

Identity Change in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel *The Lowland*

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Abstract:

The topic of identity is very prominent in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* (2013), and different characters can be analysed in terms of it. One of the main characters is an Indian woman Gauri who becomes a widow and marries the brother of her former husband. When they move to America, Gauri starts discovering her new multiple (possible present and future) identities. Therefore, the article aims to discuss how Gauri's identity changes throughout the novel. The discussion is based on Identity Theory and its relevant concepts. It reveals how migration becomes an eye-opening experience and influences Gauri's identity.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland*, Identity Theory, multiple identities, identity salience, possible identity, future self, identity change

Introduction

Identity Theory is not a new theory, for its ideas primarily come from symbolic interactionism and the theory of perceptual control (Burke and Stets 2009, 18). However, the present article will not focus on these but rather on certain cornerstone concepts from the fields of sociology and socio-psychology which Identity Theory employs. According to Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, well-known sociologists researching the topic of identity, “[w]hile identity theory has developed as a theory over the past 25 years, simultaneously, the theory has found application in a variety of [...] areas” (Stets and Burke 2014, 82). They mention such areas as crime, law, education and others. Even though literature is not included in the list, various concepts of the theory can be successfully used not only in discussions about real people and their behaviour but also in analyses of literary works and their characters. The topic of identity is very prominent in Jhumpa Lahiri's work in general as well as her novel *The Lowland* (2013). This is why different characters can be analysed in terms of it. In this article, the character of a woman called Gauri has been chosen with an aim to discuss and analyse her complicated identity that keeps changing throughout the novel, as she moves to live in different places. TK Pius has rightly noted that “all other characters in *The Lowland* follow a predictable path, [but] it is Gauri who comes across as the most complex, unpredictable character” (Pius 2014, 110). Joel Kuortti writes about “non-translation of identity in Lahiri's writing and touches upon the issue of hybrid identity not only in her work but also in the writer's life, as she has written about herself as having such an identity” (Kuortti 2007, 205). Lahiri (b. 1967), who is considered to be an American author

of novels and short stories, has Indian roots and often writes about characters who move from India to other countries and various issues they face while migrating or growing up in families that are immigrants in America. It seems that the story about Gauri may have been influenced by Lahiri's life in the United States, Rhode Island and Boston in particular.

On Identity Theory

It is quite difficult to define the concept of identity, for identity formation is always in progress and one's identity keeps changing all the time. Lawrence Grossberg, for instance, claims that "[i]dentities are always relational and incomplete [...]. Identity is always temporary and unstable" (Grossberg 1996, 89). In addition, Rosemary Rich notes that "an individual has an active role in the construction of their own identity" (Rich 2014, 2). Therefore, one's identity depends on various choices the individual consciously or subconsciously makes. In fact, it is not possible to speak about one identity, since each individual has more than one, usually many. Burke and Stets provide the following example that helps to understand how one can have a number of identities in different contexts:

One can be a teacher, a wife, a mother, a friend, [...] and so on. Each position has its own meanings and expectations that are internalized as what we would now call an identity [...]. Each of these multiple selves we now recognize as different identities. Each 'self,' as we use the term, is therefore, made up of the multiple identities a person has. (Burke and Stets 2009, 24)

Similarly to the concept of multiple identities by Burke and Stets, Grossberg refers to this phenomenon of having a number of identities as "multiplicity of identities" and focuses on identity fragmentation, for identities "are [...] always contradictory, made up out of partial fragments" (Grossberg 1996, 89-91). Therefore, sometimes the concept of hybrid identity comes into play, too, especially when different nationalities or ethnicities are involved. In short, the self can be seen as a jigsaw puzzle, since it has many pieces which are different identities that are put together. Unlike a puzzle image which is always the same when it is assembled, the self can be and often is different depending on the context, for identities that form the self are neither stable nor complete. Sometimes they co-exist, but at other times they contradict each other and identity change takes place.

It is important to emphasise that individuals need to feel comfortable about their multiple identities, so they seek approval of those identities by negotiating them with other people. Stets and Burke refer to this process as "identity verification" (Stets and Burke 2014, 62). Such verification is needed in relation to both present and future identities, but different identities may be negotiated with different individuals or groups of individuals. In other words, there are identities that individuals already have, but there are also others that they might see as possible to have in the near or distant future. According to Daphna Oyserman and Leah James, possible identities can be either positive or negative and might "differ with life phase, life transition, and life circumstance" (Oyserman and James 2011, 117). Moreover, "possible identities [...] provide a goal post for current action and an interpretative lens for making sense of experience and so should influence both well-

being and motivation” (Oyserman and James 2011, 117). Here it becomes possible to use the concept of “future self,” because it “is that part of the self-concept focused on the self one might become” (Oyserman and James 2011, 119). Nevertheless, the connection between the present and the future selves might be complicated, for “the future self may not feel connected to the present self” or “the future self can influence the current self” (but not necessarily does) (Oyserman and James 2011, 118). If the present and future identities are conflicting ones, it is a good idea to ask why and when (which includes context and circumstances) one or the other identity wins, especially when the future one does (Oyserman and James 2011, 119), since the winning identity becomes more important. This identity affects not only the individual who has it but also others around him or her.

An individual can have multiple identities, but Sabine Trepte argues that all identities “are not of the same importance at the same time” (Trepte 2006, 258). That is, some identities may be more important than others in all contexts or the importance of certain identities might differ depending on the context in which one is involved at a particular time. In the provided example by Burke and Stets above, one’s identity as a mother might be more important in all contexts at all times while her identity as a teacher may seem not very prominent when she is at home, but it does not mean it is always so for an individual who is both a teacher and mother. In other words, some identities may be more dominant than others. Karina V. Korostelina notes that a “dominant identity replaces all other core social identities and becomes the most salient and actual identity prevailing in the system of social identities” (Korostelina 2007, 76). This kind of identity is often referred to as salient or the most salient identity. Stets and Burke define it as follows:

The salience of an identity is the probability that a particular identity will be activated across a variety of situations and thus influence the role choices made by the person. Identities that are more salient are more likely to be enacted or activated across situations. (Stets and Burke 2014, 59)

Even though an individual may have more than one identity, these multiple identities are not activated at the same time. The most dominant or salient identity will have a higher chance of being activated in a variety of contexts, while not so salient identities might be active only in a particular context and may be changed by others, more salient ones.

As discussed, identities are not stable and continue changing. This “change occurs when the meanings in one’s identity shift over time” (Stets and Burke 2014, 75). As a result, identity change may be observed during a long period of time rather than quickly. Usually “the less salient and committed identities may be more likely to change or to change more than identities that have higher salience or commitment” (Stets and Burke 2014, 77). The next part of the article will discuss how the identity of one character gradually changes in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Lowland* (2013). Since identity change is a process, the way different identities gain or lose salience will be discussed almost chronologically in terms of the plot line of the novel.

Gauri's Changing Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel *The Lowland*

Having married Subhash, Gauri, an Indian woman who is one of the main characters in the novel, comes to live with him in the United States. She is twenty-three years old and five months pregnant at that time, so Subhash becomes both a husband and father. It is his idea to marry the widow of his brother Udayan, who has been killed by the police because of his involvement in one political movement about which Subhash does not want to know much. Subhash wishes to protect Gauri from both dangers related to his brother's activities and his own parents who have not treated Gauri well. To Gauri, meanwhile, this marriage is both "a means of staying connected to Udayan" (Lahiri 2013, 150), because the two brothers have similarities, and a way to start a new life in a place where no one knows anything about her, including her earlier marriage and her child's biological father, since everyone in America assumes the child is Subhash's. In fact, it seems that while living in India Gauri is presented as a rather passive character that neither makes decisions nor fights for her happiness, but in the United States she explores different possibilities and gradually takes her life into her own hands by choosing to become the person she wishes to be. The wish for change could have been caused by or related to the traumatic experience of losing her husband Udayan and the way her parents-in-law have treated her afterwards, since they never approved of this marriage. However, this article does not employ trauma studies and thus provides a different reading of the novel through Identity Theory.

According to Kuortti, "One of the more visible geographical contexts of diasporic Indian women's writing is the United States" and the "thematics revolve around cultural identity, cultural hybridity, and cultural conflict" where "the connection between India and the United States is of importance" (Kuortti 2007, 207). The issue of identity and Indian-American context are of primary importance in Lahiri's novel in question. Gauri's first impressions of America are full of surprise, and there are things she finds difficult to understand. For example, she finds it difficult to understand English. Even though she has studied English, in Subhash's car she can hardly understand the news on the radio. Moreover, she saw that food came from "icy packets from the freezer that slowly melted and revealed their contents during the course of the day" and nobody "offered to help, or seemed to care if they spent money or not" while shopping (Lahiri 2013, 153). Furthermore, once she goes shopping alone and buys cream cheese but thinks it is chocolate and eats it all (Lahiri 2013, 155). Despite numerous misunderstandings, she accepts her new environment as something that is better for her child and their future: "This was the place [Rhode Island] where she could put things behind her. Where her child would be born, ignorant and safe" (Lahiri 2013, 148). In other words, after their arrival in America Gauri sees herself mainly as a mother who tries to secure a happy future life to her child who is not born yet and is willing to adapt to the new circumstances.

At first Gauri spends her days at home, since Subhash is at work, but soon she starts visiting nearby places alone. She explores the campus and is amazed by the fact she can walk freely in the campus buildings, since no one stops her: "No armed soldiers sitting on sandbags, as they had for months outside the main building at Presidency" (Lahiri 2013, 155). She compares the campus in which she studied in Calcutta (at present referred to as Kolkata) in India and the one in Rhode Island

in the following way: “she was [now] in a place where no one was afraid to walk about [...]. [...] At the top of the hill was the campus police station. But there were no curfews or lockdowns. Students came and went and did as they pleased” (Lahiri 2013, 148). Soon enough the campus becomes the place where Gauri feels comfortable. She becomes a non-official student when she finds the department of philosophy and goes to an undergraduate class to listen. She even takes notes in the margins of the newspaper she has, since she has no paper with her but rewrites everything carefully when she is at home. Gauri secretly attends classes twice a week and does the reading in the library using Subhash’s card. This is the moment when Gauri’s identity as a student starts gaining salience, for her academic activity engages her and helps her spend the time she has, since she has no friends and the baby is not born.

In her classes and the campus in general Gauri sees many women who look very different from her, for she wears the clothes, such as saris, she has brought from India. It seems that she admires the looks of other women, and there comes a point when she wants to change her appearance to look like them or at least more American: “She began to want to look like the other women she noticed on the campus, like a woman Udayan had never seen” (Lahiri 2013, 159). Gauri does not consult anyone about her wishes to change. She probably does not plan to change on a particular day but makes this decision spontaneously. Once Subhash comes back home and finds Gauri’s hair and all her saris and other clothes cut into pieces. Gauri is not there, but when she comes back and is asked why she has done that, she answers: “I was tired of it” (Lahiri 2013, 167). She does not ask Subhash or anyone else if they like her new appearance, which means she does not ask for anyone’s approval of her changing identity. Since then Gauri has dressed like other American women of her age that surrounded her (tight clothes, accentuated breasts, etc.). In other words, since her arrival in America Gauri has acquired two identities – that of a non-official philosophy student and that of being less Indian but more American (at least in terms of hair and clothing). The latter identity is completely new, while the former one could be seen as an identity that she had in India, when she did her bachelor’s degree in philosophy. This identity lost salience after her studies had been over and now has returned to take an important place in the scale of identity salience.

The reader might expect motherhood to change Gauri once again, since she will have to play yet another new role that at the beginning of her life in America she imagined and was ready to take. Gauri gives birth to a girl: “She was relieved that her hope had been fulfilled, and that a young version of Udayan had not come back to her” (Lahiri 2013, 170). However, despite her relief that her newborn is nothing like her deceased husband and it is not even a boy, Gauri does not like her identity as a mother:

Though she cared for Bela [her daughter] capably, though she kept her clean and combed and fed, she seemed distracted. Rarely did Subhash see her smiling when she looked into Bela’s face. [...] Instead, from the beginning, it was as if she’d reversed their roles, as if Bela were a relative’s child and not their own. (Lahiri 2013, 188-189)

Gauri’s mother had tuberculosis and could not take care of her children, so Gauri and her brother Manash (even though they had older sisters who were teenagers then) were sent from their

village to the city to live with their grandparents, aunts and uncles. Later it made sense for them to stay there, since they needed to start school. Gauri's parents died in a car accident when she was sixteen, so she lived with her brother and two uncles with their wives and children then. Gauri liked living in the city, since "rural life held no appeal for her" (Lahiri 2013, 68). In addition, she "didn't think she resented her parents for not raising her. [...] Really, she appreciated them for letting her go her own way" (Lahiri 2013, 68). She grew up with her relatives rather than her own parents, and now she has her own child but behaves as if it is somebody else's. While writing about her other works, Lavina Dhingra notes that "Jhumpa Lahiri subverts stereotypical gender roles as she portrays her male and female characters' behaviour in unexpected and atypical ways" (Dhingra 2012, 147). Taking the background information into account, it is possible to assume that Gauri is portrayed as a character who does not know how a mother behaves, for she hardly remembers how her own mother did. Their connection was not strong either, and she felt neglected: "She had no memory of spending a moment, even in a house of such an isolated place, ever, alone with her mother or father" (Lahiri 2013, 72). This may have caused a trauma that she has repressed and has never been able to overcome. It may be the reason why losing her grandparents was worse than losing her parents: "It was a blow to lose them [parents] suddenly, but her grandparents' death more recently, had saddened her more" (Lahiri 2013, 68), for they were closer. At first she plans a bright future for her child, but being a mother does not become Gauri's salient identity, since raising Bela is "not bringing meaning to her life" (Lahiri 2013, 194). Although at that time Gauri does not have any other visible salient identity, it is evident that being a mother is not going to become one. It does become a relevant part of the self only years later.

Lahiri also pays attention to Gauri's sexual identity in the novel. Before meeting Udayan, Gauri did not feel attractive: "Around men she'd felt invisible. [...] She was a disappointment to herself, in this regard" (Lahiri 2013, 72). When they are married, this topic is almost not described. Udayan does not even learn before his death that he would be a father. When Gauri marries Subhash, the topic of sex is out of the question, for they are more like friends rather than a married couple. In the glove compartment of Subhash's car Gauri finds a hair tie, which probably belongs to a woman he was seeing some time ago, but Gauri assumes he is seeing someone and is not angry, just the opposite:

She was relieved that she was not the only woman in his life. That she, too, was a replacement. [...] [S]he was thankful that he was capable of hiding something. It validated the step she'd taken, in marrying him. [...] It suggested that maybe she didn't have to love him, after all. (Lahiri 2013, 160-161)

Strangely enough, Gauri is happy Subhash has replaced her with somebody else, just like she has replaced Udayan with his brother. Yet, she does not know that Subhash takes this marriage seriously and is faithful to her, despite the fact that they are not close. Only later they discuss a possibility of sex, but Gauri wants to wait till her child is born. There comes a time when Gauri understands she can no longer avoid it and tells Subhash she is ready to have sex with him. That is,

the relationship between Gauri and Subhash develops in a reverse order: they get married first and then become lovers. At first none of them seems to enjoy it, but later she starts directing his hand where and how she wants to be touched. Her sexuality is awakened, and she cannot be seen as a passive character anymore: “she learned that an act intended to express love could have nothing to do with it. That her heart and her body were different things” (Lahiri 2013, 192). Gauri even pays attention to one other man she sees sometimes on the campus. She could not have thought about anything like this before. At first she does not like him; later she feels attracted to him and starts preparing for possible encounters, but they never talk. She even follows him only to see him kissing another woman. Gauri feels disappointed but aroused at the same time, so she masturbates in the toilet on the campus. Moreover, many years later, when she lives in California, probably in Los Angeles, she explores her lesbian identity when she becomes involved with a woman called Lorna, a graduate student: “She has no recollection of crossing a line that drove her to desire a woman’s body. With Lorna she found herself already on the other side of it” (Lahiri 2013, 284). In short, Gauri’s sexual identity is not less complicated than her overall identity and keeps changing. If she had she stayed in Tollygunge in Calcutta (Kolkata), she would never have dared to experiment with it. In other words, the impact of migration on Gauri is that her identity is changing and encompassing more and more possible selves, since migration is an eye-opening experience for her, even though it does not seem to be at first. Being far away from her homeland sets her free and makes her think about her forgotten parts of the self and adopt the selves she has never even thought about. This is the reason why this experience may be seen as a sort of rebirth for her.

After some time since giving birth to Bela, Gauri starts studying. She attends a survey of German philosophy (a class at a university in Rhode Island), so she becomes a real student once again. She does her master’s degree and in some years searches for possibilities to continue her studies in a doctoral programme. As she is admitted to one in Boston and later even teaches a philosophy class two times a week, she lives between Narragansett (Rhode Island) and Boston (Massachusetts). When she is away, she wants to leave Bela with somebody else to look after her, but Subhash adjusts his schedule in order to take care of Bela himself. To put it another way, Subhash appears to be more involved in the process of parenting than Gauri whenever she is in Narragansett or Boston. According to Resmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, in her works of fiction “Lahiri, rather than concluding the fate of [...] ‘housewives’ and ‘professor’s wives’ as incapable of adjusting to America and making their nomadic condition as a disability gives each of them particular functions to perform that portray the complex reality of migrancy for these well-educated migrant women” (2012, 171). Gauri is such a female character that that is well-educated. As previously discussed, Gauri has not seen herself in the role of a mother from the very beginning, but at least she has taken care of her daughter. It is likely that now she feels a need to make a choice between being a mother, which has never been the most salient identity of hers, and being an academic, which is something she might become in the future. Kuortti analyses Lahiri’s short story “This Blessed House” and notices the following: “In the relationships, [...] there is [...] a reversal of the conventional gender roles: romance, care, beauty,

and girlishness are given as male characteristics whereas curiosity, raucousness, carelessness, and assertiveness are seen as female qualities” (2007, 208). It is possible to claim that this is a recurrent theme in other works of fiction by Lahiri, too, and *The Lowland* is not an exception, as Gauri is the one who is portrayed as curious and assertive, not Subhash, even though he is portrayed as a well-educated man, too.

When Subhash’s father dies, Subhash and Bela go to India without her. By the time Subhash and Bela come back to Rhode Island, Gauri is gone. She has moved to California to teach in a college without informing anyone, but she has been thinking about leaving for a long time, for this decision would affect not only her future self but also the future of Subhash and Bela: “She had wanted California to swallow her; she had wanted to disappear” (Lahiri 2013, 278). The future self is usually either “connected to [...] or [...] disconnected from the present self” (Oyserman and James 2011, 119). In Lahiri’s novel, it seems that Gauri’s future identity is very much disconnected from her identities of being a wife to Subhash and a mother to Bela. It is possible to see parallels between *The Lowland* and Lahiri’s early works of fiction, such as *Interpreter of Maladies* which “outlines a strategy of diasporic as well as gendered resistance towards existing colonial and patriarchal hierarchies in the post-colony” (Kuortti 2007, 217). Gauri chooses a future identity of an academic for herself, and it becomes her most salient identity. Even though usually it is important for people to have their identities, especially the salient ones, verified by others, this does not happen in *The Lowland*. Since Gauri does not need her identity to be approved, she does not negotiate it with anyone. It might mean that she is presented as a strong female character who knows what she wants and constructs her own identity. In India, she used to be a good student and thought she could be a teacher (possible self) someday: “I could teach philosophy at a college or school” (Lahiri 2013, 69), she remarked once. Therefore, her pursuit for an academic career is not very unexpected. In addition, Gauri’s grandfather was a college professor, so he “inspired her to study what she did” (Lahiri 2013, 69). While living in India different identities of hers, such as being a sister, girlfriend (later a wife to Udayan) and others, were probably more salient, and the possibility of studying further and becoming an academic in the future did not gain importance. Nevertheless, moving to America and living close to a university campus in Rhode Island changes this. In general, moving from place to place becomes not a necessity but a choice she makes and gets further and further away from the people she knows.

The reader might question the consequences of the choices Gauri makes, but the novel does not judge this character for her decisions. Pius even claims that “Lahiri [...] wants to enlist our sympathy for Gauri as a person of tragic emotional integrity” (Pius 2014, 112). However, it does not seem to be the case. On the contrary, having chosen to leave her husband and daughter she finds her happiness as an independent woman, even though it lasts only for some decades but not for the rest of her life. At the same time, this twist in the story helps Lahiri shift her focus to other characters of the novel. Only much later in the novel, when Gauri is around sixty years old, the author returns to Gauri’s story, and the reader is probably not surprised to learn that she has achieved much as an academic: she has been very productive in terms of publishing books (three of them) and articles, and she is liked and respected by both colleagues and students: “Her colleagues welcomed her. Her

students admired her, were loyal” (Lahiri 2013, 278). She has not always stayed in one place after leaving Rhode Island: “After her first job she’d moved briefly north, to teach in Santa Cruz, and then in San Francisco. But she had come back to Southern California to live out her life” (Lahiri 2013, 277). That is, “nomadism [...] runs through the veins of Lahiri’s work” (Dutt-Ballerstadt 2012, 170) or at least through this novel. Despite various difficulties, Subhash and Bela learn to live without Gauri being present in their lives, while Gauri never looks back while she is searching for herself.

Gauri is a green-card holder considers the possibility of becoming an American: “For the sake of retirement, for the sake of simplifying the end of her life, she would need to become an American” (Lahiri 2013, 280). However, even if she became an American, “in spite of her Western clothes, her Western academic interests, [she would still be] a woman who spoke English with a foreign accent, whose physical appearance and complexion were unchangeable and against the backdrop of most of America, still unconventional” (Lahiri 2013, 281-282). Her wish to look American in terms of hair and clothes was satisfied a long time ago, but only decades later she understands that only she sees herself as more American and less Indian, not others. Others do not see her as an American woman, and she has not blended in all these years. Her passport says she is Indian, and she could change it to serve her in the future, but it does not mean she would become an American, even though she has lived in America longer than in India. To put it another way, Gauri has succeeded in achieving her aims in relation to her academic identity, but her Indian and American identities turn out to be contradictory and need to be negotiated. According to Daphne Munos, “Lahiri’s work appears to be buried alive beneath the immovable stone of ‘hybridity talk,’” and many scholars have looked at her work either from the point of view of culture or ethnicity (2013, xiv-xx). This is the reason why Munos (2013, xx) focuses on the literary and the psychological instead when analysing Lahiri’s works of fiction, whereas this article focuses on a broader sense of identity rather than only Gauri’s ethnic identity which does not seem to become less complicated by the end of the novel.

Gauri should leave for a conference in London, but as soon as she lands there, she realizes she is not going to participate in it and will take another flight to visit India instead. This decision is probably made because of an identity crisis that Gauri undergoes, for her identity as an American is questionable and the identities of being a wife and a mother, which have not been salient at all for two decades, become important again. For instance, usually she says she has no children, but once, when she breaks her arm and takes a weekend off, she tells one couple at her hotel that she has a daughter and is still waiting for grandchildren. However, Gauri’s identities as a wife and mother are not approved by others, since Subhash divorces her to marry someone else, while Bela considers Gauri to be dead to her. As a result, unlike her other identities, these identities must be negotiated, but it may be too late. Gauri comes back to Rhode Island only to learn Subhash is not at home and see Bela and her daughter Meghna, to whom Gauri is presented as a friend of her grandmother: “That makes her your great-aunt. I haven’t seen her since your grandmother died” (Lahiri 2013, 372). In other words, Gauri is not allowed to be a grandmother now, since she stopped being Bela’s mother years ago. This shakes Gauri’s neatly built identity once again.

A trip to India might be a means to return to her roots and understand who Gauri really is, in other words, reconsider her identity. She visits the places in Calcutta (Kolkata) that have stayed in her memory all these years, but “[s]he was unprepared for the landscape to be so altered” (Lahiri 2013, 383). Her expectations are different from reality, since everything has changed and even the place where Udayan, her first husband, was arrested looks different. This trip does not make her feel better or help to understand herself, and Gauri even considers committing suicide: “She imagined swinging one leg, then the other. [...] It would take only a few seconds. Her time would end, it was as simple as that” (Lahiri 2013, 386). Nevertheless, she does not take action and returns to America, since answers to her identity questions can probably be found only there, as she needs to re-evaluate the importance of different identities she has or would like to have. She may even be given a chance to be a grandmother after all. Thus, the end of the novel gives hope for a happy future.

Conclusion

To sum up, in America, Gauri redefines her overall identity. While moving from city to city, country to country, which involves leaving her family, getting to know new people and preserving other values, she is changing. This change seems to be intentional and, as Gauri thinks, does not require any negotiation with others in relation to different identities that form her new self. Her most salient identity becomes the one of being an academic although she wishes to become more American and less Indian as well and thinks she succeeds at first. Only much later, when many years pass by and it is too late, since Subhash and Bela do not need Gauri anymore, Gauri would like to be in their lives, especially as a mother and grandmother, but these identities are not approved. In addition, even though Gauri visits Calcutta (Kolkata) for some days at the end of the novel, she does not re-embrace her Indian identity, for this return is only one more disappointment, which calls out the destructive part of the self rather than helps to understand herself, and at the same time understands she is less American than she has thought. Therefore, her identity now is in-between the two (American and Indian).

The ending of the novel provides hope that some of the identities that Gauri has given up on might have a possibility to return. This illustrates the very concept of identity well, for identity is never stable and keeps changing: some identities lose salience while some others gain salience, and there is always place for future identities that one might choose to pursue just like Gauri does in Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*. Gauri demonstrates a complex identity that she negotiates neither in the United States nor in India. At the end she realises that she will have to negotiate some parts of it in order to be happy, but on the other hand, she does not regret the decisions she has made.

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