

A Comparative Study of the Marital Relationships of Tom-Lydia and Subhash-Gauri in the *Rainbow* and the *Lowland*

Rajkumar Halder

Assistant Professor, Dukhulal Nibaran Chandra College, Murshidabad, West Bengal

Abstract

The portrayal of marital relationships is an intriguing area of deep contemplation in literature. The uncanny whims and reasoning of the soul remain intangible most of the time. The unfathomable depth of the human mind plays the most crucial role in shaping the marital relationship of man and woman. However, a comparative study of relationships under the same or different contexts becomes quite helpful in understanding the grey area of marital relationships. From such studies, the essence of marital relationships becomes ostensible. Hence, the comparative analysis of *The Rainbow* (1915) by D.H. Lawrence with *The Lowland* (2013) by Jhumpa Lahiri becomes very pertinent. While *The Rainbow* delineates the making of a happy marital relationship between Tom and Lydia, *The Lowland* unfolds the suffocating relationship between Subhash and Gauri. Together, Tom and Lydia discover a new world of passion and understanding, whereas Subhas and Gauri are distracted by each other. Even while Anna, the daughter of Tom and Lydia, is privileged to enjoy the warmth of her parents' love, Bela, the daughter of Subhash and Gauri, is deprived of any such occasion. The comparison substantially points to the subtle nuances of individuals to be able to achieve either harmony or discordance.

Keywords: Intimacy, Love, Relationship, Sensuality, Wholeness of Being

"Marriage, making one complete body out of two incomplete ones, and providing for the complex development of the man's soul and the woman's soul in unison, throughout a lifetime." (D.H. Lawrence, *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*)

The man-woman relationship has always been an area of obscurity that called for the attention of great thinkers, philosophers, and artists down the ages. The cruel dissections of the souls of married conjugal only intensify the darkness manifold. People are still fumbling to get the right cog to put into the wheel and sail the vessel, i.e., marital relationships, as smoothly as possible. The more one comes across the portrayal of the most complex avenues of man-woman relationships, the more one becomes bewildered; although the journey undertaken by the conjugal seems the same, the lanes and by-lanes of the itinerary very often render us dead ends. The literary portrayals of each marital relationship enlighten a new niche of sensibility and understanding, difference and defiance, romantic aspiration and disillusion, acceptance and

rejection, decay and destruction, and so many more. However, to properly understand the psyche of the individuals in conjugal relationships, one must be bold in the analyses of human souls as depicted in literary genres. A comparative study of similar texts gives us a deeper understanding of the area. In such approaches, the difference of texts, despite the similarity of their subject, renders the readers a potent scope to evaluate the multi-dimensions of man-woman relationships that eventually define the essence of the relationship. This is why I was inclined to study two novels, namely- *The Rainbow* (1915) by D.H. Lawrence and *The Lowland* (2013) by Jhumpa Lahiri to explore the similarities and differences that eventually determine the fate of the individualities and relationships as successful and failure. In this article, I strive to set the conjugal relationships of Tom and Lydia against Subhash and Gauri; I would focus on the apparent essential affinity of the plots and also on the unfathomable gulf that does not allow them to become the travelers of the same destination; instead, how one couple serves as a counter foil to the other one and ultimately becomes estranged in their journey of conjugal paths.

The affinity that we involuntarily find in *The Rainbow* and *The Lowland* is the coming together of two pairs, namely Tom-Lydia and Subhash-Gauri; we see how the two women, the widows of two martyrs, are approached by two different men to become wed locked. The men also take up the daughters of the widows as their daughters. However, in the end, we find one couple can enjoy the bliss of a conjugal life while the other is "collided and dispersed" (Charles, *The Washington Post*). One novel depicts how two individual entities attain completeness in their marriage, while in the novel, two individuals tenaciously retain the separateness of their being and eventually alight from one another. At the same time, one of the daughters can grow under the loving Rainbow of the consummation of the parents, whereas the other one suffers from the absence of one of her parents, i.e., her mother- Gauri.

In *The Rainbow*, when Tom Brangwen comes across Lydia Lensky, "a widow of a Polish doctor (p.32)" instantly feels "a curious certainty about her, as if she were destined to him" (p.32) He could perceive that she "was stranger, from far off, yet so intimate" (p.33). This sort of intuition is something that Subhas and Gauri fail to feel in *The Lowland*; instead since the marriage was based on dutifulness, the instinct of love never got the privilege to grow up between them. It was Subhash's "one act of rebellion, marrying" (p.160). Gauri, the widow of his younger brother Udayan, to rescue her from desolation and wretchedness. On the other hand, as Gauri explains to her professor Otto Weiss: "[M]y husband was killed... I watched it happen. I married his brother to get away" (p.166). So, the foundation of their marriage could be described as an act of magnanimity or a necessity, not love or anything else. The same saying goes for Tom and Lydia as well. Nevertheless, the beginning of their introduction to each other gives us a hint that "a logic of the soul," as Lawrence tells us, will play a significant role between the two.

The cardinal point that distinguishes the two relationships is the attitude of Lydia and Gauri: in *The Rainbow*, Lydia is introduced to us as the widow of a Polish rebel who volunteered in the Warsaw Civil War and ultimately died. She has a daughter of four, having lost the other children. The shadow of her past life accompanies her all the while. Her foreign identity, along with her past loss and sorrow, rendered her into an utter foreignness which Tom Brangwen could at once perceive: "[S]he belonged to somewhere

else.... to some place where she still lived, despite her body's absence" (p.33) However, through his "protective manner, and his sureness, and his intimacy" (p.37). Tom was able to get connected her with him" (p.41) Lydia herself was aware of this 'connection': "[H]er impulse was strong against him because he was not of her own sort. But one blind instinct led her to take him, to have him, and then to relinquish herself to him. It would be safety. She felt rooted safety of him, and the life in him.." (p.55) However, in the case of Gauri and Subhash, we do not witness any such thing happening; it seems the foreignness of *The Rainbow* hinders them from such realization and makes way for the other. Like Tom, Subhash also defiantly went protective towards Gauri, but unfortunately, Gauri apprehends "that he was protecting her, for reasons that would cause him to regard her differently" (p. 137.) The apprehension runs as a warning throughout the course of *The Lowland*. They cannot fall in line because of 'Udayan's ghost' (p.161), which never allows them any 'blind intimacy' like Tom and Lydia in *The Rainbow*.

The sole reason for Gauri's inability to be one with Subhash is her past, the brutal killing of her rebel husband, Udayan, in front of her own eyes. The incident "formed a grave in her mind's eye" (p.111), which she could never forget. In comparison to Gauri, Lydia turns out to be more resilient in terms of her marriage with Tom since "[I]t needed" as Lawrence comments, "so much life to begin afresh, after she had lost so lavishly." (p.65) The memory of her deceased husband and children kept tormenting her. "Sometimes she cried....for it was the old grief come back in her, the old loss, the pain of the old life, the dead husband, the dead children. This was sacred to her, and he must not violate her with his comfort. He stood aloof with turgid heart" (p.65). He never tries to encroach into the very experiences of her own. This serves as an act of catharsis to Lydia, providing her the much-needed calm and tranquility of mind. At the same time, this act also prepares her for making a new beginning with her newly married husband, Tom. Omendra Singh very precisely elaborates this:

"[I]n Lawrentian ethics, the past leaves an unhealthy influence on the soul; the memory of the past conditions the mind and thus incapacitates one to be open to the new. In *The Rainbow*, we see that Lydia understands the significance of the living moment--- the openness to the living moment immediately wipes out the past. Tom needs Lydia, and both agree to marry. We see that when Lydia opened herself and turned to Tom, "then all that had been and all that was as new as a flower that unsheathes itself and always stands ready, waiting, receptive." (p.67)

Whereas, in *The Lowland*, we witness, "[B]ack in their apartment in Rhode Island, the newlyweds hoards their secrets and regards each other as polite roommates, moving about in that "formal feeling" that Emily Dickinson says comes "after great pain" (Charles, Washinton Post).

Another critical dimension that distinguishes the two texts is the role of confrontation; the final confrontation between Tom and Lydia positively paves the way for the final consummation. Only when a violent confrontation arose between Tom and Lydia did a fresh chapter of their married life start working. Each of the words of the confrontation deserves to be mentioned here:

“Why aren’t you satisfied with me?--- I’m not satisfied with you. Paul used to come to me and take me like a man does. You only leave me alone or take me like your cattle, quickly, to forget me again--- so that you can forget me again.’

‘What am I to know to remember about you?’ said Brangwen.

‘Well, don’t I know it?’

‘You come to me as if it was for nothing as if I was nothing there. When Paul came to me, I was something to him--- a woman, I was. To you, I am nothing--- it is like cattle--- or nothing...’

‘You make me feel as I was nothing,’ he said....” (p.94)

The confrontation eventually ushers in a new realization in Tom and Lydia; she momentarily addresses her husband as "My love!" (p.94), which awakens a flame of love and desire in her.

However, in *The Lowland*, we do not witness any confrontation like this. This is not that there was never any scope for such kind of confrontation; several times, either Subhash or Gauri got the chance to challenge and confront the other one. But out of the strangeness of their relationship, they only shied away from that. When Subhash, tomuch of his dismay, discovered that Gauri “had destroyed everything” (p.141) including all of her clothing and trimmed her hair too, “he didn’t dare tell her what she’d done was wasteful, or that he found it disturbing. That such destructive behavior couldn’t have been good for the child.” (p.141) Had there been any scope for a fight between the two just at the beginning of their married life, it might be possible that, much like Tom and Lydia, there would have been another dawn of consummation between them.

Another aspect that culminates the relationship of Tom and Lydia into success is the sacred experience of sensuality and consummation that ultimately transforms them into a more passionate and loving couple. It is this sensuality that Lydia “was now transfigured, she was wonderful, beyond him.... She waited for him to meet her, not to bow before her and serve her. She wanted his active participation, not his submission” (p.95) This episode is suggestive of a new kind of understanding in Tom and Lydia which positively drives them to the attainment of a healthy relationship. Lawrence elaborates this: "[T]heir coming together now, after two years of married life, was much more wonderful to them than before. It was the entry into another circle of existence; it was the baptism into another life; it was the complete confirmation. Their feet trod strange ground of knowledge, their footsteps were lit up with new discovery" (p.95) However, *The Lowland*, serves as a counterfoil to such kind 'confirmation' and 'discovery'. Although Subhash and Gauri get themselves steeped in sensuality, they fail to derive the realization and understanding as compared to Tom and Lydia. What they can reap out of their sensuality is nothing but pure pleasure. Rather, unlike Tom, Subhash is never able to get any 'confirmation' from Gauri.

Jhumpa Lahiri also comments: "[I]nside of her, surrounded by her, he worried that she would never accept him, that she would never fully belong to him, even as if he breathed in the smell of her hair..." (p.156) This, unfortunately, happens to be the essence of their relationship; far from being 'transfigured' by each other, they end up remaining strangers throughout the text. Lahiri, again, vindicates the nature of their relationship: "[S]ubhash and Gauri shared a bed at night, they had a child in common. Almost five years

ago, they had begun their journey as husband and wife, but he was still waiting to arrive somewhere with her. A place where he would no longer question the result of what they'd done"(p.159)Since the marriage was not arranged by love, "[T]he result is a dutiful marriage entirely without joy--- and a story in which every molecule of humour and irony has been scoured away" (Charles,The Washington Post).Subhash and Gauri themselves were acutely aware of the fact that "the marriage which had been their own choice, had become a forced arrangement day after day" (p.212). Consequently, "Gauri steadily withdraws from Subhash, and then finds herself unable to love her own child, Bela."(Lasdum, The Guardian)

The daughters--- Anna and Bela, also serve as a proper counterfoil to each other. Once the parents of Anna--- Tom and Lydia, can establish a genuine communion between them, Anna can enjoy the same bliss as them. She finds a true father and companion in Tom, with whom she spent the most pleasing time of her life until her marriage with Will Brangwen.Omendra Singh beautifully illustrates this: "...under the arch of their consummation in marriage the small child Anna grows up as if under the pillars of a rainbow: Her father and mother now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between." (p.106)Whereas, we find Bela utterly deprived of such a heavenly experience. "Subhas's expectations to make Gauri fall in love with him are not met with, and for much of Bela's childhood the couple remains emotionally detached from each other"(Shah,Economic& Political Weekly) Although, "[T]he point of their marriage was Bela," (p.177)she remains the most vulnerable character in *The Lowland*.Like the relationship of Tom and Anna, another warm and loving relationship also binds Subhash with Bela. We find the confirmation more than once in the novel. When childishly Bela tells Subhash, "I love you more than anybody loves anybody, " the shadow of the relationship between Tom and Anna is unmistakable. The only thing that hinders Bela from having the heavenly experience like Anna is the active participation of her mother, Gauri.

The gloom of their relationship also fell on Bela. "Though she cared for Bela capably and kept her clean and combed and fed, she seemed distracted. Rarely did Subhash see her smiling when she looked into Bela's face. Rarely did he see Gauri kissing Bela spontaneously. Instead, from the beginning, it was as if she'd reversed their roles, as if Bela were a relative's child and not her own" (p.159)So, ultimately, Gauri, "after acquiring a doctorate, takes up an academic job far away," (Shah, Economic & Political Weekly) leaving Bela and Subhash for good. This act substantially attests to the relationship between her and Subhash as a big failure, whereas Bela remains vulnerable all her life.

Nigel Messenger precisely comments concerning the ethics of D.H. Lawrence in *The Rainbow* that it examines "the ways in which people grow and develop--- or fail to grow" (p.66). This goes perfectly with both *The Rainbow* and *The Lowland*.*The Rainbow* illuminates Tom and Lydia's journey towards a deeper understanding and love and finally achieving a 'wholeness of being,' one of the most celebrated Lawrentian dictums. *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri pinpoints the darker area of married life that always obstructs people from establishing proper understanding and companionship. The result is a nullity not only of the conjugal relationship but also of the individual. This is precisely what we witness in *The Rainbow* and *The Lowland*.

References:

1. Charles, Ron. Review: 'The Lowland,' by Jhumpa Lahiri, Washington Post, September 25, 2013
2. Lasdum, James. The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri—review, The Guardian, September 12, 2013
3. Lahiri, Jhumpa. The Lowland, Random India Book House, Noida, 2012/2013
4. Lawrence, D.H. The Rainbow, Penguin Books, London, 1985
5. Lawrence, D.H. Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover, Penguin, London, 2006
6. Messenger, Nigel. How to Study D.H. Lawrence, McMillan, London, 1989
7. Singh, Omendra. D.H. Lawrence: Prophet of New Life and Art, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997
8. Shah, Esha. Economic & Political Weekly, January 25, 2014, Vol. 49, No. 4