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### JHUMPA LAHIRI'S LOWLAND: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF COLONIAL MIMICRY AND HYBRIDITY

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#### ABSTRACT

This research has two goals: first, to carefully document the numerous expressions of hybridity and mimicry demonstrated by Indian immigrant characters residing in the United States; and second, to assess the effect that these traits have on their personal identity. Both of these goals are intended to be accomplished by this research. Because of this, the idea of post-colonialism is utilised, particularly in relation to the conversation about imitation and hybridity. The research that was conducted for this study is classified as qualitative research. This study focuses on the hybridity and mimicry shared by the characters in Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*, with a particular emphasis on analysing the ways in which these characteristics impact the characters' identities. The basis of the research is comprised of several passages from the novel, including both lines and paragraphs. Reading, digesting, and interpreting the data are the three activities that are the primary emphasis of the content analysis approach that is used in data analysis.

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Based on the findings of the study, it appears that the characters engage in a variety of kinds of imitation, including manner, value, and lifestyle copying. Additionally, the characters could be exhibiting linguistic hybridity. The study of the data suggests that the characters have a secondary consciousness as a consequence of their hybrid nature and their capacity to copy.

KEY WORDS: Hybridity, Mimicry, Lowland, Interpretation, Characters.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Identity is a topic that incorporates our self-perception, our perspective of the world around us, and our collective comprehension of who we are as individuals. It is a subject that may be carefully investigated in a conversation if one so chooses. It is possible for a person to choose to identify oneself as a Christian, a scholar, or an Asian, among other choices; alternatively, they may choose to let others to define who they are. Self-concept is something that develops over time as a consequence of the process of socialisation as well as the norms and expectations that are common in the society in which an individual lives. One's identity, whether it is that of a person or that of a community, is significantly shaped by culture, as well as by socialisation and the immediate social context in which they find themselves. Culture may be defined in a number of different ways, and one of those ways is as a collective experience that is shared by a group of people. Individuals who come from different cultures have different perspectives and ways of living because of the collective and individual experiences and difficulties that are related with elements such as historical events, geographical location, religious beliefs, and other traits that are peculiar to a particular region. For instance, in the same way that a coloniser would not entirely appreciate the experience of being colonised, a European man could not fully know the difficulties and obstacles that an Asian human is confronted with.

Individuals that get together to form a community are able to develop norms and behaviours that are reflective of their shared ideas and values within the group. As a result, any particular region and collective of people will invariably be distinguished by a culture that is distinct from the others. In accordance with Graburn (2001:6), traditions are an important component of culture that will endure in spite of the passage of time. A number of features, including marriage, public gatherings, religious ceremonies, and respect for the old, are included in the collective concept of society. When traditions are passed down from one generation to the

next, they eventually become an integral part of the identity and way of life of a community. The ceremonies and customs that are practiced in this area offer a great deal of information. They serve as a concrete expression of the collected knowledge and wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation, and they are a representation of the lasting heritage of human civilization. These results are a reflection of the people's interactions with one another in the community, which in turn affect their perspectives and sense of who they are. The availability of isolation is decreasing as a result of progress in various aspects of life. On the other hand, the possibilities and methods of interacting with other communities and cultures are expanding and flourishing, which is generating opportunities and avenues for individuals and societies from all over the world to connect and engage with one another. In the early modern era, cultural mixing and contact occurred as a result of migration, commerce, and colonisation, which brought together populations that sprang from a variety of cultural backgrounds. According to Ashcroft (1998:118), hybridity is defined as the creation of fresh trans-cultural manifestations in the contact zone as a result of colonisation. Consequently, during the time period of colonialism, the cultures of those who colonised and those who colonised also interacted with one another. Throughout the course of a nation's history, the interaction and fusion of many languages and practices has resulted in the formation of hybrid cultures. The process of colonisation results in the formation of at least two distinct groups of contact zones. The first one is a reference to the territory that is now under control or the area that was originally inhabited by a certain group of people. Specifically, this is the location where the coloniser displays the culture of the nation that they founded. A number of advantages are provided to the colonised by the colonisers, beginning with the provision of education and concluding in the cultural practices of the colonised. Within the colonial population, there was a great amount of attention and influence to account for. Over time, the colonised gradually adopt the colonizer's manner of speaking, clothing style, lifestyle choices, and other parts of their culture. As a consequence of this, certain aspects of the culture of the coloniser are still present in the countries that were formerly subject to colonial rule. Over the course of a considerable amount of time, Western powers created colonies in a number of Asian republics. As was the case with a number of other Asian countries, India was colonised by the British throughout its history. A table is presented by Luscombe (2014) that illustrates how British commercial businesses gradually built a foothold in India between the years 1609 and 1947, when India

gained its freedom. The conquest of India by the British Empire had several repercussions, some of which were beneficial while others were disastrous.

A second type of contact zone is one that relates to the territories or homelands of the people who colonised the region. In the context of colonialism, the term "Diaspora" refers to the movement of a colonial people from their native territory to that of the colonisers. A contact area is created as a result of this. It is the one that is responsible for the emergence of the hybridity phenomenon. The persons who were colonised are put in a position where they are subjected to cultural differences and, in the most extreme cases, racial prejudice when they relocate from their place of origin to the country of the coloniser. There are a number of ways in which the efforts of persons who have been colonised or who have immigrated to assimilate into the dominant culture might present themselves, one of which is cultural mimicry.

### **PROCESS OF CULTURAL HYBRIDIZATION & IMITATION**

Due to the fact that they are subjected to cultural hybridization and imitation, the characters' sense of self is in a state of ongoing growth and negotiation. As a result of differences in culture and a large number of individual factors, immigrants frequently suffer feelings of doubt and engage in reflection over their identity and destiny. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the existing body of literature by critically analysing the depiction of Indian immigrant characters in Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*. More specifically, the study will concentrate on the characters' participation in hybridity and imitation, as well as the ensuing influence on their sense of themselves.

When analysing the material that is being taken into consideration, the principles of hybridity, which were initially introduced by Homi Bhabha and Bill Ashcroft, are given attention. Bhabha highlights hybridity as "the third space," a domain that supports the emergence of something new, unusual, and unknown. This is something that Bhabha says in the book *The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha*, which was written by J. Rutherford. According to Ashcroft's definition, which can be found in *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*, hybridity is the result of cultural fusion that occurred as a result of contact between colonisers and colonised people. A number of different expressions, including language, culture, politics, race, and ethnicity, are among the possibility that the items may take on. In addition, the researcher takes

Lois Tyson's perspective, which defines hybridity as the favourable emotions that are experienced while interacting with a number of other cultures. In order to undertake the phenomenon analysis, a selection of words, phrases, idioms, sentences, and paragraphs from Lahiri's *The Lowlander* are utilised. As a consequence of this, it is essential to apply the ideas of mimicry and hybridity to the data in order to achieve the goal of obtaining conclusive conclusions.

### FORMS OF LINGUISTIC HYBRIDITY & MIMICRY

The table below presents the forms of linguistic hybridity and mimicry in *The Lowland*.

**Table 1: Forms of Hybridity**

NO.	PAGE	QUOTATION	MEANING	CATEGORY
1.	36	'Ma' & 'Ba'	The Indian pronouns "Ma" & "Baba" signify mother & father, respectively.	Unspoken phrases
2.	38	Lungi	A waist garment frequently worn in India and other Southeast Asian countries (e.g., "Indonesia, Malaysia & Myanmar"), also referred to as a sarong.	
3.	257	Because the letter was written in Bengali, there was no way that Bela could read it. Despite her obvious perplexion, she managed to communicate a paraphrase of its contents.	While Subhash & Bela were away, Gauri penned a Bengali letter. Bela is slightly lacking in Bengali proficiency due to her family's history of Indian immigration to the United States. Because of this, the letter will be unreadable to her.	Expressions made by fictional characters

**Table 2: Forms of Mimicry**

NO.	PAGE	QUOTATION	MEANING	CATEGORY
1.	169	"Why did you cut off your hair? I was tired of it. And your clothes? I was tired of those,	The Indian pronouns "Ma" & "Baba" signify mother & father, respectively.	Manners' Mimicry

		too.”		
2.	38	“There were hotels he might have entered in this part of the city, to have a whiskey or a beer, to fall into a conversation with strangers. To forget the way his parents behaved, to forget the things Gauri had said.”	One Western culture is going out to a club and consuming alcohol. Subhash had the opportunity to imitate the behaviour after returning from the US.	Lifestyle Mimicry

**Table 3: Two Minds at Work**

NO.	PAGE	QUOTATION	MEANING	CATEGORY
1.	134	“Though he looked like any other Bengali he felt an allegiance with the foreigners now. He shared with them to knowledge of elsewhere. Another life to go back to. The ability to leave.”	After Subhash has lived in the US for a while, he returns to India and finds that he doesn't fit in with the locals. Now he knew the ins and outs of a distant nation, the one where he had lived and would return. Subhash is able to go, unlike the locals in India who are permanently tied to the land they reside on.	Two minds at work
2.	286	“Her appearance and accent caused people to continue to ask her where she came from, and some to form certain assumptions. Once, invited to give a talk in San Diego, she'd been picked up by a driver the university had sent, so that she would be spared the effort of driving herself. She had greeted him at the door when he rang the bell. But the driver had not realized, when she told him good morning, that she was his passenger. He had mistaken	Although Gauri has successfully adopted the Western way of life, she still manages to distinguish out. Those who haven't met her yet are curious as to who she is. It wasn't until the driver mistook her for an aid worker that Gauri realised she didn't quite fit in with her new neighbourhood.	

		her for the person paid to open another person's door. Tell her, whenever she's ready, he'd said."		
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A variety of methods for reducing the amount of data were utilised, including careful content observation, data evaluation, elimination of data that was not essential, and, eventually, the extraction of data for the purpose of conduct research topic analysis in the above cited tables.

## **FINDINGS & CONCLUSION**

Linguistic hybridity is shown in the novel *The Lowland* by Lahiri. This hybridity is demonstrated through a sort of mimicry that encompasses the imitation of manners, values, and lifestyles. According to the findings of the researcher, this particular form of imitation is of a non-verbal character. In order to investigate the ways in which hybridity and imitation influence the identities of Indian immigrants, especially in regard to the second research question, post-colonial literature is utilised.

### **Linguistic Hybridity**

The narrative style and cultural portrayal of each piece of literature is unique to that particular piece of literature. It is possible to discover the cultural representation that literary works express through the language that authors choose to use through the process of literary analysis. Language is used by postcolonial authors not only for the purpose of communication but also to illustrate the socio-cultural aspects of indigenous or post-colonial cultures. As an illustration, a number of postcolonial authors use expressions from the language of the postcolonial society that have not been translated into their compositions of literature. This tactic is also utilised in Lahiri's work, which is titled *The Lowland*. In spite of the fact that the work is written in English, the author deftly incorporates a number of Bengali idioms scattered throughout the story and the conversation. The conversation between Subhash and Gauri, two protagonists from the novel's first wave of Indian immigrants, takes place in Bengali rather than English on both occasions. They solely write their letters in Bengali for the sole aim of keeping all of their correspondence confidential. Udayan wrote letters to his brother in Rhode Island

using the Bengali language. His brother was located in Rhode Island. Later on, once Subhash has finished reading them; Udayan gives him the instruction to delete the letters since they contain conversations regarding his participation in the Naxalbari demonstrations.

“A few days later, in his mailbox at his department, Subhash found a letter from Udayan. Paragraphs in Bengali, dark blue ink against the lighter blue of the aerogramme. (Lahiri, 2014: 51)”

Due to the fact that Bengali script is being used, the possibility of information being leaked is quite low. The fact that Subhash & Udayan, two of the protagonists in *The Lowland*, converse with one another in Bengali is evidence of this. As can be seen from the data that was presented, Udayan gave Subhash the instruction to keep the goods for himself, but Subhash ultimately chose to get rid of them. In addition to that, he responds to the mail that Udayan sends him in Kolkata.

“Perhaps the letter would have been safe among his possessions in Rhode Island. It was written in Bengali, it could have been something Subhash kept. (Lahiri, 2014: 52)”

One of the main characters in the novel, Bela, is an immigrant from India who is of the second generation and has difficulty understanding and using the Bengali language successfully. Deepa, a native of West Bengal, inquires about the weather conditions in Rhode Island, but Bela, who does not have a strong command of the Bengali language, is unable to properly converse with her. Due to the fact that Bela is the child of immigrants, she is faced with the unique challenge of being unable to communicate with the country of origin of her parents.

Not only does Lahiri use unique Bengali vocabulary into the discourse of the characters, but she also incorporates it into the narration, which helps to accentuate the socio-cultural component of West Bengali society. The anticipation of ‘Durga Pujo’, a Hindu festival that is held in Calcutta and has a significant place in Bengali customs, is mentioned in the chapter. According to Lahiri (2014: 99), the Bengali festival days of Pujo, which include Shashthi, Saptami, Ashtami, and Navami, started and continued. (An energetic and joyous festival that takes place over the entirety of the city at large). precisely, the source that is being referred to is Lahiri (2014: 129). By writing the novel in English and including unique Bengali vocabulary

without translation, Lahiri hopes to achieve her goal of presenting the genuine local essence of West Bengali culture as well as the cultural identity of the characters. Lahiri contains additional language that is associated with traditional Bengali dress, such as the terms "Lungi" and "Kurta", with the sari being one of the examples. One of the most frequent garments worn by males in India is called a Lungi, which is also occasionally referred to as a "sarong" in a number of nations belonging to the Southeast Asian region. The term "Kurta" refers to the traditional garments that it is usual for men in India to wear. This item of clothing is designed to look like a shirt without a collar. In addition, Lahiri uses Bengali terms that are associated with the passage of time, the day, and the season. "Kal," "shakal bela," "bikel bela," "ratrir bela," "barsha kal," and "basanta kal" are some of the words that are contained in this collection. The purpose of this translation of Bengali terminology is to familiarize the reader with the local surroundings as well as the cultural characteristics of the Bengali community. The use of Bengali language into a piece of work enriches the linguistic and cultural depth of the work, which in turn makes it easier for readers to comprehend the context of the tale and fosters a respect for Indian culture. For the purpose of aggressively promoting Bengali language and culture, Lahiri is employing the English language, which is widely known and highly valued.

### **Mimicry**

Mimicry is frequently cited as the predominant phenomenon in postcolonial writing. Colonization, whether voluntary or coerced, causes the colonized population to assimilate the conquerors' way of life through various means. Mimicry in colonial and postcolonial literature sometimes occurs when individuals from the colonized society, such as Indians or Africans, adopt the language, clothing, politics, or cultural mindset of their colonizers, such as the British or French. The dominant forms of imitation in literary works frequently entail the colonized individuals adopting the language, attire, style, political ideologies, and cultural perspectives of the colonizers. The majority of the imitation in Lahiri's *The Lowland* is conveyed through non-verbal means. Non-verbal forms of imitation include imitating style, value, and manner of life.

### **Manner Mimicry**

Throughout the novel *The Lowland* by Lahiri, the Indian immigrants make a point of imitating the fashion and haircuts of the host nation. This is especially true with regard to their

outward appearance, which includes their clothing and their makeup. The celebration of marriage, the wedding ceremony, and holidays such as Halloween and Thanksgiving play a significant role in the novel's depiction of Rhode Island society.

### **Value Mimicry**

Being a part of the Diaspora culture makes immigrants respect and act like their host countrymen. These immigrant individuals begin to view their home nation and its culture through a new lens upon their return. The work portrays some American principles, such as equality and individuality. Because every person is special in their own way, individuality places a premium on personal space, autonomy, and initiative. Hierarchy and holism are the guiding principles of traditional Indian society as presented in the book. There is a superior-inferior gradation in society that manifests itself in hierarchies or the ordering of units. The occupational domains and marital status of each caste are likewise structured according to this concept of caste. The primary tenet of holism is the idea that every person has responsibilities and rights within a larger social or collective context. The protagonists and antagonists all act in ways that reflect the importance of individualism, particularly when it comes to issues of personal space and autonomy.

### **Lifestyle Mimicry**

The Rhode Islanders also adopt some western practices, such as drinking and having sexual relations outside of marriage, as part of their way of life. The practice of consuming alcohol at social gatherings, sometimes referred to as "social drinking," is based on the belief that it makes individuals feel more at ease, relaxed, and sociable. Many people find that social drinking helps them relax enough to talk more effectively. It is deeply ingrained in our society to drink socially. [Paragraph 4 of Alcohol Culture in America, 2017] Even after returning to their native West Bengal, the characters carry on with this habit of copying. The Tolly club is a symbol of the phenomena of imitative behaviour among native Indians. In addition to providing locals with opportunities to experience western culture, the club also promotes the values held by the British. As they return to their homeland, Indian immigrants also enjoy Tolly Club. Strange as it may seem, this club is the one place they truly belong, even more so than their home in India.

## **Effects of Hybridity & Mimicry on Indian Immigrant Identity**

In his work Ferdous (2015), Achebe asserts that the primary responsibility of a novelist is not to only prioritize current events, but rather to delve into the profound aspects of the human experience. While novels may vary in their subject matter, they all convey a universal message. Every narrative encompasses the ideas, cultures, and emotional experiences of the readers. The Indian immigrant characters in *The Lowland* have characteristics of hybridity and emulation. The book demonstrates how hybridity and imitation have diverse impacts on the identity of Indian immigrants throughout different generations. Hybridity has a positive impact by promoting the harmonious collaboration between diverse cultures. The convergence of several cultures results in a harmonious influence, characterized by a state of equilibrium. This space provides individuals with the opportunity to fully embrace their diverse identities while still respecting and acknowledging their cultural origins. Mimicry, however, is frequently perceived in a derogatory manner. Bhabha contends that imitation can fulfil two distinct functions (as cited in Singh, 2009: par.7). It possesses the ability to be potent and rebellious in some aspects. Subversive mimicry happens when it persuades individuals to forsake their cultural heritage, so suppressing their cultural identity. Nevertheless, there are circumstances in which copying can really be advantageous, particularly in relation to the principles of the rule of law, freedom, and justice. Indian immigrants are influenced by hybridity and imitation, which impact them both in their own country and abroad. The language hybridity of Subhash, Gauri, and Bela has been advantageous because to its ability to foster resistance. They are able to keep their incognito thanks of the Bengali language they speak. This is shown in Subhash's letter-writing communication with his brother in India. For concern that someone may read their intimate correspondence, they write in Bengali. As we observe when Gauri receives a letter from Subhash many years after they've split ways, the usage of the mother language also offers the characters an emotional sense. Since she mainly uses English, even while communicating with her brother in India, Subhash's letter makes her feel lonesome. It reveals that Indian culture and identity are irreversible and strongly etched in their thoughts. Although imitation supports the characters in reaching their aims, it also has a deleterious influence on them. Gauri says that wearing like an American has a negative effect on her as it makes her feel less genuinely Indian. This is something that Bela goes through as well. Nonetheless, her family did not teach her about Indian culture, which is why she appears more Americanized. The characters experience a condition of

dual awareness as a result of the situations outlined earlier. A person's sense of the world as divided into two halves is what Tyson calls "double consciousness" (2006: 421). As an example, a postcolonial individual bears two cultures: his own and that of his conquerors. The socio-cultural development of persons is eventually effected by this conceptual division. Finally, the postcolonial individual feels himself stuck between the two cultures; he has a strong sensation of not belonging anywhere. *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri demonstrates how the characters of Subhash, Gauri, and Bela - representing the first and second generations of Indian immigrants - experiencing double consciousness owing to the story's focus on immigration.

## CONCLUSION

The researcher made the observation that the protagonists in Lahiri's work "*The Lowlandis*", who are immigrants from India, go through a condition that is referred to as linguistic hybridity. The work makes it very obvious that it incorporates Bengali phrases and idioms that have not been translated into English, and it also depicts characters having conversations in Bengali. Generally speaking, there are three different sorts of imitation that may be used to the characters. A variety of elements, including behaviour and attire, are examples of one type of cultural copying that can be seen. As a distinguishing attribute of individualism, the second characteristic is a destructive focus on one's own independence and personal limits. Individualism is characterized by this fixation. Additionally, one might imitate the lifestyle by indulging in risky activities such as drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual activity prior to being married. This is a way to create the desired effect. From a postcolonial point of view, these findings lay the groundwork for conducting an investigation into the influence that imitation and hybridity have on the process of self-discovery among Indian immigrants. In the course of the narrative, the characters acquire a feeling of dual awareness as a consequence of the balancing and subversive effects that imitation has on them. In the process of mimicking civilizations from other countries, they are watering down their Indian cultural heritage. The effect of hybridity in the process of maintaining a balance, on the other hand, plays a significant part in the ongoing struggle against full elimination and oblivion.

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