

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The issues of diasporic formation and diaspora have been explored in multiple forms or divergent patterns from different perspectives in literature. The issue of diasporic formation is concerned with the process through which people are either voluntarily or involuntarily made to leave their native country and settle down in a foreign land. However, the issue of diaspora capitalizes on the ambivalent state of life of those people in foreign land who are either the voluntary migrants or the forcefully displaced and dislocated ones. In this sense, this research has aimed at critiquing the issue of inflection in diasporic formation through the critical analysis of Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* from the perspective of gender and sexuality. In addition, it also aims to highlight how Amy Tan and Jhumpa Lahiri have illustrated the prominent issues of diaspora in their respective novels *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Lowland* from the perspective of gender and sexuality.

In Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*, it is very crucial to explore the issue behind why the mother, Winnie Louie, and the daughter, Pearl Louie Brandt have got to be mediated, motivated or inspired by Auntie Helen to know each other's secrets. Why does or can Winnie Louie not reveal the secret of her past life with Wen Fu in China herself to her daughter, Pearl Louie Brandt, even after her second husband, Jimmy Louie's death? Is it the fear of losing their mother-daughter ties existing in a foreign country? Likewise, why does or can Pearl Louie Brandt not reveal herself to her mother that she has got multiple sclerosis? Similarly, what is the pressurizing factor that compels Weili to get the divorce from Wen Fu and get married to Jimmy Louie and come to America from China and become Winnie? In

analogous contemplation, similar crucial questions also arise from the critical scrutinization of Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna's predicament in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*. Though Gauri's intention behind deserting her second husband, Subash, and her daughter, Bela (from her first husband, Udayan) in America bears different critical notions, yet the crucial question lies on what compels her to get married to her husband's elder brother, Subash, in her pregnancy, after her first husband Udayan's death, and come to America leaving India. Why don't her parents-in-law (Udayan's parents) consider her a real member of their family and hate her after Udayan's death? Is she responsible for Udayan's death? Why does Subash treat her as an object of mercy or pity and bring her to America marrying her? Does Subash's great devotion and sacrifice ever satisfy Gauri? What is the compelling factor that leads her to deserting Subash and Bela in a foreign land and seeking her own individual identity? Likewise, what is it that implants the seeds of hatred in Bela's mind against Gauri? Does Gauri actually hate Subash and Bela? Such queries keep on multiplying until and unless the root causes that stand on the same ground illustrated in Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* are properly analyzed through a particular theoretical framework.

As the process of becoming diaspora or forming diasporic life is plural, the role of gender and sexuality is also vital in diasporic formation due to which Winnie and Peal in Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* construct a different world of their own from the conventionalized notion of diaspora, despite some contradictions that exist between and among their relationships. It shows that gender and sexuality form a different pattern of diaspora which is exclusively fertile on the one hand and equality dangerous as well as destructive on the other hand.

The concrete purpose of doing this research on Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* is particularly to reveal how gender and sexuality cause to form a different kind of diaspora. Yet the central issue to demystify why and what makes the central characters in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* a different sort of diaspora will be critiqued from the perspective of the respective authors who have portrayed the predicament of their central characters in terms of gender and sexuality.

In order to concretely simplify the entangled complexities shown in the lives of major characters such as Winnie and Pearl in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*, this research writing has taken the issues of cultural diaspora from the perspective of gender and sexuality in connection with psychoanalysis and feminism as the basic theoretical framework. The major reason behind the choice of this theoretical framework is that all the principal characters such as Winnie and Pearl in *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna in *The Lowland* constitute hybrid identity in different forms through their specific gender and sexuality. As a result, they are bound too well in such a world of diaspora which can neither mingle with the main stream culture in foreign land nor can re-exist in the original culture in native land. This precarious condition of diaspora is further holstered with the paradoxical treatment of gender and sexuality in the foreign land and in the native land. Therefore, the basic theoretical tools of this research paper are cultural diaspora from the perspective of gender and sexuality.

To avoid ambiguity and vagueness, and make the research more specific, this research paper has set its theoretical limitation of cultural diaspora in terms of gender and sexuality particularly from the perspectives of diaspora studies, psychoanalysis

and feminism. In simple terms, cultural diaspora is marked by hybridity and heterogeneity. These characteristics are, however, not exclusive from gender and sexuality. Gender is known as a social construct which is treated differently in different societies, whereas sexuality is known as a sexual identity of a person as male or female. Therefore, the entire analysis of Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* will be encapsulated within this theoretical delimitation.

## CHAPTER II

### **Diaspora, and Inflection in Diasporic Formation Through Gender and Sexuality**

The term 'diaspora' has been generally critiqued as the naming of the 'other' in the academic circle. Tracing the origin of this term, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur have pointed out that the etymological meaning of 'Diaspora' is derived from the Greek term 'diasperien' in which 'dia' means 'across' and '-sperien' means 'to sow or scatter seeds'. Hence, it highlights one of the major characteristics of diaspora marked by the sense of dispersal of human beings across the world in this sense, diaspora seems to have some positive connotation as when human beings disperse or get dispersed across the world, a number of different variables such as culture, language, nationality and so on associated with them come to form an amalgamation with the similar variables already existing in a foreign land. However, even in the process of amalgamation, different factors like migration or immigration, displacement or dislocation have been critiqued as the responsible matters in forming the diasporic identity of an individual. Such factors as the desire of people for better job opportunities, better life style, education and health services in a foreign land have been noted as the key pressurizing factors of the voluntary Diaspora. On the other hand, such as wars, natural disasters or catastrophes, internal conflicts and so on have pointed out as the major causes of involuntary diaspora.

Therefore, an interesting reason behind why diaspora has been defined and interpreted in multiple ways has been identified to be its peculiar mode of formation. As there are its various modes of formation, so are its definitions and interpretations. In this connection of idea, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur have pointed out the difference between the diasporic identity and the transnationalist in the following way:

While diaspora may be accurately described as transnationalist it is not synonymous with transnationalism. Transnationalism may be defined as the flow of people, ideas, goods and capital across national territories in way that undermines nationality and nationalism as discrete categories of identification, economic organization and political constitution. We differentiate diaspora from transnationalism, however, in that diaspora refers specifically to the movement-forced or voluntary-of people from one or more nation-states to another. (8)

This statement reveals the fact that diaspora is often confused with transnationalism. However, it also clarifies the confusion between them by stating the fact that diaspora particularly refers to the 'movement' of people from their native land to a foreign country. Making the distinction between diaspora and transnationalism more clear, Braziel and Mannur have further stated as follows:

Transnationalism speaks to larger, more impersonal forces-specifically, those of globalization and global capitalism. While diaspora addresses the migrations and displacements of subjects, transnationalism also includes the movements of information through cybernetics as well as the traffic in goods, products and capital across geo-political terrains through multinational corporations. While diaspora may be regarded as concomitant with transnationalism or even in some cases consequent of transnationalist forces, it may not be reduced to such macroeconomic and technological flows. It remains, above all a human phenomenon-lived and experienced. (8)

This quotation further clarifies that diaspora particularly refers to the lived experience of people in two different cultural settings in terms of ethnicity, language, nationality

and nationalism, whereas transnationalism incorporates multiple forces in connection with the flow of non-human entities such as information technology, goods, products and capital across the national boundaries between and among the nation-states.

Likewise, Arjun Appadurai has stated that there are five different types of imagined world landscapes that seem to have a significant role in the formation of diaspora on the one hand and transnationalism on the other hand. They are 'ethnoscapes' (People who move between nations), 'technoscapes' (technology), 'financescapes' (global capital, currency markets, stock exchange), 'mediascapes' (electronic and new media), and 'ideoscapes' (official state ideologies and counter ideologies). As Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur have pointed out that any one of these five categorical imagined world landscapes can yield to the formation of diaspora, for instance, the drive of ethnoscapes may make people diaspora by means of their compulsion to carry their native ethnic identity and reside in a foreign country in negotiation with the existing foreign ethnic practices. Implying this fact of diasporic formation, Appadurai has stated as follows:

I propose that an elementary framework for exploring [...] disjunctures [In diasporic formation] is to look at the relationship between five dimensions of global cultural flow which can be termed: (a) ethnoscapes; (b) media-scapes; (c) technoscapes; (d) financescapes; (e) ideoscapes. The suffix-*scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes which characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. These terms with the common suffix-*scape* also indicate that these are not objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision, but rather that they are deeply perspectival constructs,

inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as sub national groupings and movements (whether religious, political, or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighborhoods, and families indeed the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part by their own sense of what these landscapes are. (31)

Appadurai's concern over five perspectival constructs of not only the global cultural and economic flows but also of the diasporic formation hints at a significant departure from the conventionalized notion of diasporic formation through his observation of these constructs as a result of inflection by different causes such as the historical, linguistic, and political ones.

Similarly, Stuart Hall's definition of diaspora marks a significant departure from the conventionalized notion of diaspora and diasporic formation. In Hall's Opinion, diaspora does not simply refer to the scattered group of people that simply aims at returning to their home land as a sacred place to be retained at any cost from the foreign land where they have been residing. Rather, it refers to the groups of those scattered people who constantly produce and reproduce themselves a new without being tormented by the nostalgic sense of retaining the constitutive factors of identity from their homeland. Hall makes this opinion clear in the following words:"

[...] diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the



sea. This is the old, the imperializing, the hegemonizing form of 'ethnicity'. We have seen the fate of the people of Palestine at the hands of this backward looking conception of diaspora-and the complicity of the West with it. The diaspora experience [...] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (244)

Hall's Statement has not only defined diaspora as an identity with heterogeneity and diversity, it has also elaborated the concept of diasporic formation as a constant process of 'producing and reproducing' 'anew' identities 'through transformation and difference'. In this regard, Hall sound analogous to Appadurai in the matter of diasporic formation.

Appadurai's notion of 'perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors bears some sort of resonance with Hall's notion of constantly 'producing and reproducing 'anew' identities through transformation and difference. In this light of theoretical resonances between Hall and Appadurai about diaspora and diasporic formation, different factors of inflection in diasporic formation draw the attention of a critical mind to critically explore and analyze them. Therefore, as pointed out by Gyatri Gopinath, this research paper aims at exploring and critically analyzing the issue of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Thumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*.

Likewise, the term ‘inflection’ in linguistics generally refers to the (rule of a) grammatical change at the end of a word by means of a suffix. This grammatical change not only shows the variation in the form of a word or a lexeme but also creates a sense of difference in the meaning of that word generated with the inflection. However, inflection in linguistics is different from word formation. In Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, the distinction between inflection and word formation has been stated as follows:

Given the nature of a lexeme, it is possible to distinguish two kinds of morphological rules some morphological rules relate to different form of the same lexeme; while other rules relate to different lexemes. Rules of the first kind are inflectional rules, while those of the second kind are rules of word formation. The generation of the English plural ‘*dogs*’ from ‘*dog*’ is an inflectional rule, while compound phrases and words like ‘*dog catcher*’ or ‘*dishwasher*’ are examples of word formation. Informally, word formation rules form “new” words (more accurately, new lexemes), while inflectional rules yield variant forms of the “same” word (lexeme). (4)

This distinction between inflection and word formation shows that inflection does not create a new word or term as such by changing the root word. Rather, it points out the difference in the formation of that root word or term and its meaning by means of a suffix at the end of that root word.

Similarly, in an analogous sense, this term inflection in Diaspora studies has been used to denote a particular change in the conventionalized notion of diasporic formation as suggested by Appadurai, Hall, and Gayatri Gopinath. Distinct from Appadurai’s and Hall’s opinions, Gayatri Gopinath has suggested that gender and

sexuality inflect the diasporic formation of an individual. In her opinion, the Diaspora formed mainly by the differences in the treatment of gender and sexuality especially in the two different cultural locations – the native and the foreign – is typically different from the conventionalized Diaspora formed by other factors such as war, migration or immigration, desire for better job opportunities, better life style, and so on. Gopinath has clearly expressed this opinion in the following lines:

Given the illegibility and unrepresentability of a non-heteronormative (female) subject within patriarchal and heterosexual configurations of both nation and Diaspora, the project of locating a queer South Asian diasporic subject – and a queer female subject in particular – may begin to challenge the dominance of such configurations. To this end, I want to suggest here some reading strategies by which to render queer subjects intelligible and to mark the presence of what Alexander terms an “insurgent sexuality” that works within and against hegemonic nationalist and diasporic logic. (4-5)

Through these lines, Gopinath hints at the peculiar formation of Diaspora through gender and sexuality. It seems that gender and sexuality, as they are not conceived and treated in the same way all over the world, dynamically shape and reshape diasporic formation. In this regard, the reconstruction of Diaspora may result in different forms whether they are ‘queer’ or ‘lesbian’ or they are ‘feminist’ or ‘masculine’ or ‘patriarchal’ or ‘heteronormative’ or ‘non-heteronormative’.

Likewise, the concept of gender and sexuality in literary criticism has become a prominent topic of theoretical orientations. The term ‘gender’ is considered as a social construct that labels ‘male’ as ‘man’ and ‘female’ as ‘women’. It analyzes male qualities or characteristics as ‘masculine’ whereas female qualities or characteristics

as 'feminine'. However, the term 'sexuality' is considered as an inborn individual identity of a person as 'male' or 'female' in terms of their biological differences in their sexual organs. Therefore, gender and sexuality are neither exactly similar to each other nor entirely different from each other. The concept of gender entails some socio-political and cultural inclination that defines and set the limitation of the role of an individual in the society. Therefore, gender is conceived and treated differently in different socio-political and cultural settings. Likewise, the concept of sexuality also entails some socio-cultural and political inclinations that vary from one socio-political and cultural setting to another one.

The differences in the treatment of gender and sexuality from culture to culture and nation to nation have especially prompted different feminist critics like Simone de Beauvoir, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva to radically oppose and protest against all kinds of patriarchal operations, including male domination, that govern a society. In their opinion, such differences as seen from a male perspective always give maximum power and privileges to men whereas a very little and circumscribed (or no power and privilege at all) power and privilege to women to act independently. Therefore, these feminist critics have made bold assertions to dismantle all kinds of patriarchal operation that function through the treatment of gender and sexuality with prejudice. For instance, commenting on Simone de Beauvoir's assertion against patriarchal ideology made in her essay "The Second Sex" written in 1949, Lois Tyson has stated as follows:

Although Simone de Beauvoir didn't refer to herself as a materialist feminist, her groundbreaking "*The Second sex*" (1949) created a theoretical basis for materialist feminists for decades to come. In a patriarchal society, Beauvoir observes, men are considered essential

subjects (independent selves with free will), while women are considered contingent beings (dependent beings controlled by circumstances). Men can act upon the world, change it, give it meaning, while women have meaning only in relation to men. Thus, women are defined not just in terms of their difference from men, but in term of their inadequacy in comparison to men. The word “*Woman*”, therefore, has the same implications as the word ‘*Other*’. A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man’s Other. She is less than a man’ She is a kind of alien in a man’s world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is. (96)

Tyson’s observation of Beauvoir’s reflection on women’s status in a patriarchal or male dominated society suggests that men maintain their superiority and hegemony upon women simply by considering masculinity and male sexuality as the only determining factors of a real human being. Femininity and female sexuality have meanings only in relation to masculinity and male sexuality. This gives an absolute power to men to rule in the society while giving no power at all to women to exist independently.

Therefore, Beauvoir has argued that women should make their own allegiance to resist all kinds of patriarchal or male dominated operations that undermine and exploit women in the society. They “should not be content with investing the meaning of their lives in their husbands and sons, as patriarchy encourages them to do”. (Tyson, 97). Beauvoir’s idea of the allegiance of women to resist all kinds of patriarchal normativities has led to the formation of different collective identities of women including the diasporic one.

Therefore, the diasporic formation of people inflected by their gender and sexuality has typically become a part of critical analysis in literacy criticism.

In this connection of idea, Tina Campt and Deborah A Thomas have made a critical survey of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality in their critically acclaimed article “gendering diaspora transnational feminism, Diaspora and its hegemonies.” In their opinion, there is a tension between “ a conception of diaspora as a formation that is solely or primarily the direct result of migration, and a more expansive notion of diaspora as a phenomenon that exceeds any causal link to travel, movement, or displacement that is a defining component of contemporary Diaspora scholarship” (2). Therefore, the issue about the hegemonic formations within the diaspora and their confronting forces has become a matter of critical analysis in literary criticism. Giving a suggestion about how to conduct an inquiry about the confronting forces against the hegemonic formations of diaspora, Tina Campt and Deborah A Thomas have further stated as follows:

Adopting a transnational feminist analytic for the study of diasporic formation and the tensions of difference and inequity within those formation offers a way to more directly engage with how certain (masculinist) understandings of the Diaspora and diasporic culture circulate; how key sites in the transmission of diasporic culture (e.g., literature and performance) function in uneven ways as well as how and why particular models of diasporic relation and articulations of [...] identity become dominant or hegemonic, while others are uppressed or marginalized. (5-6)

As these lines suggest, gender and sexuality and the differences in their treatment in different cultural settings have also been recognized as the prominent confronting forces that have caused a kind of inflection in diasporic formation.

### CHAPTER III

#### **Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*: A Manifesto of Inflected Diaspora**

First published in 1993, Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* has marked its distinction in the thematic aspect of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality. The central characters of this novel such as Pearl, Winnie, and Helen have been portrayed as the representatives of the inflected Diaspora from China in the United States of America. The individual struggles of Winnie and Helen in their homeland have been shown as an enactment of feminist liberation from the suppression, oppression and domination of their male counterparts.

However, in Tan's novel "The Kitchen God's Wife", it is very crucial to explore the issue behind why the mother, Winnie Louie, and the daughter Pearl Louie Brandt have got to be mediated, motivated or inspired by Auntie Helen to know each other's secrets. Why does or can Winnie Louie not reveal the secret of her past life with Wen Fu in China herself to her daughter, Pearl Louie Brandt, even after her second husband, Jimmy Louie's death? Is it the fear of losing their mother-daughter ties existing in a foreign country? Likewise, why does or can Pearl Louie Brandt not reveal herself to her mother that she has got multiple sclerosis? Similarly, what is the pressurizing factor that compels Weile to get the divorce from Wen Fu and get married to Jimmy Louie and come to America from China and become Winnie? This research paper assumes that such queries are directly associated with the issue of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality.

As the process of becoming Diaspora or forming a diasporic life is plural, the role of gender and sexuality is also vital in diasporic formation due to which Winnie, Pearl, and Helen in Tan's "The Kitchen God's Wife" construct a different world of their own from the conventionalized notion of Diaspora, despite some contradictions



that exist between and among their relationships. It shows that gender and sexuality form a different pattern of Diaspora which is exclusively fertile on the one hand and equally dangerous as well as destructive on the other hand.

Nevertheless, Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* has been critiqued in different ways particularly in the light of mother-daughter relationship of a migrant family. It bears the notion that it is to some extent necessary to keep the secrets of the past between the mother and the daughter in order to let the things happen that are bound to happen at any cost. In connection with this view, Rabb Forman Dew has stated as follows:

[...] the major question posed by the investigation of the life of Jiang Wei/Wei-Wei/Winnie is how much our circumstance is fated and how much is shaped by individual choice, or if, in fact, fate and individual choice are even entirely separate things. This idea is like an undercurrent throughout Winnie's tale, and I wish Mrs. Tan has not underscored her point by making the equation between the horrors that befell Winnie and the disease that has befallen her daughter. (3)

Dew's argument makes us think about whether the diasporic subjects are conditioned by their fate instead of their gender and sexuality or by their individual choice.

However, fate can not be taken as exclusive of gender and sexuality.

In the novel, Tan has exposed the fact that Winnie's compulsion to get married to Jimmy and come to America to live a diasporic life is mainly caused by the disparity in the treatment of her gender and sexuality in two different cultural settings-one in her homeland China and another in the foreign country the United States of America. In her homeland, Winnie is known as Weiwei, who is badly crushed and tormented from her childhood on simply because she is a girl or female not a boy or male. In her

own narrative of her own past in China, Winnie tells Pearl that she had been badly suppressed, oppressed and exploited by her own first husband Wen Fu. She never received any kind of love or compassion from him. Rather, she suffered a lot in order to please him thinking that her suffering for him would change her husband's negative attitude towards her and she would be able to gain a sort of love or compassion from him. Winnie narrates her plight with her first Chinese husband Wen Fu to her daughter Pearl as follows:

And often in the morning he would complain, telling me I was not a good wife that I had no passion, not like other women he knew. And my head and body would hurt as he told me about this women and that woman, how good she was, how willing, how beautiful. I was not angry. I did not know I was supposed to be angry. This was china. A woman had no right to be angry. But I was unhappy, knowing my husband was still dissatisfied with me and that I would have to go through more suffering to show him. I was a good wife. (170)

Through these lines, Tan makes it clear that Winnie's sexual identity as female or gender identity as a woman is the main cause of her suffering in china in the past. Through Winnie's narrative, Tan makes it clear that women in china were always dominated by men. For instance, Winnie's mother was bound to desert Winnie at her age of six due to the pressure of patriarchy. Her sister Peanut had to get a divorce from her husband due to the similar kind of male domination. Likewise, Winnie herself feels compelled to get a divorce from her Chinese husband Wen Fu due to his inhuman and immoral behaviour towards her. Therefore, she gets married to Jimmy, comes to America and becomes a Diaspora of a different kind.

Regarding Winnie's character in the novel some critics have noted that there are some autobiographical elements of the writer, Amy Tan, similar to Winnie's predicament.

The most autobiographical element in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, however, is the character and story of Winnie Louie, which is very much modeled after Tan's own mother Daisy Tan. Daisy, by the time she moved to the United States in 1949, had already been through a great deal, just as Winnie had suffered before reaching America. Both Daisy and Winnie were motherless children, both were involved in intensively abusive traditional marriages, and both lost children of their own. Furthermore, there are the facts of Tan's own life, growing up as an American in a Chinese home that provides an important background for the novel. This predicament causes, as for many Asian-Americans and other 'hyphenated Americans' a sense of being caught in between two worlds. (<http>)

This excerpt discloses the fact that the diasporic subjects like Winnie and Pearl are bound to live in between two worlds. They are the world of American life and the world of Chinese customs. Therefore, they are neither fully American nor fully Chinese in their individual identity. Their identity is a kind of hybrid and heterogeneous female existence which marks one of the characteristics of inflected Diaspora.

Though the gender and sexuality of Winnie and her daughter, Pearl, is the same, yet the treatment to their gender in two different cultural settings, in a foreign land and in a homeland, is entirely different. Pearl is known as an American woman born from the Chinese descendents, but Winnie is an Americanized woman bound to

make a choice of leaving her homeland. In this regard, L.S. Klepp has stated that Tan's novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* capitalizes on the central theme of her first novel "The Joy Luck Club" that "there is no simple solution to the mother-daughter questions, such as being Chinese" (1). In his opinion, Tan conveys the strong message through the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* that the diasporic subjects are divided into opposite polarity with certain secrets between and among them that generates the problem of generation gap. However, this problem is effectively solved when they revisit their past by disclosing each other's secrets that separates them from the hegemonic notion of diaspora by giving them an identity of inflected diaspora.

It is in this connection that Winnie and Pearl disclose each others long term secret of the past in the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* and get properly united with the common identity of an inflected diaspora i.e. the diaspora formed through gender and sexuality.

Going through the novel, it seems that Winnie and Pearl, as mother and daughter, are living in America simply in the form of a common nation of diaspora for a long period of time. However, as their diasporic identity is distinct, Aunty Helen plays the role of a mediator in order to bring them to a closer contact so that both of them can share their true secrets with each other and live with their distinctly specific identity of an inflected Diaspora to which Auntie Helen herself belongs. For instance, in the novel, Winnie tells that when she came to the United States, she wished to live an entirely peaceful and prosperous life by forgetting all the tragedies of life she had faced in China. Winnie has stated this as follows:

When I came to this country, I told myself: I can think a new way.

Now I can forget my tragedies, put all my secrets behind a door that

will never be opened, never seen by American eyes. I was thinking my

past was closed forever and all I had to remember was to call Formosa “China”, to shrink all of China into one little island I had never seen before. (71)

However, her wish does not get fulfilled as she belongs to an inflected Diaspora through her gender and sexuality. Therefore, it is through Helen, who makes a pretension that she is suffering from brain tumor and has a desire to see Winnie and her daughter Pearl share each other’s secrets to embolden their ties before she dies, that Winnie is bound to recall her bitter past in china as accurately as she can and reveal it to her daughter. Though Winnie lacks her personal will to reveal her secret to her daughter yet she does it due to the pressure exerted upon her by Helen. Therefore, Winnie tells Pearl to “imagine [Winnie’s] anger when Helen told [Winnie] in her kitchen, right after that fish dinner, that she has decided to let all [Winnie’s] secrets out” (73). However, as the sense of her bitter past in china cannot be erased permanently from her life, Winnie takes Helen’s advice positively and contemplates deeply on how to reveal it safely so that it won’t hurt Pearl any more. In this situation, she realizes that Pearl will finally come to know her real father Wen Fu instead of Jimmy and it may make her feel otherwise with her now. Winnie makes her this opinion clear as follows: “And then Pearl would know the worst truth of all-what Helen does not know, what Jimmy didn’t know, what I have tried to forget for forty years. Wen Fu, that bad man, he was Pearl’s father” (86). Despite this feeling, Winnie goes on unfolding one after another secrets of her bitter past in china from her childhood to her arrival in the United States of America that enables Pearl to feel disillusioned with the reality about the main cause of her disease of multiple sclerosis which is an unknown fact to Winnie.

Winnie's long narrative of her bitter past in china actually enables her daughter Pearl to recognize her true identity. She comes to realize now that she is no more different from her mother Winnie. As she learns that her mother had been brutally dominated, suppressed, oppressed, and exploited simply for being a female or a woman by the oppressive Chinese customs and tradition she comes to acknowledge her real identity of an inflected Diaspora like that of her mother Winnie and her friend Helen. Instead of cultivating the seed of self-humiliation and anger or hatred towards her mother, Pearl feels more attached to her mother emotionally and spiritually as she comes to internalize her mother's suffering. Beforehand, Pearl is told that her real father is Jimmy Louie. Jimmy also believes that Pearl is his real daughter. He believes this because he loves Winnie by heart and doesn't know the fact that Winnie had been raped right before the time of immigrating to America. Jimmy is a well educated American who has a sense of great love, respect and faith upon women. Therefore, he sustains his dignified family tie with Winnie and Pearl in America. He teaches Winnie the American way of life in a very gentle and civilized manner. He has no sense of discrimination, bias and prejudice between sons and daughters. So, Pearl is entirely brought up in an American way of life. It delights Winnie quite a lot, and enables her to liberate herself from the misery of her past in china. Though she still tries to practice some of the Chinese beliefs and customs, yet Pearl outstands them and gives her a sense of great satisfaction. Both the mother and the daughter are quite able to live a dignified way of life in America regarding America is as if their own homeland. In this sense, Tan has shown the American cultural setting far better than the Chinese cultural setting from the perspective of treatment of the female gender and sexuality. In the novel, she has shown Chinese culture as traditional, conservative, stereotypical and strictly patriarchal in nature. In contrast, she has shown the American culture as

modern, civilized and quite liberal towards gender discrimination. Commenting on the American cultural norms and value, Gary Althen, in his well-known essay entitled “American Values and Assumptions”, has stated that the Americans always praise and respect those people who are able to deal with the adverse situation tactfully and gain success in life. Althen has stated about this as follows:

Americans admire people who have overcome adverse circumstances (for example, poverty or a physical handicap) and “succeeded” in life. Black educator Booker T. Washington is one example; the blind and deaf author and lecturer Helen Keller is another. (7)

This statement made by Althen is quite resonant with the way Pearl understands her mother’s suffering in China in the past and heightens her sense of love and respect towards her mother Winnie even more.

In the novel, Winnie does not disclose the secret about Pearl’s parentage blatantly. She is quite conscious about its effect on Pearl, and therefore, she begins the narrative account of her past with her childhood days. The particularly striking incident in her adolescent life which she shares with Pearl is about her curiosity towards the male sexuality and her eventual disillusionment. She makes it clear by posing Pearl an interesting query about the male sexuality as follows: “Wouldn’t you scream if you saw that your husband’s “*Ji-Ji*” looked nothing like that of your boy cousins? Wouldn’t you think all his *Yang* was bursting to pour out?” (162). Through this query made by Winnie, Tan has revealed an inquiry into the enigma of male sexuality for female. It seems that men are more aggressive towards women because of their nature of sexuality. They are particularly experimental in their relationship with women. So, many women have to bear the brunt of their husband’s aggression and remain quite subservient and submissive to their male counterparts at home while

their husbands are free to keep on their experimental relation with women one after another. In the light of this idea, Tan has shown Winnie's reproach towards her own father in the novel. Winnie's father is no more an ideal figure in the novel. He is used to making an experimental relation with multiple women, and therefore, he has many wives. When Winnie comes to know about the real nature and character of her own father, she hates him and criticizes him as an arrogant male figure. Therefore, she does not reveal her sense of pity or sympathy or compassion as a daughter towards him even in the last stage of his life in which he seems to be quite miserable. Instead, she reflects upon all of his past cruelties upon women which make her opine that male aggression towards women sometimes leads women to become an inflected Diaspora. Winnie has stated her reflection upon her father's arrogant nature towards women as follows:

And then I thought of more reasons. He was the one who mistreated my own mother! He was the one who refused to see me when I was growing up. He was the one who let me marry a bad man. He did not care that he was giving me an unhappy future. Why should I sacrifice my happiness for him? There had never been love between us, father to daughter, daughter to father. (359)

Through these lines, Tan has shown a conflict between femininity and masculinity that ultimately leads to an inflection in diasporic formation or it leads to the formation of an inflected Diaspora.

Likewise, Winnie's narration of the Chinese traditional myth of the Kitchen God and her own personal objection to it also yields to the thematic interpretation of the feminist resistance to the patriarchal supremacy in the society. According to this myth, the careless, thoughtless, immoral and irresponsible husband named Zhang is



made the kitchen God by the Jado Emperor simply for having the courage to admit that he was wrong. His task was assigned to observe everyone's behaviour and report to the Jade Emperor about who deserves good luck and who deserves bad one. Winnie finds this myth itself to be quite patriarchal and oppressive in nature she equates Zhang with Wen Fu and strongly opposes his position of the Kitchen God. Therefore, when a kind of proper understanding between mother and daughter is built up by revealing each other's secrets towards the end of the novel, the entire Chinese myth of the Kitchen God is put upside down in a symbolic manner by Winnie's act of granting Pearl a gift of a lady statue and fixing it inside the red altar and renaming it as Lady Sorrow free. "Lady Sorrow Free" happiness winning over bitterness no regrets in this world" (415). Winnie's invention of the "Lady Sorrow Free" through the redrawing of the Chinese myth comes from her ability to win her daughter's heart and recognize the main cause of her daughter's disease of multiple sclerosis. It enables both the mother as well as the daughter to dwell happily the same world of an inflected Diaspora caused by their gender and sexuality.

Similarly, Pearl's narrative part in the novel also reveals the fact that no matter how much diasporic hegemony is made to sustain, it gets inflected via the same means of its formation. After listening to the long narrative of her mother's past in china and her subsequent arrival in the United States with Pearl's gestation from Wen Fu, Pearl is moved to reveal the secret of her own disease of multiple sclerosis to Winnie. It is the pleasure of knowing her mother's that makes Pearl reveal her secret too. The following lines narrated by life. Here I had just been told that Wen Fu might well be the other half of my genetic makeup. Yet we were laughing" (400). As Pearl reveals the secret of her disease, Winnie exclaims that it must have been given by

Wen Fu. So, she thinks of its possible cure through the Chinese herbal medicine. It relieves Pearl a lot. In her own words, Pearl has stated as follows:

I was relieved in a strange way. Or perhaps relief was not the feeling because the pain was still there. She was tearing it away-my protective shell, my anger, my deepest fears, my despair. She was putting all this into her own heart, so that I could finally see what was left. Hope.

(401-402)

It shows that the more mother and daughter share each other's secrets the more love between them increases. Therefore, Winnie makes a plan to go back to China seeking the herbal medicine to cure up Pearl's disease. Pearl has no way to object to it. Rather she feels amazed at the way her mother at the final stage of her life strives to find out the permanent solution of her daughters problem.

This kind of reunion between Winnie and Pearl as mother and daughter is, however, made through the mediation of Auntie Helen. Helen is not in fact Winnie's sister. She is Winnie's native friend. Winnie does her a favour to come to America as her sister. Therefore, Helen wants to pay for her credit by reuniting Winnie and Pearl after a long period of their emotional detachment. Helen pretends with Winnie that she has got a brain tumor and before she dies of it she wants Winnie to reveal her secret to her daughter Pearl so that Pearl and Winnie can be reunited. As Winnie follows Helen's advice, she is disillusioned with Pearl's infirmity that brings both mother and daughter much closer to each other. It delights Helen in a tremendous way, and as she thinks that her intention of making a pretention of brain tumor with Winnie has been fulfilled, she discloses the reality that she has got no brain tumor at all Pearl has narrated Helen's expression revealing this fact as follows:

‘Well, you had a secret, your mother had a secret. I said I was going to die so you would both tell each other your secrets. Isn’t this true? You believed me, hanh?’ she giggles to herself like a naughty girl (408).

This expression of Helen narrated by Pearl hints at the fact that all the three female diasporic personalities, Winnie, Pearl and Helen, belong to the same form of Diaspora that has been inflected through gender and sexuality.

In connection with this representation of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality, this research has brought Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel “*The Lowland*” in an analogous contemplation. The following chapter critically analyzes how Lahiri has revealed the issue of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality in terms of the major characters of her novel such as Gauri, Subash, Bela and Meghna.s

It is in the light of this idea that this research paper aims at probing the issue of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality in Amy Tan’s novel “*The Kitchen God’s Wife*” with an analogous contemplation on Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel “*The Lowland* “. However, the central issue to demystify why and what makes the central characters in Amy Tan’s “*The Kitchen God’s Wife*” and Jhumpa Lahiri’s “*The Lowland*” a different sort of Diaspora will also be critiqued from the perspective of the respective authors who have portrayed the predicament of their central characters in terms of gender and sexuality in their respective novels.

## CHAPTER IV

### **Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* as a Masterpiece of (Representing Inflected Indian American Diaspora**

Published in 2013, Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* reflects multiple issues of Indian American diasporic formation through gender and sexuality. In this novel, Lahiri has situated her inflected diasporic characters such as Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna in an amorphous paradigm of diaspora that constantly keeps on constructing and deconstructing their relationship with one another mainly because of their gender and sexuality. The relationship between Subash and Gauri as husband and wife is a kind of manufactured relationship on the basis of the differences existing in the treatment of gender and sexuality between the American culture and the Indian tradition. Therefore, their relationship of husband and wife gives them a bogus identity that doesn't last long. Likewise, Bela's antipathy towards her mother, Gauri, particularly for deserting her with Subash, and her sympathy and empathy towards Subash for undertaking the risk of becoming her father and rearing her up constitute a rather malleable world of their family ties that constantly undergoes a paradigm shift in the formation of their diasporic identity in the foreign land, America.

Initially Subash is fascinated by Gauri's beauty reflected in her photo sent to him by his younger brother, Udayan, to inform him that they have recently got married in Calcutta while Subash is carrying on his studies in America. It is this deeply imprinted fascination towards Gauri's beauty in his mind that ultimately makes him decide to marry her and make her his own wife after Udayan's death despite his mother's warning that Gauri will never love him. It seems that Udayan's unprecedented death after some time of his marriage with Gauri merely serves as a pretext for Subash to implant and impose his male decision on Gauri's isolated mind from her husband's

family . A number of critical questions arise in the mind of a critical reader in connection with Subash's ultimate decision to marry his own brother's wife Gauri, and Gauri's submissive and docile acknowledgement of Subash 's decision inspite of being pregnant from her first husband, Udayan. For instance, why does Subash take Gauri as a helpless , dependent , submissive , docile ,and isolated figure desperately in need of some rescue from the uncertainty of her future? Doesn't it appear to be his male gaze towards a woman conditioned by his patriarchal society that prevents women from exercising their freedom and independence from their male counter parts? Likewise, why is Gauri compelled to live in isolation from her husband's family members after her husband's unprecedented death? Why do her parents-in-law treat her as an outsider and neglect her as an unwanted stranger after their son's death? Closely examining this issue from the perspective of their traditional mindset, doesn't it appear to be their cultural dogmatism that dominates, exploits, suppresses and oppresses women by putting them on the pedestal? Moreover, isn't Gauri capable of living a significant life of her own herself instead of seeking to be rescued by her husband's elder brother that also by getting married to him for the second time? In other words, does she actually seek help from subash with her second marriage with him? After all she is also an educated woman who is well familiar with her own individual rights and freedom on the one hand, and her social customs, norms and values and tradition on the otherhand. Undermining this fact, why dose Subash consider him self as a supreme and superior figure better educated in America who can rescue Gauri as an ignorant, helpless, submissive and docile creature from her predicament? It is mainly from this issue that the dogmatic treatment of gender and sexuality which gives maximum power and privilege to men but no power at all to women in an Indian society, and in contrast, a more equitable treatment of gender and

sexuality practised in America, seem to be the compelling factors of Gauri's compulsion of getting married to Subash again after her husband Udayan's death, coming to America with Subash as her husband now, and living their individual lives separately as an inflected diaspora there in the foreign land in their old age. Gauri's isolated condition of life after Udayan's death from her husband's family has been properly illustrated in the novel. Lahiri has illustrated it through Subash's enquiry into Gauri's predicament with herself briefly at first and then with his parents in details. In his brief enquiry with Gauri for the first time Subash seems to be a bit influenced by his emotional feeling toward her. Lahiri has mentioned the influence of Subash's emotional feeling toward Gauri as follows:

How is it for you here in the house? With my parents?" She said nothing. He waited, then realised he was staring at her, distracted by a small dark mole on the side of her neck. He looked away.

'I can take you somewhere else', he suggested. Would you like to visit your family for a while? Your aunts and uncles? (99)

Subash's assertion "I can take you somewhere" suggests that he has got the power and privilege to manipulate Gauri not as a saviour of mankind but as a powerful male figure to regulate women in a patriarchal society. A critical mind also discerns the fact here that Subash has properly observed and explored the truth that his own parents have not acknowledged Gauri's existence as the real member of their family particularly after Udayan's death. The query about why they do so regarding Gauri's existence in their family elicits a more critical issue of the subservient role of a woman based on gender discrimination practically existing in a patriarchal society. Although Subash is more educated than his parents to construe the bitter experience and consequences of gender disparity, yet he displays his inability to practically fight

against the prevailing custom of gender discrimination in his society and therefore, adopts the praxis of social escapism concealing his tainted spirit of male chauvinism with the pretension of providing Gauri with the better survival in the foreign land only after getting married to her. Subash's ultimate decision to marry Gauri and help her give birth to her baby in the foreignland under his care is just the matter of his inner desire to take Udayan's place in Gauri's life and replace him forever. It is in this sense that he feels joyless for her to give birth to her baby at his home in his native land where nobody truly acknowledges her as the real member of their family and cares her. Lahiri has clearly stated this fact in the following lines:

The only way to prevent it was to take Gauri away. It was all he could do to help her, the only alternative he could provide. And the only alternative to take her away was to marry her, to take his brother's place, to raise his child, to come to love Gauri as Udayan had to follow him in in a way that felt perverse, that felt ordained. That felt both right and wrong. (115)

To extend the meaning Lahiri has stated in the last line of this extract, it only feels right for subash from the perspective of male domination but feels to be entirely wrong from the perspective of Gauri's freedom, independence, and personal liberty in her individual life. Subash's primary concern with Gauri is basically to possess her youthful hue that always keeps on attracting him towards her. To fulfill this inner intention, Subash finds the favourable pretext of Gauri's isolated, lonely and helpless condition. Lahiri has illustrated this point in the following lines:

He had tried to deny the attraction he felt for Gauri; but it was like the light of the fireflies that swarm up to the house at night, random

pointed that surrounded him, that glowed and then receded without a trail. (116)

It is in this sense that Subash treats Gauri as an object of taking pleasure in his life and hoodwinks her with the promise to make her life better after marrying her and taking her to America. Through Gauri is obliged to follow Subash's manipulative advice to get married to him and go America with him due to her compulsion to remain as a docile and submissive woman in a patriarchal society, yet she takes it as her audacious step to resist the oppressive norms and values of her patriarchal society and enjoy her individual freedom and liberty in a different cultural setting. And she is also conscious of the fact that Subash will never be able to fully reign the place of Udayan in her heart no matter how much he tries after marrying her and taking her as his wife to America. Lahiri has magnified this point clearly as follows:

She had married Subash as a means of staying connected to Udayan  
But even as she was going through with it she knew that it was  
useless, just as it was useless to save a single earring when the other  
half of the pair was lost. (127-128)

However, Gauri does not reveal her conscious will to exist independently in the foreign cultural setting of America to Subash until the circumstances turn favourable for her to act independently in the foreign land. This sort of manufactured relationship between Subash and Gauri based on the ominous compromise between them to live a rather more comfortable and meaningful life in America ultimately situates them in the realm of an inflected (Indian - American or South Asian American) diaspora. Propelled by the alacrity of meaningfully living her own individual life in the more advanced foreign cultural setting of America, Gauri begins to find her way out from her gripping manufactured identity of Subash's wife. Therefore she occasionally keeps



on searching for the moments that give her a sense of relief from living as Subash's wife. The time she spends alone in Subash's absence sometimes in the apartment and sometimes in the university library disillusion her more than the time she spends with Subash in Rhode island. The contrast between her physical proximity with Subash as her second husband and the psychological distance she intends to maintain from him paves her the way to living an inflected diasporic way of life in the long run. Gauri's willingness to maintain a sort of psychological distance from Subash is further bolstered up by her epiphany in which she discovers the fact that she was not Subash's first love after all. There was someone in his past however temporary it was in Rhode island. In reality it is Holly who temporarily settles in Subash's life as his beloved in the past in Rhode island further emboldens Gauri with a sense of approaching freedom or independence from her tainted or gilded identity of Subash's wife. Lahiri has apparently hinted at this point in the following lines:

She was relieved that she was not the only woman in his life. That she, too, was a replacement. Though she was curious, she felt no jealousy. Instead she was thankful that he was capable of hiding something. It validated the step she'd taken, in marrying him. It was like a high mark after a difficult exam. It justified the distance. She continued to maintain from her new husband. It suggested that she didn't have to love him, after all.(136)

It is this epiphany that suggests her for not having to love him "after all" which provides her with some moral courage to continue with her own way of life through study and research in stead of living a subservient life with Subash. In other words, Gauri's realization of not having to love Subash after all creates her own world landscape analogous to Arjun Appadurai's concept of 'ideoscape' that stands in

contrast to Subash's imagined world of sustaining marital ties with Gaur bashi's imagined world of sustaining marital ties with Gauri.

Closely scrutinizing the dividing lines that appear in Gauri's imagined world landscape of her individual freedom and independence from Subash's imagined world landscape in which he dreams about rejoicing his family life with Gauri even after the birth of Bela, the seeds of their ultimate identity of becoming inflected Indian American diaspora through their gender and sexuality in the long run seem to be sprouting. The nostalgic memory that often keeps on haunting the diaspora in general is identical with Gauri's recurrent reminiscence of her days with Udayan as her first husband. It is this sort of Gauri's nostalgia that foregrounds her upcoming ultimate identity of an inflected Indian American diaspora through her gender and sexuality. Lahiri has highlighted Gauri's initial phase of nostalgic mind in the following lines:

What she'd seen from the terrace, the evening the police came for Udayan, now formed a hole in her vision. Space shielded her more effectively than time: the great distance between Rhode Island and Tollygunge. As if her gaze had to span an ocean and continents to see. It had caused those moments to recede, to turn less and less visible, then invisible. But she knew they were there. What was stored in memory was distinct from what was deliberately remembered, Augustine said. (154)

The philosophical explanation of Gauri's nostalgic state of mind in terms of Augustine's view gives a particular hint of how Gauri feels alienated even though she's got subash's companionship as her second husband living together in a foreign Land. It seems that Gauri's alientation effect even after the birth of her daughter, Bela, stems from the contradiction between her and subash's psychological wishes. Subash

wishes to eliminate their psychological distance by possessing her entirely as his docile and submissive wife who would give birth to his own child at his will. Lahiri has sufficiently hinted at this point in the following lines:

He'd hoped that by now Gauri would be ready to have a child with him and to give Bela a companion. He'd gone so far as to suggest it one day, saying he did not want to deny Bela a sibling. He believed it would correct the imbalance, if they were four instead of three. That it would close up the distance. (160)

However, Subash's wish to "correct the imbalance" and "close up the distance" by having his own child from Gauri (in order to replace Bela as his brother's daughter?) never gets fulfilled as Gauri's wish stands in sharp contrast with his wish. To obtain her individual freedom and independence from Subash's patriarchal hegemony, Gauri is strongly determined to keep on maintaining her psychological distance from Subash until the situation turns favourable towards her to get completely detached from him. Lahiri has elucidated this point in the following lines:

She didn't tell Subash, when he brought it up with her, what she already knew; that though she had become a wife a second time, becoming a mother again was the one thing in her life she was determined to prevent from happening. (161)

It is this strong determination which ultimately liberates her from the bondage of living a traditional way of life with Subash as his permanent wife and gives her the freedom to live in her own way in the foreign land.

However, some critics like Savita Iyer Ahrestani have criticized Gauri's will of seeking freedom from her tradition of deserting Subash and Bela in order to cherish

her dream of living an individual life in America as selfish and 'egofistical'. In Ahrestani's opinion, Gauri is:

A selfish and heartless woman, She seems to care little or not at all for those closest to her. Lahiri draws a woman so intent on making a life on her own, alone that she's willing to break hearts, shatter minds and screw up future [...] fully awacauses those in her immediate entourage.

(1)

Ahrestani's this opinion expressed in these lines towards Gauri's desire and daring act for independence is from the perspective of the traditional woman. In Indian tradition, a woman who gives up her family in order to search for and form her own independent individual identity is labelled as "selfish" and "heartless" woman. However, from the post-modern and feminist perspective, it is mandatory for a woman to break or go beyond the patriarchal tradition in order to form her true identity. It is from this past modern feminist perspective that Gauri represents those radical woman who prefer to form her true identity. It is from this past modern feminist perspective that Gauri represents those radical women who prefer to live a diasporic life characterized by their own gender and sexual drives instead of living a traditional life under the hegemony of patriarchal norms and values.

Lahiri as an omniscient narrator in the novel, has pointed out one of the causes of Gauri's radical step towards independence to be Subash's patriarchal authority that tends to domesticate her life for his saks. She has Highlighted this point as follows:

Though he had encouraged her to visit the library in her spare time, to attend lectures 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)

Through these lines, Lahiri suggests the critical thinkers that they make a fair analysis of why Gauri is bound to defy Subash's authority and desert him with Bela. Given that her suggestion is followed, the meaning behind Gauri's desire and daring act for independence turns out to be the practice of her individual liberty which Subash vindictively attempts to curtail for his personal comfort in carrying on with his profession. Therefore, they all are compelled to live in isolation and separation from one another leading their lives of an inflected diaspora consequently produced by their gender and sexual drives in the foreign land.

In this connection of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality in Lahiri's *The lowland*, another critic Michiko Kakutani has labeled the novel as 'operatic' on its thematic ground. In Kakutani's opinion, the entire novel further extends the process of diasporic formation that was already introduced by Lahiri in her earlier works *The Namesake* and *The Interpreter of Maladies*. In this further extension, he also hints at the idea that the entire novel *The lowland* aims at magnifying the principle of inflection in diasporic formation through the gender and sexual drives of its principal characters such as Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna.

Kakutani hints at this point as follows:

Jhumpa Lahiri first made her name with quiet, meticulously observed stories about Indian immigrants trying to adjust to new lives in the United States, stories that had the husband intimacy of chamber music. The premise of her new novel, "The lowland", is startlingly operatic. Udayan an idealistic student in Calcutta in 1960s, is drawn into Mao-inspired revolutionary politics. After his violent death (which happened fairly early in the novel), his devoted, dutiful brother, marries his pregnant widow, Gauri, and brings her to America in

hopes of beginning her new start in a new country. Their marriage, though, will remain haunted by their memories of Udayan and a terrible secret Gauri keeps to herself. (1)

It is this 'terrible Secret' that ultimately gives her own individual identity of an inflected Indian American diaspora, and also compels Subash, Bela, and Meghna to go through the same identity formation.

In the novel, Lahiri has clearly illuminated the predicament of living an inflected diasporic life through gender and sexuality by all the major characters such as Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna which is mainly characterized by nostalgia, remorse and loneliness. After deserting Subash and Bela moving to California from Rhode Island to continue with her teaching profession and having continued her teaching or lecturing profession for several years living alone, Gauri is tormented by the predicament of living and inflected diasporic life that makes her deeply feel that she is neither a pure American woman nor remains a pure Indian woman. Lahiri has illuminated Gauri's predicament caused by her inflected diasporic identity in the following lines:

And yet she remained, in spite of her Western clothes, her Western academic interests, a woman who spoke with a foreign accent whose physical appearance and complexion were unchangeable, and against the backdrop of most America, still unconventional. She continued to introduce herself by an unusual name, the first given by her parents, the last by the two brothers she had wedded. (236)

The 'unusual name' by which Gauri continues to introduce herself is suggestive of her unusually inflected diasporic identity through her gender and sexuality.

Subash's predicament of living an inflected diasporic life is even more pathetic than that of Gauri's predicament. As Bela also deserts him when she grows up Subash deeply realizes the detrimental effect of loneliness and nostalgia triggered by his inflected diasporic identity Lahiri has highlighted his feeling of loneliness in this way in the following lines:

Sitting beside him, Subash delivered the sparse details of his own life. A wife from whom he was estranged, a daughter who had grown up and moved away. A job at the same coastal research lab he'd been with nearly thirty years. Some consulting work on oil spills from time to time, or for the town's Department of Public Works. He was without a family, just as he'd been when he'd know Richard. But he was alone in a different way. (245)

Subash's condition of being "alone in a different way" is suggestive of the detrimental effect of loneliness triggered by his inflected diasporic identity that he gains through his gender and sexuality. Likewise, Lahiri has further illuminated Subash's nostalgic predicament as follows:

Instead, in his bed, he found himself traveling into the deeper past sifting at random through the detritus of his boyhood. He revisited the years before he left his family. His father returning from the market every morning, the fish his mother would slice and salt and fry for breakfast, silverskinned pieces spilling out of a burlap bagi. (250)

Subash's this reminiscence of his past is typically a nostalgic drive that momentarily releases him from his bitter condition of living a lonely life in a foreign land against his dream. And this sort of feeling is one of the characteristics of the inflected diaspora through gender and sexuality.

Similarly, in her further comment, Savita Iyer-Ahrestani has given a different opinion from her earlier one and mentioned that she has identified Jhumpa Lahiri's character Gauri with the traces of her own diasporic predicament as an Indian-American woman. She says:

As an Indian woman reading *The Lowland*, I personally admired Gauri's daring, her willingness to trample on the life that tradition and custom demand. Without fear, she strikes out to live on her own terms a truly American notion. [2]

This sort of revolutionary spirit of Gauri has already been postulated as the prime cause of inflection in her diasporic formation. Resenting the traditional stereotypical role of an Indian to be checked woman in the family as well as society, Gauri bravely constructs her own independent world of inflected Indian-American diaspora. In this sense her daring character seems to deconstruct the notion of male and female hierarchy and brings characteristic change in diasporic formation, which is what this research paper has dealt with.

In the similar vein of critical comments on Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*, another critic Macro Delgu has pointed out that Lahiri has beautifully stretched the domain of diasporic existence of her major characters in her novel through the conflict between "resentment" and "redemption" and "rootedness" and "freedom" He says:

[...] the characters in *The Lowland* seem to have been conceived as representative types with designated roles to play in a family melodrama constructed to underscore generational patterns of resentment and redemption. (1)



Delegu's this statement highly complies with the issue of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality as elaborated in preceding paragraphs on Lahiri's novel. It elucidates the fact that the inflected diasporic identity of Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna through their gender and sexuality is illuminated in their dichotomy between resentment and redemption and rootedness and freedom.

Bela's inflected diasporic identity through her gender and sexuality has also been portrayed as a product of Subash and Gauri's transformed identity. Lahiri has stated this fact through Subash's realization when Bela comes to meet him after a long time being pregnant by an unknown male figure. The writer has presented this fact as follows:

The coincidence coursed through him numbing, bewildering. A pregnant woman, a fatherless child. Arriving in Rhode Island needing him. It was a reenactment of Bela's origins. A version of what had brought Gauri to him, years ago. (264)

Subash's ultimate realization and acceptance of his prime role in the manufacturing of their inflected diasporic identity has been bolstered by Bela's identity formation in the similar way of Subash and Gauri's manufactured identity of an inflected diaspora through their gender and sexuality. Lahiri has elucidated this point through Bela's refusal to reveal the father of her daughter Meghna, to Subash. She has stated this point as follows:

Her refusal to reveal who the father was, her insistence upon raising a child without one; he could not set this concern aside. But it wasn't the prospect of Bela being a single mother that upset him. It was because he was the model she was following; that he was an inspiration to her. (256)

Lahiri's this statement brings a critical mind closer to the mother daughter relationship as critiqued in Amy Tan's novel *The Kitchen Gods Wife*. The only difference lies in the fact that the secret of becoming the inflected diaspora through gender and sexuality is ultimately exposed between Winnie and her daughter, Pearl, through the exchange of their personal secrets, whereas it remains artististically hidden or unexplored in between and among Gauri, Subash, Bela and Meghna's separate and irreconcilable lives in the foreign land in Lahiri's *The Lowland*.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusion

Drawing a picture or sketch of linear comparison between and among the central characters of Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The lowland* in terms of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality, this research has thus attempted to explore and demystify the newly emerging (yet highly underevaluated) concept and issue of the inflected diaspora particularly through gender and sexuality. It has attempted to achieve this goal by bringing the discussion of this issue to the forefront of literary, theoretical and academic analysis. In this attempt, some of the major tenets of diaspora studies, feminism, and psychoanalysis have been encapsulated while critiquing this issue in the two feminists ground breaking novels - Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*.

Winnie and Helen in Tan's *The kitchen God's Wife*, and Gauri in particular and Subash in general in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* have been critically observed as the major representative figures of the inflected diaspora through gender and sexuality. Similarly, Pearl and Tan's novel and Bela and Meghna in Lahiri's novel have been taken to be the extending product of an inflected diasporic identity that seems to exist distinctly from the conventionalized notion of diaspora. As their fixed or true identity is yet to be theoretically distinguished, determined, and canonized with distinction in diasporic domain, their fluid diasporic identity has been hypothesized as an inflected diasporic identity through gender and sexuality, and this hypothesis has been attempted to be scholarly and critically examined and justified with the luminous ideas of diasporic studies, feminism, and psychoanalysis.

Likewise, as this research has aimed at unfolding manifold issues of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality in literary, theoretical, and critical circles and rigorously discussing and analyzing them, it is not adamant on coining a new term and labeling it to name refer to an inflected diasporic identity through gender and sexuality. Rather it critically advocates for the recognition and critical analysis of this issue by redrawing the concept of diaspora especially from the perspective of gender and sexuality. It is in this sense that this research hopes to have achieved the goal of bringing the distinctly inflected diasporic identity of Subash, Gauri, Bela and Meghna in Lahiri's *The Lowland* and Winnie, Helen, and Pearl in Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* to the limelight of through literary, theoretical and academic discussion and analysis. In this process, the literary and theoretical ideas of Jana Evan Braziel and Anita Mannur, Arjun Appadurai, Stuart Hall, and Gayatri Gopinath in diaspora studies, Simon de Bravair, Helen Cixos, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva in feminism, and Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan have mainly been borrowed along with other critics' supporting critical opinions towards the issue of an inflected diasporic identity through gender and sexuality.

Similarly, this research is supposed to have successfully brought all the major characters of Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Lahiri's *The Lowland* under the same critical and theoretical rubric of inflected diasporic identity through gender and sexuality. Gauri and Winnie have been assumed to have suffered similar blows of gender discrimination, patriarchy and male domination as the compelling factors of their inflected diasporic formation. While Wen Fu is seen overtly playing the role of a dominating and chauvinistic male figure, Subash has been critiqued, as a result of which he is also supposed to have fallen the victim of an inflected diasporic identity. Pearl, Bela and Meghna have been postulated to be the products of especially their

mother's predicament that leads them to continue with the same inflected diasporic identity. Therefore, they all are supposed to be standing on the same platform to continue with their distinctly inflected diasporic identity through gender and sexuality even in the future. Thus, this research is highly wished or hoped to have critically illuminated the major concern of inflection in diasporic formation through gender and sexuality with Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*.

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