



QUEER IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 'THE LOWLAND' BY JHUMPA LAHIRI AND 'THE SELECTION DAY' BY ARVIND ADIGA

Naresh

Assistant Professor in English, Government College Baund Kalan,
Charkhi Dadri, Haryana

Cite This Article: Naresh, "Queer Identity and Representation: A Comparative Study of 'The Lowland' by Jhumpa Lahiri and 'The Selection Day' by Arvind Adiga", International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education, Volume 8, Issue 2, Page Number 69-72, 2022.

Copy Right: © IJMRME, 2022 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract:

The present study throws light on specific major thematic concerns of queer culture, such as gender relations, lesbian sexuality, gay sexuality, etc., in the selected novels of selected writers. Their novels represent the homosexual desires of human beings and the identity crisis, especially in terms of sex. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to delineate queer sexuality and focus on lesbian and gay sexuality in the novel *The Lowland* (2013) by Jhumpa Lahiri and *Selection Day* (2016) by Arvind Adiga. In this paper, the character of a woman called Gauri (*The Lowland*) and a boy named Manju (*Selection Day*) have been chosen to discuss queer sexuality in two novels.

Key Words: Queer Sexuality, Gay, Lesbian, Social Issues, Identity Crisis

Introduction:

Sexuality and minority groups that aren't 'straight' in their sexual identity are the queer. Because the term literally means 'weird' or 'unusual,' it began to be used disparagingly against individuals who engaged in same-sex urges or connections in the late 19th century. Homosexuality is gaining legitimacy throughout the globe, with stigma and prejudice giving way to freedom and acceptance. Despite the legalisation of Section 377 of the IPC, the Indian situation seems to be still negative. People are becoming more aware of the burgeoning 'third gender' due to advertising, films, novels, books, journals, and other forms of media. Despite this, homophobia is widespread among India's main cities, with all associated prejudices and misunderstandings. Unnatural, aberrant, disease-ridden, yet treatable human life is labeled as unusual, abnormal, and subjected to transformation treatments. Most teenagers usually consider heterosexuals. However, a small group of teens is never taken seriously when it comes to sexual issues. Jhumpa Lahiri's book *The Lowland* and Arvind Adiga's *Selection Day* raises questions about gender identities and sexual orientations by demonstrating the complexities of human interactions and queer sexualities.

Nilanjana Sudeshna is Jhumpa Lahiri's real name. In Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* (2013), the subject of queer sexuality is prevalent. Her parents are Indian, and she was born in London in 1967. Later, she relocated to the United States to further her studies. Though she was born in India, she lived most of her life in the United States. The Interpreter of Maladies (1999), her first book of short stories, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Hemingway Award. Her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), was incorporated into the iconic film version. As a result, it may be used to analyze various roles. The role of Gauri has been selected for this paper to discuss and analyze her queer personality as she travels all across the book, living in various locations. Lahiri, an American novelist and short-story writer of Indian descent, frequently writes about protagonists who migrate from India to other nations and their problems growing up in refugee communities in the United States.

Aravind Adiga was born on October 23, 1974. (The Indian Express) He is a journalist and writer from India. His debut novel, *The White Tiger*, received the Man Booker Prize in 2008. Aravind Adiga started his journey in finance as an intern at the Financial Times. He wrote about the stock market and investments for publications such as Financial Times and Money. Aravind Adiga's novel *Selection Day* (2016) is a masterpiece. It demonstrates Adiga's incredible ability. The third novel by Aravind Adiga is both visionary and unique. It's a moving, disturbing, and fascinating tale of ambition set in Mumbai, about two cricketing brothers' successes and failures. The novel's central characters are the story's protagonist, Kumar, the father, and two sons. In his book, he portrays social mobility and liberalism. The novel is written from many characters' viewpoints, including Mohan Kumar, Radha, Manju, Anand Mehta, Tommy Sir, and Javed Ansari, by a third-person author. The most significant point of view is Manju, who is soon established as the novel's protagonist. The book is, in several respects, an integrated work, with concepts developed by the opinions and behaviour of a variety of protagonists. As the novel continues, Manju's hardships and tribulations become more prominent. On one side, the story focuses on interpersonal relationships, especially between the Kumars. Manju's friendship with Ansari transforms his life to understand himself and his skills, and the novel's central drama revolves around Manju and

the choices he wants to decide for his future. As a result, Manju's viewpoint receives the majority of narrative emphasis.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of queer representation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* and Arvind Adiga's *The Selection Day*. Despite the growing body of literature on South Asian queer identities, few studies have explored the intersection of these identities within the context of popular contemporary narratives by Lahiri and Adiga. This research aims to bridge that gap. The scope of the study is confined to the two selected works of Lahiri and Adiga. While acknowledging that the authors have written other significant works, the focus on *The Lowland* and *The Selection Day* is deliberate, chosen for their complex characters and the nuanced depiction of queer identities. The temporal and cultural context of the study is contemporary South Asia, with a specific focus on the countries and cultures portrayed in these novels. This research also positions itself within the broader field of queer studies and South Asian literary studies, contributing a unique comparative analysis to both fields.

By examining the novels' literary techniques, character development, and plot structures, the study seeks to elucidate the representation of queer identities, bringing to the fore the intersectional issues of culture, class, and sexuality. In doing so, the research will add to the understanding of queer narratives in South Asian literature, enriching the conversation on diversity and representation in contemporary fiction. The main objective of this paper is to represent queer sexuality with a focus on lesbian and gay sexuality in the novel *The Lowland* (2013) and *Selection Day* (2016). In this paper, the character of a woman called Gauri (*The Lowland*) and a boy named Manju (*Selection Day*) have been chosen to discuss queer sexuality in two novels.

Objectives of the Study:

- To critically analyze the representation of queer identities in 'The Lowland' and 'The Selection Day'.
- To understand how the socio-cultural context in South Asia shapes these representations.
- To compare and contrast the narratives and characterization of queer identities in both novels.
- To examine the impact of these representations on the broader discourse of queer identities in literature.

Discussion:

In *The Lowland*, Lahiri subtly explores the themes of forbidden love, repression, and self-discovery through the character of Gauri. Although not explicitly identified as queer, Gauri's sexual identity is fluid and ambiguous, challenging traditional notions of heteronormativity. Gauri's relationships with both her husband and his brother illuminate different facets of her sexuality and identity, offering a multifaceted depiction of a queer character. Lahiri's narrative encapsulates the character's struggle with societal expectations and norms, underlining the inherent difficulties faced by queer individuals in a heteronormative society. On the other hand, *The Selection Day* provides a more direct exploration of queer identity. Manju's confusion about his sexual identity forms a central theme of the novel. The evolving relationship between Manju and Javed presents a deep, intimate portrayal of same-sex attraction and love. Adiga skillfully navigates the complexities of queerness within the traditional, masculine world of cricket, highlighting the challenges of non-normative sexual identities in rigidly defined societal structures.

When comparing these two novels, one notices the differences in their narrative strategies. Lahiri employs a subtle, nuanced approach, exploring queerness through layered character relationships and internal turmoil. In contrast, Adiga adopts a more overt portrayal of queer identity, engaging directly with the theme of same-sex attraction. Despite their different approaches, both novels offer critical commentary on the societal pressures and expectations queer individuals face in South Asia. Additionally, both novels explore the intersection of queer identities with other social factors, such as gender, class, and religion. In *The Lowland*, Gauri's struggle is compounded by her gender, while in *The Selection Day*, Manju's lower-middle-class background adds another layer to his struggle with his sexual identity.

1. Queer Sexuality in the Lowland:

In the book, Lahiri shows close consideration to Gauri's sexual orientation. Gauri didn't think she was beautiful before seeing Udayan: "About guys, she'd felt unseen, and she was a failure to herself in this context" (Lahiri, 72). As Gauri marries Subhash, they don't talk about sex because they're more like mates than husband and wife. When they got engaged, this subject is often never spoken. Udayan is unaware that he will be a parent before his passing. Gauri discovers a hair tie in Subhash's car's engine box, which most likely refers to a lady he was meeting some time earlier, but Gauri thinks he is seeing anyone and is not upset.

Surprisingly, Gauri is pleased that Subhash has displaced her with someone other, just as she has done with Udayan's brother. She has no idea that Subhash considers this marriage seriously and is loyal to her about the reality that they are not connected. They only explore the prospect of intercourse later, but Gauri prefers to wait until her baby is born. Gauri then realizes she can't stop it anymore and informs Subhash she's happy to have sex with him. Gauri and Subhash's marriage progresses in a reversed manner: they marry first and fall in love. At first, neither seems to like it, but she eventually begins to guide his hand about how she needs to be loved. Her desire has awoken, and she can no longer be considered a soft personality: "she discovered that an act meant to show passion could have little to do with it." That her soul and body were two separate

entities." (Lahiri, p.192) Gauri also pays heed to a guy she often sees in college. She had never considered something like this before. She doesn't like him at first, but as time passes, she becomes drawn to him and begins to plan meetings with him, but they never communicate. She also chased him to see him loving another lady.

Furthermore, as she lives in California, most likely in Los Angeles, she discusses her lesbian sexuality as she falls in love with Lorna, a college learner: "She has no idea of approaching a threshold that pushed her to crave a woman's body." (Lahiri, p.284) She finds herself on the other aspect of things with Lorna. In brief, Gauri's sexual orientation is as complex as her general selfhood, and it's constantly changed. In her dualistic topic status, Gauri's and lesbian relationship offers her a fresh persona, a modernist image, as she deconstructs assumptions through her various positions and assertions about her personal decisions. Gauri's lesbian action is similar to what Sedgwick sees in the expressiveness of gender or bisexual behaviour when coming "out of the closet" (Barry 140) is not a specific complete operation. Therefore, Gauri's queer exploration is motivated by her sexual desires and her changing positions, which emphasizes her liberation.

2. Queer Sexuality in Selection Day:

Mohan Kumar, a money-obsessed father, expects his two sons to be India's top batsman. Since that is the only way for him to grow from hardship to wealth, he approaches his sons harshly and spans them if they make errors. He raises them in a strict male-dominated climate. As a sad, needy man, he never seemed to know what his boys deeply desired. Since Mohan Kumar's wife has already abandoned her husband and sons, Kumar's sole attention was on his sons. His sons aren't his sons, but he runs a company with them. He reviews them on a routine basis and places limits on them. The boys are required to give up their independence to participate in arduous training. It has imbued them with a skewed viewpoint. They couldn't even consider shaving or children. However, as time passes, these two brothers begin to speak regarding females without telling their parents. Radha's relationship with Sofia also provides some relief from his father's environment. Manjunath is a more dynamic and peculiar personality who, though missing his mother, takes pleasure in Javed Ansari.

Javed's father, brother, and Sofia have all heard about Javed and Manju's sexual preferences. These brothers' sexual orientation drives them to step across the borderline and explore what they truly want. As a result, section 377 has legalized this kind of sexual identity, formerly found unequal or irregular in our culture. And when Manju informs Javed regarding his brother and father's doubts about him, Javed chastises him for being so aware of it. He has no hesitation with people identifying him as bisexual. Manju's interaction with Ansari transforms his identity to recognize himself and his abilities. The story's primary conflict revolves around Manju and the choices he attempts to create about his career. As a result, Manju's experience receives the majority of plot emphasis. Manju's queer connection with Ansari transforms his identity to know himself and his skills, and the relationship seems odd at one stage.

Conclusion:

The Topic suggests a conception of gender sexuality as a study to identify one's inner self as a lesbian or gay. This study is a detailed assessment of how a traditional culture constructs a gender's actions and identities. The research of lesbian and gay people focuses on their standard and abnormal changes in terms of Homo-sexuality. The selected novels delineate the homosexual desires of human beings; therefore, the study only represents the gay and lesbian representation in the selected novels.

Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* has successfully demonstrated the concept of queer sexuality through lesbianism. *The Lowland* is a daring effort to portray womanhood in Gauri, who describes herself as an advanced and progressive woman in the context of adversity. Her relationship with Lorna describes her queer sexuality in the novel. She finds herself on the other aspect of things with Lorna. It demonstrates Lahiri's exceptional narrative ability and her confidence in the concept of a new woman. Gauri's queer and romantic encounters offer her a modern persona, in which she deconstructs modernity's assumptions and challenges biases in the people she chooses to love.

Selection Day is a poignant and brilliantly written modern novel about youth, passion, self-realization, and the relationship between father and son. The story's primary conflict revolves around Manju and the choices he attempts to create about his career. Manju's queer relationship with Ansari transforms his identity to recognize himself and his abilities. Manju and Javed's interaction approaches queer sexuality, but Manju escapes Javed's house to return home to begin his cricket career. In this novel, Arvind Adiga demonstrates the queer sexuality of Manju with Javed. In conclusion, Manju is chosen to join pro cricket, and Radha is not. This is a story of fate and desire, family determination, queer sexuality and the attraction of a young person's growing identity.

References:

1. Burke, Peter J., and Jan E. Stets. "Identity Theory" In *The Roots of Identity Theory*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 18-32.
2. Lahiri, Jhumpa (2013). *The Lowland*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury.
3. Barry, Peter (2011). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* Third Edition. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited.

4. <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/01/07/queer-theory-in-international-relations/>
5. Adiga, Aravind (18 October 2008). "Provocation is one of the legitimate goals of literature". The Indian Express (Interview).