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Critique of Traditional Gender Roles in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

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Letter of Approval

The research paper entitled, "Critique of Traditional Gender Roles in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Tara Poudel has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This research paper explores Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* as a novel that interrogates traditional gender roles. Unlike traditional roles of a loving and caring mother, Gauri, the mother, is projected as a very rebellious and dynamic character who fights against the ideology of patriarchal society. Furthermore, her extramarital affair, involvement in homosexuality, her challenge to social taboos, and her appetite for studying philosophy are some of the examples of how she questions the traditional gender roles. The paper establishes how traditional gender roles are being transformed and reversed. For this, the paper has employed the concept of "performative gender" as discussed by Butler in her book *The Gender Trouble*. Many critics have examined the novel from gender perspectives but the paper focuses on the performative nature of gender. Moreover, this paper also questions Lahiri's choice to make Gauri as a mother uninterested in nurturing and who in turn is obsessed with philosophy. Even if Lahiri has shown Gauri a bold and courageous character that is capable of crossing the boundary of patriarchal society, she also has portrayed the family is shattered and consequences of such transgression as the characters suffer from essential isolation.

Keywords

Performative gender, homosexuality, patriarchy, gender roles, shattered, isolation

Introduction:

This research paper focused on Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013), studies the subversion of gender roles in the modern society. The novel implicitly shows how gender is constructed, it means, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed and thus can be challenged and dismantled in any time. In her novel *The Lowland*, Lahiri presents a courageous and independent woman who resists the traditional gender roles, based on conventional patriarchal ideology. Lahiri employs Gauri and Subhash to show the subversion of gender role; through them she questions the traditional beliefs that certain gendered- behavior are natural and normative. In the novel Gauri is a female character who is bold, independent and career-oriented. She is no more like a traditional kind of woman who silently sacrifices all their desires and dreams for the sake of family. Traditional stereotypical roles are created in the society so that the biased attitude about masculinity and femininity could persist. Patriarchal ideology advocates the supreme power of male; and it seems to be natural because of its long history. Here, in case of Gauri, she does not want to remain submissive and weak woman as defined by traditional gender. For patriarchal society, a woman's extramarital affairs are considered as a matter of shame and humiliation. But Gauri engages herself in extramarital as well as homosexual relationship. She fearlessly expresses her passion for a boy as well as for a girl. Her bold ideas concerning the quest for autonomous identity reinforce the challenging attitude of traditional patriarchal definitions of gender. In this regard, this novel can be taken as a novel that questions the stereotypical roles of gender which implicitly advocate for women's equal position in the society.

Many critics have analyzed Lahiri from different perspective but this research paper focuses on the performative nature of gender. The researcher here has used the concept of

Butler's performativity to reach the conclusion. Furthermore, this research paper also questions upon the Lahiri's choice to make Gauri a mother uninterested in nurturing in turns obsessed with philosophy. An unhappy and lonely family whose members are shattered as a consequences of a reversal of traditional gender roles, with an ambivalent mother and a flexible, gentle father is a crucial part of what Lahiri is exploring. At the end of the novel, it seems that, Lahiri too is unable to come out from the male dominated society which supposes mother to nurture family and stay within the boundary of own home.

Method:

I am employing the notion of "performative gender" as proposed by Judith Butler to study the complexity of gender formation in *The Lowland*. The concept of gender performativity is at the heart of Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler departs from the common assumption that sex, gender and sexuality exist in relation to each other. According to her idea one who is biologically female is not compulsorily expected to display 'feminine' traits and to desire men. She claims that gender is 'unnatural' and for her there is no necessary relationship between one's gender and one's body. In her terms, "the performance of gender, sex and sexuality is about power in society" (4). In her vision, gender and heterosexuality are constructed as natural because the opposition of the male and female sexes is perceived as natural in the social fantasy.

Regarding this issue the philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*(1949)says, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (7). The field emerged from a number of different areas such as the sociology in the 1950s, the theories of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the work of feminist such as Judith Butler. Each field regards 'gender' as a practice and as a performative phenomenon.

With regard to the concept of the construction of gender, Stuart Hall's concept of stereotype equally corresponds. As Hall argues, "stereotyped means reduced to a few essential, fixed in Nature by a few, simplified characteristics" (249). Stereotyping reduces the individual to the stable identity. That is to say, it fixes the identity and ignores the differences. Hall further argues that the stereotypes are socially and culturally constructed. If the meaning is fixed, it would be impossible to change, since the meaning is constructed in the course of the time, we can change this stereotype by assigning the new meaning. The same thing happens in the construction of feminine and masculine identity. Some stereotypes are imposed by the society to the females as well to the males, so without recognizing the individual differences society just accepts us to fulfill those stereotypes.

The concept of gender performativity is at the heart of Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble*. Butler departs from the common assumption that sex, gender and sexuality exist in relation to each other. According to her idea one who is biologically female is not compulsorily expected to display 'feminine' traits and to desire men. She claims that gender is 'unnatural' and for her there is no necessary relationship between one's gender and one's body. In her terms, "the performance of gender, sex and sexuality is about power in society" (4). In her vision, gender and heterosexuality are constructed as natural because the opposition of the male and female sexes is perceived as natural in the social fantasy.

The crux of Butler's argument is that the artificial coherence of sex, gender and sexuality is culturally constructed; the repetition of stylized acts in time. These repetitive stylized bodily acts establish the appearance of an essential, natural coherence. This is the argument for which Butler theorizes gender, along with sex and sexuality, as performativity. The rules of the society are just for the benefit of some normative heterosexuality so, it is not real. If the rules are not

natural or essential, Butler argues that they do not have any claim to justice. Since those rules are historical and rely on their continual enactment by people, then they can be challenged and changed through the performative acts.

Butler opines that gender identity is 'performative' to stress that no interior essence, no 'real' self exists. Gender is 'performative' because it has no 'reality' at all, no natural core. In Butler's view all the identities are seem to be real but in reality they are just produced one. Female is independent being like male who can perform anything equals to male. Not only independent they can exist in the world without male also.

Traditional gender roles represent woman an inferior creatures, they are forced to accept the laws and costumes that always make them inferior in various ways. It is said that "traditional gender roles cast, man rational, strong, protective and decisive; they cast woman as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive" (Tyson 85). Such patriarchal ideology is spread all over the world that advocates the supreme power of male; and it seems to be natural because of its long history.

This is the subversion or criticizing of gender roles: the researcher is going to use this tool to analyze the text, *The Lowland*.

Literature Review:

The *Lowland* has been examined by numerous critics through various perspectives since its publication. Being cautious about the future and freedom Gauri abandons Bela and Subhash in very kindless and inhuman manner. Noreen Malone explains why Lahiri's chose to make Gauri, a mother, uninterested in nurturing, but obsessed with philosophy. According to Malonne, "Gauri's indifference as a mother is the heart of the story. It begins with her pregnancy, with her sitting in on philosophy classes at the university. After her daughter, Bela is born, philosophy

begins to absorb her entirely and she officially signs up for classes" (31). Lahiri chose to make Gauri a mother uninterested in nurturing, but obsessed with philosophy. What happens to a family in which there is a reversal of traditional gender roles, with an ambivalent mother and a flexible, gentle father, is a crucial part of what Lahiri is exploring. But Lahiri too is unable to come out from the male-dominated society which suppose mother to nurture family and stay within the boundary of own home.

Katherine A. Powers elaborates upon Gauri's negligence towards her daughter Bela, "nursing her own sorrow and frustration, and finally, secludes herself from the family, taking up study toward what becomes a doctorate in philosophy. Subhash, who has achieved a university teaching position, has to look after the child, after everything in fact" (46). These lines show how the notion of traditional gender roles are transforming, the role of father and mother is now fluctuating so we cannot find any solo role to be played. Although the concept of Katherine somehow corresponds with the main concept of the paper, it employs the performative gender as proposed by Butler which stresses upon the gender roles being real only because of its repeated use.

Likewise, ArchanaBarma Singh focuses on the issue of female iconoclasm. Her article analyzes the role of female played by Gauri in the novel, where to pursue the career and her own dreams of studying philosophy, Gauri rejects the feminine prototype. Archana opines:

The final chasm in their marriage takes place when unexpectedly coming home early one day, Subhash finds Bela abandoned by her mother in the house.

Subhash punishes her by not speaking to her for a week. "The day he broke his silence, he said, my mother was right. You do not deserve to be a parent. The privilege was wasted on you" (175). But, for the sake of their daughter both

Gauri and Subhash continue to live under the same roof. She continues to pursue her further studies, travelling to Boston for a Doctoral programme. Gauri can be seen as an iconoclast, who shatters the preconceived notions of what she should and must do by abandoning her daughter and husband. The cutting of her hair and her sari's are the first signs of this rebellion.

Here the writer has used the concept of Gynocriticism, the term coined by Elaine Showalter, to reach to this idea. According to The Gynocriticism approach, the gender can be viewed in the context of its social and cultural aspects. Furthermore, it also believes the concept that gender is social phenomena and sex is biological construct. This paper, unlike Singh's focus on Iconoclasm discusses about the performative nature of gender. Although both the views rely upon the changing roles of male and female, Singh stresses on Iconoclasm and Gynocriticism, whereas, this paper focuses on Butler's view of performative nature of gender.

Michiko Kakutani in her *The New York Times* review projects Gauri as a cold, selfish woman, apparently faulting Lahiri for creating an unrelatable character. She argues:

While Gauri is cold and withdrawn in response to Subhash's kindness, a careful reader sees clues throughout the novel that indicate the reason behind her decision to escape her in-laws by marrying their other son. Gauri is an angry, selfish woman, who will repay Subhash's generosity and kindness- and his efforts to invent a new life for them in Rhode Island- with chilly disregard" (5).

Thus, though other critics also have studied Lahiri's *The Lowland* from a gender perspective, this research report is quite distinct in the sense that it has studied this novel through the gender perspective, particularly through the performative nature of gender as discussed by Butler.

Furthermore, this research paper also questions upon Lahiri's choice to make Gauri a mother uninterested in nurturing, but obsessed with philosophy. Lahiri never gives us real insight into Gauri's decision-making or psychology, instead she just focuses on Subhash slow, painful efforts to rebuild a life for himself in the wake of Gauri's departure. It seems that, Lahiri is unable to come out from male-dominated society which supposes mother to nurture family and stay within the boundary of own home. Lahiri shows the reason of family unhappiness as mother's searching for independent and career. This research report insights upon the view that unhappiness is not because of Gauri's indifference towards her family but because of Subhash indifference towards Gauri's appetite for philosophy and freedom, for which he had promised earlier but forgot totally when the time of implementation came.

Performative Gender in *The Lowland*:

The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri is a multi-generational tale that stretches almost five decades set in Tollygunge and Rhode Island in the twentieth century. It deals with the women's desire for self identity, a desire for self recognition and how the same desire for self identity leads to alienation, suffering and frustration. This novel also subverts the existing gender roles by challenging the norms of gender, which are constructed, in accordance of male favors. The contemporary society is based on the gender biased ideology, where females are given the limited floor. Females are both restricted from power and property, instead are limited only up to four walls of kitchen and treated as the child rearing machine. Lahiri too seems to be the by-product of the same contemporary society. Though she seems to be dissatisfied with the contemporary gender ideology of society and is presenting female trying to be powerful and self dependent, she could not completely come out from patriarchal ideology as she presents Gauri as lonely and frustrated because of her own decision of abandoning her husband and daughter.

Feminist thinkers are of the view that both men and women should coexist properly, in one's absence, the other is incomplete, and women cover half of the sky of the world. The development of the world rests on the equal progress of well-being of both the sexes; but in the practice there is vast difference, women are completely dominated by men and are defined as the half men. Lahiri turns upside down, the existing gender roles is questioned by her by depicting the mother uninterested in nurturing, obsessed with philosophy and father despite having university teaching position looks after his child and has kind heart towards almost all the characters of the novel.

Traditionally, gender roles represent women as inferior creature; beings whose subjectivity is consequence of the internalized patriarchal programming. It is argued that, "traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective and decisive; they caste women as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive" (Tyson 85). These gender roles have been used very successfully in the society to justify inequalities, which is done to women by men. Such kind of traditionally accepted assumption about the gender role does not apply in the case of Gauri in the novel, *The Lowland*. She redraws and overthrows such false sets of patriarchal stereotypes by refusing to be stuck in the traditional kinds of gender roles. She establishes herself as a strong, bold, determine and self dependent human being who is capable of fulfilling her inner desire despite the hindrances caused by patriarchal society.

For the fulfillment of her intense desire to pursue the dream on philosophy, she is even ready not to take care of her child, which superficially shows as a negative character and incapable of being mother but if we analyze deeply we come to know that being mother is not female's natural desire, it is just being made natural by the male members of the society. This is further reflected in these lines:

She asked Subhash if they could hire somebody, to give her time to take a survey of German philosophy that met twice a week. Though Bela was five now, in Kindergarten, she still attended school for only half the day. Gauri said that this was a reasonable solution, given that Subhash was busy, given that that knew no one else who could help. He told her no. Not for the money it would cost but on principle not wanting to pay a stranger to care for Bela. (162)

Gauri does not want to just spend her time on Bela rather she wants to use it in her study and to pursue her career on philosophy not on child rearing. Here, Subhash seems to be rather kindhearted and Gauri strong enough to compromise her traditional gender roles, which shows that the gender roles are performative and can be changed in changed time and context.

In the novel Gauri felt to be betrayed by Subhash, for he had promised one thing and now compelling her to do another. He seems to be friendly who gives his wife all kind of freedom that she wants to determine her future and career herself, but in reality it is just opposite. This can be clear from these lines:

Though he had encouraged her to visit the library in her spare time, to attend lectures now and again, she realized that he didn't consider this her work. Though he'd told her, when he asked her to marry him that she could go on with her studies in America, now he told her that her priority should be Bela. (162)

In the society there are certain roles to play and those roles are guided by the certain social discourses, which regard male as out-going, career oriented, bold and female as nurturing, submissive who only wants to engage in household works. But just opposite is true in the novel.

Willing to compromise, he told her he would try to rearrange his schedule. He began to leave earlier on certain mornings, and return, a few days a week, by late

afternoon. She registered for the class and went to the bookstore, filling a basket with books. She bought a packet of pens and a dictionary. A wire-bound notebook bearing the university's seal. (162)

From the above excerpt, it is clear that Gauri unlike traditional mother is fully consumed by books and Subhash unlike traditional father is interested in nurturing and even managing his time to take care of his daughter Bela. When Bela is born, philosophy begins to absorb Gauri entirely. When Bela is little older, she begins to leave her alone for classes and for increasing stretches of time. Later, when Gauri becomes a PhD student, she is afraid to leave her manuscript alone in the home for fear it might be harmed. If the gender roles are natural, the activities of Gauri and Subhash are impossible to occur. These show the performative nature of gender which is not innate and gifted by nature rather it is the subject to be changed in certain time and context. Regarding this view Jim Osborne says, "As such, gender differences are not the result of 'natural' influences which originate from sexed bodies, but are instead the product of learnt behaviours that produce (and reproduce) the illusion of stable identities" (503). This saying clearly shows that the gender roles are just the construction of the society not nature.

In one incident Gauri and Bela were on the way to school and waiting for a school bus and because of rain some kind of insects have come out on the way. Bela was afraid but Gauri behaves in unmotherly way which is illustrated in the novel in this way,

Bela shut her eyes tightly. She recoiled at the image, complained of the smell. She said she didn't want to step on them. And she was afraid to walk across the lawn from which they'd come.

Why are there so many?

It happens sometimes. They come out to breathe when the ground is too wet.

Will you carry me? You're too big.

Can I stay home, then?

Gauri looked up to where the other children stood, under hoods and umbrellas.

They seem to have managed, she said.

Please? Bela voice was small. Tears formed, and then slid down her face. (169)

There is not a mutual and natural relationship between mother and daughter. That is to say that the roles given to women are just a performance which is performed in certain circumstances, that is neither natural nor inborn rather construction and seems to be natural because of long practice. Further Gauri thinks about herself as:

Another mother might have indulged her. Another mother might have brought her back, let her stay home, skip a day of school. Another mother, spending the time with her, might not have considered it a waste. Gauri remembered how happy Subhash had been, those days last winter when it had snowed so heavily, and most everything was shut down. For a whole week he'd stayed home with Bela, making a holiday of it. Playing games, reading stories, taking her out to lay in campus, in the snow. (169)

This excerpt shows how the roles of mother and father are being transformed and reversed. Being a mother Gauri is totally indifference towards her daughter's wishes but father at any cost manages to fulfill them. Unlike Gauri, Subhash is happier while being in the company of his daughter but Gauri thinks as if it is a waste of time.

After this again she warned Bela as if she is not her child, she treated her a bit rudely:

If you don't get on the bus we're going to walk to school. Over more worms than this.

When Bela still refused to move, Gauri grasped her tightly by the hand, causing her to trip, dragging her across. Bela was sobbing audibly, miserably now.

Don't make a scene, Bela. Don't be a coward.

I don't like you, Bela cried out, shaking herself free. I'll never like you, for the rest of my life. (170)

This shows that the relation between mother and daughter is cold from the beginning as mother fails to fulfill her traditional roles. Father is rather happy with his daughter and takes care of her even better than of Gauri. In the novel, Gauri's each activity works in opposition to the traditional society's expectation, and thereby challenges the traditional gender roles, which are just a performance that seems real because of a long practice.

In one part of the novel it is showed how men seem to have revolutionary feeling outside the home and remain patriarch inside home. It is clear from this extract that feeling of change towards new dimension is just a show-off for male since they cannot come out from male-dominated ideology.

She was thankful for his independence, and at the same time she was bewildered.

Udayan had wanted a revolution, but at home he'd expected to be served; his only contribution to his meals was to sit and wait for Gauri or her mother-in-law to put a plate before him. (126)

Gauri also challenges the traditional gender role through cross dressing. She holds the belief that there is not any difference between men and women. She further asserts that women are also equally capable if they get equal opportunities. Nature is equal to both men and women. Both

have their own bodily duties but the social or gender duties are the later constructions by social institutions. She is tired of performing her roles and wants something change in herself, she gains change by cutting her hairs and dressing in totally different ways than that of traditional women.

These lines illustrate the same thing:

On the dressing table was a pair of scissors that he normally kept in the kitchen drawer along with clumps of her hair. In one corner of the floor, all of her saris, and her petticoats and blouses, were lying in ribbons and scrapes of various shapes and sizes, as if an animal had shredded the fabric with its teeth and claws. He opened her drawers and saw they were empty. She had destroyed everything.
(141)

Gauri not only puts herself in new image but destroys all her old things in violent ways, which surprised Subhash, so he asked about those activities and got the answer which made him rather angry:

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 it.

And your clothes?

I was tired of those, too. (141)

Gauri often left Bela alone leaving her engaged while she took a walk alone. When Subhash found this out he told her, "My mother was right. You don't deserve to be a parent. The privilege was wasted on you"(175). Here Subhash was just connecting what his mother had warned him when he had almost planned an alliance between Gauri and him. Here Subhash has hoped

Gaurito pursue his expectation as a good mother and when she failed to do so he scolded her showing his superior power towards her.

Although Gauri is married, her attraction with a man and her involvement in female masturbation is really a taboo in the contemporary society. She followed the man whenever she saw him, she even imagines him in her bed while sleeping with Subhash, "Seeking out Subhash in bed, she pretended she was with this man, in a hotel room, or in the home. Feeling his mouth, his sex against her own" (172). For patriarchal society, women's extramarital affair is considered as a matter of great shame and humiliation. But Gauri has not any remorse for imagining and involving in masturbation.

She escaped to the only place she could think of, the enormous women's room, pushing against the heavy door, crossing the thick carpet of the lounge, locking herself into a stall. She was alone, there was no one in the neighboring stalls, and she could not help herself, she pushed her hand up her shirt, to her breast, caressing it, another hand unzipping her jeans, hooking her fingers over the ridge of bone, her forehead against the cold metal of the door. (172)

The lines quoted above show how Gauri challenges the patriarchal social structure that creates a kind of ban where women are confined within an unnecessary restriction of patriarchal values and where women's footsteps outside the house is taken as the matter of great shame. On the contrary Gauri alters all these patriarchal norms and values through her activities.

From the very beginning women are culturally, socially, economically and even biologically discriminated from men. Women are treated as 'other' or 'object' whereas men being 'self' and 'subject', having their independent identity. In all sphere of the society male plays the

major roles and female is just an assistance to help him become a successful person. Women are always defined as subordinate being to man, as Simone de Beauvoir claims:

Women have been assigned the role of parasite and every parasite is an exploiter. Woman has need of the male in order to gain human identity, to eat, to enjoy life to procreate; it is through the service of sex that she gets these benefits; because she is confined to that function. She is wholly an instrumentally of exploitation.
(626)

In the lines quoted above, Beauvoir argues that, since the human civilization, women are given the role of parasite which depends on other body for its existence. A woman is just a thing that fulfills man's sexual desires and she is defined as per man's beneficiaries. That is to say women have almost no any identity and importance in absence of men, she has no right to take any decision by herself. Even if she does so, she is the subject of criticism and at last she has to be ruined because of her deeds. So in the fear of being ruined she maintains her identity as per male's definition and those traits are internalized in such a way that it seems to be permanent and natural.

Contrary to such notions, Gauri struggles to achieve her independent life. She wants to establish her own identity in this hostile society, where women should appear in the usual get up and repeated works as well as all the responsibilities of being loyal, caring, dutiful and obedient are thrown upon women. She does not depend on men as a parasite but exist on herself with her own struggle, dedication and determination. After leaving Subhash apart again Gauri is haunting of his presence, this shows how Subhash has psychologically tortured her depriving her from entertaining her freedom and pursuing her desired goal. From the narration below it is clear that Gauri by departing from Subahsh and Bela is now able to gain success in her life:

She used to fear that they would find her on the sunny campus, on one of the sidewalks that led from one building to another. Confronting her, exposing her. Apprehending her, the way the police had apprehended Udayan. But in twenty years no one had come. She had not been summoned back. She had been given what she'd demanded, granted exactly the freedom she had sought. (231)

The above given extract shows the inner desire and effort of Gauri; it works opposite to the patriarchal notion which undermines the strength of women.

The traditional gender role is being questioned by Gauri and Subhash in various ways. Both the characters are reversing their respective roles by performing their acts in just the opposite ways. These characters prove the fact that women are not born with feminine and men with masculine, rather these categories are constructed by the society. As the gender roles are constructed by the society or culture, it can be deconstructed as well, as described by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble*. She writes:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself became a free. Floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and women and feminine a male body as easily as a female one. (iv)

That is to say that the construction of femininity and masculinity is discursive in nature. We all are born human but the society makes us man and woman. For Butler, even sexual desires and feelings are structured by the cultural practices. If a female performs the role of "woman" timidly and faithfully, her performance is likely to uphold heterosexist domination, if, on the other hand,

she performs paradoxically, her performance subverts such domination. In the present novel, society has imposed certain rules for Gauri and Subhash, but Gauri unlike traditional mother discovers a desire for freedom and independence to establish her self-identity, as a result, she cuts herself from Subhash and her daughter Bela. Previous concept of gender as pure and unified is challenged now, no one is pure male or female, each has to perform his\her responsibilities as per situation and time.

In the society it is thought that female cannot achieve success without the support of male and any kind of freedom is not allowed to be entertained by female. In such society women are not supposed to go wherever and whenever they want neither they are allowed to do anything out of their own will because patriarchal norms and values do not give permission to them for any kind of activities that are done alone. Such social structure confined women within a narrow domestic wall.

On the contrary, Gauri abandons her family in search of freedom and alters all these patriarchal norms and values through her activities. In the novel she dares to escape from domestic confinement in order to pursue her goal. This narration of the novel makes it even clear, "she entered a new dimension, a place where a fresh life was given to her" (232). Furthermore, "she had established her areas of specialization, German Idealism and the philosophy of the Frankfurt School" (233). This statement displays the sight of success she is achieving after leaving her husband and daughter.

Gauri is a powerful woman having the quality of masculine who crosses the boundary of social restriction and no man can oppose her. When she leaves home permanently on one is able to stop her or interrupt her in her decision. Subhash who should have been bold and strong enough to make her return back, is becoming helpless and worry. His helplessness can be seen as follow,

" He wanted to call Gauri and scream at her...you have left her (Bela) with me and yet you have taken her away, he wanted to say" (216). This line shows how patriarchal assumptions concerning masculinity and femininity are deconstructed in the novel.

In the novel, Gauri is presented as a revolutionary character who aggressively rejects patriarchal norms and values by her actions. She is not a kind of woman who is weak, submissive and emotional; rather she is very bold and strong character who is capable of leaving her daughter and dominating her husband by not following his rules and regulations. She is a character who highly contrasts with the traditional image of woman as a dependent on male. Subhash psychology is presented in this way, " he worried that she would never accept him, that she would never fully belong to him, even as he breathed in the smell of her hair" (147). This line shows how Subhash is afraid of being neglected and rejected by Gauri.

Traditionally it is believed that women should not involve in homosexual relationship because such behavior is associated with great shame and humiliation. Though homosexual relationship is natural society takes it as a taboo and because of that people are afraid of performing such activities. Gauri is innovative character who often does a new thing and also different kinds of activities which remains opposite to the patriarchal society's expectations. She challenges the phallogocentric law of patriarchy by involving in homosexual relation with Lorna, a graduate student at UCLA. Though she is married, her involvement in such relation had contained the subversion notion which can help to blur the dichotomy between heterosexuals and homosexuals; a dichotomy within which heterosexual is regarded as natural and homosexuality as an unnatural act. As difference from this Gauri gets involved in a homosexual relation her lesbian relation as is vividly expressed through this narration:

She took Gauri's hand, putting it inside her T-shirt, on top of one of her breasts, beneath the pliant material of her bra. Gauri felt the nipple under the bra thickening, hardening, as her own were. The softness of the kisses was new. The smell of her, the sculptural plainness of her body as the clothes was removed, as piles of papers were pushed aside to make room on the daybed behind the desk. The smoothness of her skin, the focused distribution of hair. The sensation of Lorna's mouth on her groin. (239)

Here, it is cleared how the traditional notion of hegemonic sexuality had been challenged by the lesbian sexuality. In heterosexual society having homosexual relation is taken as a matter of unusual thing. Since sex is biological and natural need which depends not upon opposite sex but upon its contentment; it does not matter the way to have sex either it is heterosexual or homosexual relation. Gauri does not follow heterosexual norms and systems rather she has desire to live like a life of bisexual woman who can perform sexual activities beyond the society's rules and regulations. This point is further stressed by the critic Adrienne Rich in a different context where she says:

The bias of compulsory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is perceived in a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent, or simply rendered invisible...that women are innately sexually oriented toward man that the lesbian choice is simply an acting-out of bitterness toward man. (3)

Rich further explains that heterosexuality is a violent political institution making way for the "male right of physical, economical, and emotional access" to women. She urges women to direct their energies towards other women rather than men, and portrays lesbianism as an extension of feminist. Rich claims that women may not have a preference toward heterosexuality, but may

find it imposed, managed, organized, and maintained by society. Part of the lesbian experience is an act resistance" specifically, a rejection of the patriarchy and the male right to women.

From the novel it is clear that traditional gender roles are matter of change and transformation, it is not natural entity. Following narrations make it obvious how male can play a role of mother and how mother can be negligence towards her daughter and it is not surprising thing since roles are constructed by society, not an inborn quality.

One night he switched off the television and entered the bedroom with Bela.

Gauri was turned away from him, sleep/ He perched on the other side of the bed, then leaned back, placing Bela's moist black head on his chest, quieting her. He extended his legs on the bed so that Bela could stretch out. (146)

Mother's negligence can be seen in her action such as, "she tugged the zipper shut at the base of Bela's throat, perhaps a bit harder than she should have, almost catching the skin" (150). When Gauri is rearing her child she always remembers sitting in the philosophy classes, listening to lectures whereas when Subhash is with Bela he is wholeheartedly and even happier than before. These actions are very relevant to say that the gender roles are performative and man-made thing that can be challenged over time and space.

Roles which are given by the society are to be fulfilled at any cost, whether one wants it or not that does not matter. Society expects mother to be nurturing, caring, loving and mothers are bound to fulfill these criteria regardless of their will. In the novel same thing happen:

Though she cared for Bela capably, though she kept her clean and combed and fed, she seemed distracted. Rarely did Subhash see her smiling when she looked into Bela's face. Rarely did he see Gauri kissing Bela spontaneously. Instead,

from the beginning, it was as if she'd reversed their roles, as if Bela were a relative's child and not her own. (159)

Despite challenging the traditional gender roles, Jhumpa Lahiri seems to be gripped by it because at last she displays family shattered and being unhappy because of Gauri's decision to leave her husband and daughter. In some point Gauri too is feeling sense of alienation, as shown in these lines:

Given what she'd done to Subhash and Bela, it felt wrong to seek companionship of anyone else. Isolation offered its own form of companionship: the reliable silence of her rooms, the steadfast tranquility of the evenings. (237)

Further, it is illustrated that due to her decision of leaving her husband and daughter she suffered, which can be seen in this way, "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 two strip it bare, only to be alone in the end" (240).

Amid these feelings of isolation she also entertains a sense of satisfaction, as this line says, "her existence all these years, after Udayan, without Bela and Subhash, remained indulgence enough" (241). Lahiri has showed Gauri having an ambivalence characteristic, which cannot stick in one situation and who is not satisfied in her roles as a mother and goes on searching her self-existence which results into separation of many characters from each other's life. In the latter half of the novel Subhash condition is narrated as follows:

But he had lost that confidence, that intrepid sense of direction. He felt only aware that he was alone, that he was over sixty years old and that he did not know where he stood [...]he was without a family; he was alone in a different way[...]an act of survival that now offended him. (244-246)

No one seems to be happy and contented, but suffering from alienation. Thought Gauri has pursued her carrier she is hunted by her daughter's and husband's memory. They have become the family of solitude, as these lines say, "They were a family of solitaires. They had collided and dispersed. This was her legacy. If nothing else, she had inherited that impulse from them" (262). Family has shattered here and there, they have confusion, collision within. Why does Lahiri chose to show such condition of a family?

Lahiri seems to have rooted psychology of male-dominated society. Though she has tried to show a reversed traditional gender roles with an ambivalent mother and a gentle father, it is somehow clear that she is not being able to come out from the stereotypical condition of male and female. Gauri is a woman born ahead of her time, unfitted both by temperament and intellect to the conventions demanded by her culture. She had reinvented herself most fully in the more liberated climate but this reinvention has cost a lot of her family. Subhash calls her cold-hearted, Bela is determined not to talk and meet her anymore.

The concept of gender is connected with performance. Performativity is not a singular act; rather it is a ritual and repetition. This concept gender is performative shows that the thing we take to be an internal essence of gender is just a manufacture of some repetitive actions, which are the matters of change according to time and space. Butler elaborates this idea in her book *Gender Trouble*, where she writes:

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative--that constitutes the identity it is purported to be. In this sense,

gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. (34)

Lahiri challenges the traditional gender roles by presenting Gauri as possessing more masculine qualities than Subhash. Gauri is the representative figure who challenges stereotypical values towards gender through her aggressive and decisive actions. Gauri always questions upon the patriarchal beliefs that pose certain stereotypes to woman and deny any kind of transformation.

As the novel progresses, Gauri goes on challenging the traditional gender roles. She proves that such roles can be changed in any time and space because it is not a constant or natural category but rather a constructed idea about being either man or woman. Butler has argued that gender is not the matter of sex, and that gender does not proceed from sex. Butler reads Beauvoir's saying, "One is not born a woman, rather becomes one" (203) critically which for Butler means that Beauvoir was one the opinion that one is born with the sex. Butler claims:

If gender is the cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders [...] the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one. (9)

According to Butler, sex does not cause gender and gender cannot be understood to express sex. If gender is not tied to sex then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proceed beyond the binary limits imposed by binary sex. She argues against the system of categorizing people,

stating that gender should be seen as a fluid human trait that can shift and change in a given context rather than one that remains fixed.

It is patriarchal ideology of the male dominated society that restricts women walk freely and as their desire. Women are compelled only in domestic work and excluded from other opportunities of productive work. No matter how much or for how long period of time women work inside home that work is not considered as a valuable one. Gauri is presented as a rebellious woman with feminist sensibility that disapproved the binaries of traditional gender roles based on patriarchal ideology by showing her resistance against such roles. She dismantles the traditional concept of sex being pure, fixed and natural. Sex is constructed so it can be challenged by individual effort. Gauri achieved her new identity by her own effort and at h same time encouraged other women towards their liberation and search for self-identity.

To summarize, traditional gender roles and stereotypes can be dismantled over and time and space since it is not natural and permanent category, rather it is a cultural one, created by society. Furthermore, the modern trend of alienation, frustration and loneliness is not because of female's quest for freedom but because of male's rigidity and stick upon convention stereotypes by taking it as biological phenomena. Hence, women's mobility and courage to challenge conventional gender roles by showing themselves as bold and courageous character help them to challenge the stereotypes and create a new dimension of identity.

Conclusion:

This research paper has analyzed the novel, *The Lowland* through the perspective of gender studies; focusing particularly on the concept of gender being a performance. In the novel, Lahiri has portrayed a subversive woman character who challenges the social barriers and boundaries based on patriarchal ideology. The biased views upon gender are created by the

society to dominate and subjugate female. Such conventions treat women as weak and just as a sex object, whereas men are taken as controlling figure that have authority towards women not only physically but also psychologically.

Gauri's disapproval to accept female stereotypes which regards women as passive, weak and ignorant proves that she is no longer associated towards such traditional beliefs and construction. Patriarchal social values always place woman as kindhearted, emotional and man as strong, reasonable but through the activities of Gauri and Subhash it can be interpreted that such dichotomy are just a construction of the male dominated society. Thus, neither a man nor a woman has their fix traits and behavior; they both can convert themselves according to situation. Thus, in order to challenge and question the whole social structure and the patriarchal ideology, Gauri revolts with her bold and courageous behavior and actions.

Gauri is not just an ambivalent woman, she is stunningly selfish. Lahiri intended to make Gauri the un-motherly mother which is a promising concept for Lahiri, but she seems unwilling and unable to delve into Gauri's interior life so she remains flat character. Though she has life in the new world, full of temporary lovers and an all-consuming career, Lahiri does not seem interested in exploring how the old psychological wounds square, with Gauri's daily existence. From this view of Lahiri, it is obvious that though Lahiri is concerned with the issue of female roles and empowerment, psychologically she is trying to illustrate that what happens to a family in which there is a reversal of traditional gender roles, with an ambivalent mother and a flexible gentle father is a crucial part. It is concluded that Lahiri is unable to come out from the male-dominated psychology which suppose mother to nurture family and stay within the boundary of own home. Lahiri is concerned to make Gauri selfish as well as ambivalent, which prove that female in the society are ruled by male ideology not only physically but also psychologically.

The inferior position given to female is thus provisionally established by gender-biased society. The novel shows that the notion of masculinity and femininity itself is wrong, which sets one category at high level and another at low level. In the novel, Gauri shows the dignity of being a woman by sidelining all the stereotypes and progressing her life as per her will. This paper contends although women seem to have awareness of their identity, their deep-rooted psychology is bound to follow the conventional roles. In the novel, the characters like Gauri, Bela have the knowledge and self awareness of their self identity but their inhibited psychology leads them to follow patriarchal ideology.

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