knowledge of the subject as well. He should show the reasons for trust to the audiences. Pathos means argument should generate proper emotion in the audience. That means argument should generate proper mood or feeling in the audience so that they will be motivated to believe or do something. Types of pathos in audiences are like desire fear, anger, love, hatreds and so on. Such pathos becomes the determiners of making a person to take actions. It is all about rhetor handling of audiences' emotion.

Ethos is a Greek word meaning 'character', in terms of persuasive language, it is an appeal to authority and credibility. Ethos is a means of convincing an audience about the reliability of character or credibility of the speaker/writer, or the credibility of the argument. Moreover, it is an important tool of persuasion as it can let audience to judge rhetor as his/her work. Audiences look the work either it is credible and trustworthy or not, which can be much easier to persuade them.

For making her work more credible she has include the minute detail of history, history of rise of naxal movement. She explains the fascination of youth towards communist philosophy which merely disappear after certain year of failure.

> Udayan reached under the mattress, which was where they stashed their odds and ends. Notebooks, compasses and rulers, razor blades to sharpen their pencils, sports magazines. The instructions for putting the radio together. Some spare nuts and bolts, the screwdriver and pliers they'd needed for the task. Using the screwdriver, he started taking the radio apart again. The wiring to one of the coils or switches must be loose, he said. (69)

In logos, argument refers to reason or evidences that are given to support the conclusion. It is rhetors' reasoning itself. If he includes sufficient reasons and

evidence, his argument will be persuasive to the audience. To be persuaded audiences have to understand what the rhetor says. Therefore logos have to make sense to the audience otherwise there will be no question of persuasion. In full persuasive essay, ethos, logos and pathos support each other.

Logos is a Greek word meaning ‘a word’ or ‘reason’. In rhetoric, it is an appeal to logic and reason. It is used to persuade an audience by logical thought, fact and rationality. Logos can be a useful tool of persuasion because if you can ‘prove’ an argument through logical and sound reasoning, your audience is more likely to be persuaded.

Lahiri portrays Udayan murder as an unambiguously grievous crime. The manner of Udayan’s execution, on the other hand, is noted only in passing and eliciting little beyond a rote condemnation of police brutality. The text’s real investment rests in the authorial judgment of the policeman’s assassination. Lahiri’s strength lies in her command over the technicalities of writing. Neat, precise descriptions make certain parts of the world – from Tollygunge Club in Kolkata to storms in Rhode Island – vivid to the reader. As a narrator, she lingers upon moments, memories and objects from her characters' largely unremarkable lives, turning them into touchstones for the grief, disillusionment and guilt that are intrinsic to *The Lowland*. For all this attention to detail, the novel covers four decades in 340 pages without seeming jumpy. It’s easy to follow Lahiri’s lead as she elegantly leaps across oceans to another continent and a different decade.

Pathos is a Greek word meaning ‘suffering’ or ‘experience’, and it is used in persuasive speech as an appeal to the emotions of the audience. Pathos is the way of creating a persuasive argument by evoking an emotional response in the audience/reader. We can use pathos to persuade audience by appealing to an

audience's hopes and dreams, playing on their fears or worries, or appealing to their particular beliefs or ideals.

Udayan's connection with the Naxalite movement is portrayed with neither empathy nor even conviction. As part of his political training, Udayan leaves for the countryside for a month to live and work with agricultural workers. Instead of just alluding to rural poverty as a sociological phenomenon, here was an opportunity for her to dwell on the motivations behind Udayan's political beliefs. Through Udayan's experiences, the narrative could have explored what it means to live under grinding feudal oppression, to be forced into a subhuman existence for generations, and to pass it on to one's children. She might have woven into the narrative the everyday texture of deprivation, injustice, and humiliation. That would have humanized and contextualized the militant peasant uprisings against feudal landowners.

In fact, Naxalism is rarely embedded in the experiences of the characters; the brothers learn of Naxal activities through the news or from fellow passengers on a train. It creates a cinematic effect of the camera zooming out from its focus on private lives to a city caught in the whirlwind of a political agitation. Thus, there is mention of Udayan and his comrades attending political study groups and of their militant activism, but little engagement with the lives of those young people and what drew that generation to sacrifice their immediate interests and safety to make common cause with the rural poor. In a measured authorial voice, the novel notes the draconian counterinsurgency operations, during which nearly everyone under age thirty was treated as a suspect; the rampant state-sanctioned torture of young activists; the disappearances; and the killing of unarmed prisoners. Prakash Singh in his path-breaking book The Naxalite Movement in India has given a praiseworthy remark on The Naxalite movement and its ideology:

> The Naxalbari uprising did not achieve much by itself but is nevertheless a watershed in the history of the Indian Communist movement. Its importance is symbolic. Here was a movement aimed at transforming the society. Here was an uprising blessed by Peking. From Naxalbari the sparks flew all over the country, and there was political upheaval. (Singh 15)

The narrative does not portray why and how, someone like Udayan would have been drawn to the movement. How did Udayan and others of his generation transcend middle-class insensitivity to the plight of the rural poor? What was their own experience of a crippling social and economic system? In what ways did political organizing channel their energies? What was it like for Udayan to be young in Calcutta in 1969, and know that he was part of a worldwide movement for social justice? The little that we learn of Udayan's character surfaces through the memories of Bijoli, his grieving mother. Bijoli reminisces about Udayan's intelligence, his sensitivity, his concern for the poor and the weak, yet these characteristics do not acquire much resonance beyond the distraught recollections of a bereft mother.

Udayan's death is not the only novelistic indictment for the "crimes" of the movement. Lahiri reserves an even more severe judgment for Gauri. She escapes Udayan's fate, and moves to the United States, where she begins life anew with his brother and her daughter. Through this move, Lahiri places Gauri in her familiar territory of immigrant experience. But Gauri is unlike her other immigrant characters; there is little authorial sympathy for this character. Her move to another country produces in her neither curiosity for the new nor nostalgia for the old. It is this pervasive indifference, a fundamental inability to connect, which becomes Gauri's

punishment for her part in the Naxalite movement. Lahiri explains how naxalite movement is still in Gauri mind even after ages:

> She truns on her laptop, raises her spectales to her face. She reads the day's headlines. Once in a while Gauri notices a piece in American paper mentioning Naxalite activity in various part of India, or in Nepal. Who were they? Was this new movement sweeping up young men like Udayan and his friends? Would Calcutta ever experience that terror again? (335)

Initially,Gauri strikes one as a remarkably interesting character. In her life experiences, her interests, her relationship with Udayan, her flouting of all familial expectations through her marriage and her nascent involvement in the Naxal movement, there is much potential for compelling character development. That promise, however, remains unfulfilled. Once Gauri marries Subhash and moves to Rhode Island, her character becomes increasingly opaque. Her one distinguishing characteristic is a resistance to all relationships. In the end, her long, successful, and austere life, free of sustained emotional attachment, could have been ascribed to authorial excess and left at that, were it not for another failure on Gauri's part. She abandons her twelve-year-old daughter, Bela, with hardly any explanation and pursues her own life without regrets. This abandonment of her child cannot be dismissed as mere authorial excess. The reader is forced to judge Gauri for the cruelty of her act, if not her intentions. And decades later, when Gauri learns from an unforgiving Bela that, in contrast to Gauri's emotionally barren life, both Bela and Subhash thrived in their own ways, the reader can't help but find some satisfaction in this emotional justice.

Initially she tried to mingle with the mixed Indian community: for instance, she was happy to mix with other women of the University at the dinner party of Narasimhan and Kate. Later she withdrew saying she did not have anything common with them. Subhash found it quite disturbing when she cut her hair short, dramatically altering her face and adopted the American style of dressing. Certain irrational fears haunted Gauri before and after the birth of Bela, her child. After Bela was born, Gauri was aware "how the slightest oversight on her part could cause Bela to be destroyed" (145). She felt Bela was her child and Udayan's, and Subhash for his helpfulness was simply playing a part. But soon Bela seemed to recognize Subhash: "To accept him and to allow him to ignore the reality that he was an uncle" (146). As the years passed Gauri is found to be withdrawing little by little from her role as a mother, contrary to the position she had naturally asserted earlier stating, "I'm her mother"(146). On the other hand, Subhash, who according to Gauri was just role playing, strives to achieve the implication of his promise to Gauri, "I'll make it [Bela] mine, Gauri" (137).

Why does Lahiri reserve such judgment for Gauri? Udayan is executed by the state, but Gauri is punished by her author for her participation in the Naxalite movement. She, too, played a part in the assassination of the policeman by Udayan and his comrades; it was her job to observe and report back on the policeman’s daily routine. In fact, it is through her eyes that we see a man walking his little son home; a father-son companionship both quotidian and precious. Gauri’s guilt, even though unstated, emotionally paralyzes her. Udayan confesses to Gauri that after what he has done, he could not bring himself to parent a child, and since their guilt is shared, Gauri’s life becomes an acceptance of that punishment. Even though she gives birth to their daughter, Gauri finds herself unable to forge a bond with her child. However, the fatherly tenderness Subhash felt for Bela, was not the same on Gauri's end. Though

she cared for Bela capably, she seemed quite distracted. Bela was quick to observe this: "You're not paying attention, Bela protested, when Gauri's mind strayed"(161). She behaved "as if she'd reversed their roles, as if Bela were a relative's child and not her own"(159).

As *The Lowland* unfolds, we see that the story is about the indictment of that one militant act in which Udayan and Gauri were both involved. It is about the long-term consequences of the political assassination of a man who was also a father. After such crime, what forgiveness? By making the assassination the source of the narrative's moral and emotional logic, the novel reduces the movement itself to an act of crime. Lahiri's depiction of Naxalism is largely in tune with conservative historiography — a selective rendering that casts the movement as well-intentioned but wrong-headed and devastating in the way it played out. Lahiri's isolation of an act of Naxalite violence for literary exploration, while providing little more than a conventional overview of the context, has the effect of depoliticizing, even criminalizing, the entire movement.

Lahiri is entitled to her critique of the Naxal strategy of "annihilation" that targeted state officials. My issue with the novel does not relate to her position on a particular strategy; rather it is that while locating it at the heart of her narrative, Lahiri does not provide a humanized reading of the Naxal movement. It is entirely possible to be critical of aspects of a movement or even of a movement in its entirety while offering contextualized, intimate portrayals of its origins, justifications, and dynamics. A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*, for instance, provides a scathing critique of the later-stage militancy of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, while at the same time offering a deeply historicized and sympathetic portrayal of the driving force behind the Tamil movement. In that novel, the political is explored through the intimate life experiences of the characters; it is never a state-constructed backdrop. Sivanandan's

empathetic investment in the historical process is a characteristic sadly lacking in *The Lowland*.

The novelist has remarked that her inspiration for the novel was an incident that took place in her grandparents' neighborhood in Calcutta. Two brothers who were Naxal activists had been executed by the police in front of their family. For Lahiri, the poignancy of the incident is located in its familial core; the political is incidental. In her rendering, the familial and the political may intersect at times, but usually run on parallel tracks. She is unable to appreciate how the political can dwell within the realm of the affective. In exploring the different contexts of the incident, she had to acknowledge the political, but there seems to have been little genuine curiosity regarding the motivations of the executed brothers.

Since the political activity is of little interest to Lahiri, the politics she subscribes to are grounded in an easy and available critique of left radicalism. Thus Udayan, grappling with the perceived futility of the movement as well as his own imminent death, questions Che Guevara's belief that the "revolution is the important thing and that each one of us alone is worth nothing." In the established tradition of left-bashing, her character is made aware of the sanctity of the individual over and above any political process. She remains oblivious to the possibility that, for a character like Udayan, the cause of a revolution could be inherently personalized and its experience not in contention with other aspects of individuality. Similarly, Gauri, confronted with the failures in her own life, is drawn to the news of Naxal leader KanuSanyal's suicide. Her dark fascination with the leader's final act is far more compelling than her interest or involvement in the movement ever was. Ironically, the political meaningfully resonates with Lahiri's characters only for imagined messages of defeat and loss.

In sharp contrast to Udayan and Gauri, Bela, the second-generation immigrant and hapless victim of a marriage of convenience, benefits from the writer's abundant empathy. While Gauri's motivations in abandoning her daughter remain obscure, Bela's crippling suffering is carefully portrayed. Lahiri's remarkable skills in depicting the nuances of pain and its after-effects are at play in Bela's quest for emotional anchors. Such oppositional ideology, which often originates from private angst and transforms little beyond lifestyle choices, has Lahiri's blessings. Bela's parents, however, are censoriously judged for advocating another ideology that seeks a far more fundamental transformation of exploitative structures. Her empathetic rendering of Bela's life speaks to her strength. The unfortunate part is that Lahiri's empathy is limited only to characters like Bela and the universe she inhabits.

Lahiri may dislike the label "immigrant writer," but it is doubtful that *The Lowland* will do much to change that reputation. The greatest failing of *The Lowland* is that while the Naxal movement is academic to her, it is still the primary catalyst for the plot. In an interview with NPR, the author expressed her reservations when she spoke of the Naxal activists as "basically kids" attracted by an ideology with a certain appeal. The mature, responsible Subhash echoes the authorial position when he is skeptical that an "imported ideology could solve India's problems."

Whatever the merit of such critique, she could have chosen to express her perspective through a literary and humanistic engagement with the political. Instead she simply patronizes and dismisses the movement, a gesture that resonates well with her liberal readers, who embrace multiculturalism but shun "extremist" ideologies.

Ultimately, she remains confined by a sensibility invested in cultural knowledge unencumbered by questions of power and ideology. It is a sensibility that works well within the bounds of immigrant and familial fiction. *The Lowland*, unfortunately, crumbles under the burden of a subject that remains outside its author's ambit of sympathy.

Chapter III: Conclusion

Lahiri's attempt to the use of Rhetorical Devices and Kairos

For *The Lowland,* partly set in Calcutta in the sixties and seventies, during the throes of the Maoist Naxalite movement, Lahiri ambitions are of a different order. She steps out of the sphere of navel-gazing immigrant fiction and frames the novel with a political movement of which she has no experiential knowledge. Like her earlier work, *The Lowland* made a splash as a finalist for both the prestigious Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award for Fiction, and yet, almost every major review of the novel has remarked on the stagnant quality of the narrative, the flat, detached characters, and the tepid pace. None, however, has identified the cause for this failure in an otherwise extraordinarily skilled writer. The single reason that is sometimes cited is her inability to translate her mastery of the short-story form into that of the novel. Lahiri's failure in *The Lowland* is not one of style, but of sensibility. She has little writerly investment in the ethos and spirit of the political culture she chooses to depict, exhibiting neither imaginative curiosity about that era and its politics, nor genuine sympathy for the cause that motivates some of her characters. She is remarkably skilled at mapping the tapestries of emotions, flounders here in the construction of compelling characters. Naxalism is the catalyst for the plot, and her characters' actions are often shaped by the movement, but because she herself cannot muster much sympathy for her characters, the affective is hollowed out of political meaning and the central characters denuded of a compelling structure of motivation. The failure, however, is not a general one; aspects of the novel that are less connected to the political movement do not fare as poorly. In fact, characters who remain untouched by Naxalism are delineated with the precision and care that have long been characteristic of her fiction.

Lahiri manages her characters without either condemning or forgiving them. Udayan is a victim of police brutality, but he's also a killer (the extent of his involvement in the guerrilla movement is slowly revealed as the novel progresses). Subhash asks his mother, "why did they kill him?" and she replies, "he was your brother … how can you ask such a thing?" But we understand Subhash's love for Udayan—a love that is not ignorant of his faults or crimes. This mixture of victimhood and culpability is evident in many of the characters. Gauri is one of the best examples: we feel pity for her when we see how lonely and mistreated she is in Udayan's absence; we want to take her with us, rescue her like Subhash does. But later, when Gauri abandons Bela and Subhash to pursue her career, our pity turns to contempt.

By the end of the novel, we have come to know four generations of this family; we know how much the characters' present lives are determined by their shared past, how tangled their old-worlds and new-worlds are. These characters define themselves in contrast to their history. "I am who I am," Bela imagines saying to her mother. "I live as I do because of you." As she grows older, Bela strives to be a caring and dedicated mother. She rejects Gauri's intellectual lifestyle, her passion for academics, and instead seeks a meaningful connection with living beings; she raises her daughter, Meghna, falls in love with Drew, and learns to grow her own food.

With this large, multi-generational scope, Lahiri does what she does best: she moves seamlessly through time—sometimes pausing to describe one moment in minute detail, other times sketching the passage of many years in only a couple of paragraphs. She's as efficient as always, her language at once simple and transfixing. When Gauri returns to Rhode Island, years after abandoning her family, Bela

remembers in detail the day her mother left: “The ripe heat of August, the door to the study left open and the desktop nearly bare. The grass sprouting to her shoulders, spreading before her likes a sea.” We get lost in these descriptions of the past, but we quickly snap back into the present. “Even now,” she writes, “Bela felt the urge to strike her.” This combination of lyricism and short declarative sentences makes Lahiri’s language simultaneously vast and concise.

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