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# Reconstructing “*E Pluribus Unum*”: The Imaginary Space for Revolution in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland* \*

Shunsuke SHIGA

The 1960s and early 70s witnessed unprecedented social turmoil around the world and the situation was no different in India, where a communist movement rejecting traditional values had broken out. In May 1967, a peasant uprising of particular note occurred in Naxalbari, an area in the northern part of West Bengal. That uprising was fueled by armed Communist revolutionaries who had been members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)). Later, dissidents of the CPI(M), led by Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal, formed the Communist Party of India (Maxist-Leninist) (CPI(ML)). The most outstanding activities by these rebels took place between 1967 and 1972. Their aim throughout was to put an end to the oppression of peasants by affluent landlords, fighting against the structural system that had been established by the British colonialism. As Sumanta Banerjee explains in *India’s Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising*, even after the independence in 1947, India had had a hiatus between the educated few at the top and the masses at the bottom, which was a legacy from the British colonial rule (173). The CPI(ML) condemned these education institutions as semi-colonial, and regarded the bourgeoisies as class enemies.

Outside the country, after the immigrant act of 1965, which abolished the quota system restricting the number of immigrants, many Indians migrated to the United States for higher education or professional jobs. Regarding these immigrants to the United States, Richard Hofstadter points out the significant

relation that existed between their social status and identity; he writes: “Achieving a better type of job or a better social status and becoming ‘more American’ have been practically synonymous” (56). Hofstadter’s assertion, however, may not apply fully to the writer Jhumpa Lahiri. Born of Bengali parents in London in 1967, Lahiri moved to Rhode Island for her father’s job as a librarian when she was three. Looking back her childhood in Rhode Island, she says: “I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things” (“My Two Lives” n.pag.). Even after she received her Ph.D. from Boston University, she did not seem to believe that she could be “more American.” On the contrary, the pressure to be two things appears to have remained within her and even served as the inspiration behind her works. Like the author herself, most of her Indian-American characters have higher education but experience an anguish forced by the gap between their traditional Indian values and American culture that provides the mobility of the social status. In her latest novel *The Lowland* (2013), Lahiri chose the Naxalite movement as a motif. Here she draws from historical events, rather than referencing aspects of popular culture such as rock music, which she did in her previous works, including her first novel *The Namesake* (2003), where the protagonist Gogol Ganguli is describes as infatuated with the Beatles, especially John Lennon.

In *The Lowland*, however, references to popular culture are rare. Udayan, one of main characters, engages in a political activity – the Naxalite movement. His aim is to liberate poor Indian people from the traditional hierarchical system established under British colonialism. Unlike Udayan, the elder brother Subhash does not join the movement, but decides to move to Rhode Island for a Ph.D. program after the immigration law changed in 1965. His life appears entirely different from that of his younger brother who planned a revolution. However, the two of them are the same in that both of them reject the Indian traditions of the older generation. Even though Subhash does not adopt a direct course for overthrowing that tradition, he rejects it, too. Still, contrary to Hofstadter’s argument,

Lahiri does not describe the Indian immigrant as becoming “more American.” Although having left behind Indian culture, Subhash still attempts to confront the older generation in India. In *The Lowland*, what Lahiri suggests is that higher education can be a means of globally unifying Indians for revolution.

### **The Class Conflict in India: English Education and the Naxalite Movement**

During the colonial era from 1858 to 1947, which is typically referred to as the British Raj, the British government instituted a system of the social and linguistic stratifications by promoting English education. As Gauri Viswanathan points out in *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, an analysis of the history of English education in India demonstrates that English people used the English text as a representation of what they viewed as the highest and most perfect state (20). As a result, they succeeded in establishing a kind of linguistic stratification in which only a few Indian students who studied English were regarded as the elite. As Viswanathan discloses to us, however, this education included a fatal contradiction; that is, although some elite students could receive English education under the guise of liberalism, they had to face the reality that they had no opportunities to obtain higher levels of employment in the British Indian government. Naturally, this situation caused dissatisfaction among the Indian youth in the nineteenth century. Ironically, English education, which taught Indian elites the ideals of equality and fraternity, led them to question the rights of the British government. Nonetheless, in the twentieth century, a few intellectuals who used to oppose the existing social structure came to protect and advance their own class interests. As a result, even in the late 1960s, the populace remained ignorant.

This semi-colonial state in India is reflected in Lahiri’s *The Lowland*. The Tolly Club in Calcutta represents the influence of British rule: “Until the mid-

forties, from behind the wall, their [Subhash and Udayan's] father used to watch horses racing around the track. . . . But after the Second World War, around the time Subhash and Udayan were born, the height of the wall was raised, so that the public could no longer see in" (4). This description implies that the semi-colonial state in India did not fade out after the independence; on the contrary, the situation seems to have gotten even worse for the populace because a few elites excluded them. As Udayan complains after entering Presidency College, "the Tolly Club was proof that India was still a semi-colonial country, behaving as if the British had never left" (25). As he is educated, he becomes gradually aware of this contradiction in Indian society.

The significance of Presidency College in relation to the Naxalite movement cannot be overlooked. The dissidents of the CPI(M) were led by the Presidency College student leaders, and they formed the Naxalbari Peasants' Struggle Aid Committee, which later developed into the CPI(ML). Not only did Udayan but also Gauri, who was later to become the wife of Udayan, studied at Presidency College. Lahiri's choice of this school implies that education and revolution are connected with each other. Presidency College, which today is called Presidency University, Kolkata, was originally named Hindu College and known as one of the oldest institution of western education in South Asia. In 1855, it was rechristened as Presidency College and then, in 1966, it restricted its administration to only the best students. This policy was supported by the elite of the West Bengali society. Some of the students who graduated from the school were not accepted into the post-graduate classes. In addition, the socio-economic conditions under which the peasants had been exploited by their landlords and the working class people had been oppressed by the elite were another reason that motivated the students. This exclusiveness caused the students to question the social structure.

It is worth noting that in the nineteenth century the Indian youth received English education who typically opposed the British rule, and again in the twen-

tieth century it was the students studying at schools of western education who became the nucleus of the youth uprising. The leaders of the CPI(ML) such as Majumdar viewed the youth and students as essential to spreading the teachings of Mao Tse-tung to the rural uneducated people and urban working class because those students were able to work hard and vigorously (R. Dasgupta 1921). In Udayan's letter to Subhash in the United States, he writes: "Our generation is vanguard; the struggle of students is part of the armed peasant struggle, Majumdar says" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 42). Also, many of the most active members of the CPI(ML) were drawn from graduates of American and European colleges and graduate schools. Thus, while Naxalbari aimed to overthrow the legacy of British imperialism, their motivation was driven by western education. That is, western education could lead to a way of revolution.

Lahiri's body of work, as well as her interview with Isaac Chotiner indicates that she has been interested not only in the agrarian roots of a people, but also in peasants and those in the working class, who were viewed as crucial to the realization of a revolution. As a means of subverting the semi-colonial condition, Majumdar claimed that the students were able to bring peasants and the industrial proletariat into the uprising. He said: ". . . there can only be one criterion by which we should judge whether a youth or a student is revolutionary. This criterion is whether or not he is willing to integrate himself with the broad masses of workers and peasants, does so in practice and carries on mass work" (qtd. in R. Dasgupta 1923). In Lahiri's 2008 interview with Chotiner, Lahiri reveals that she admires the descriptions of agriculture seen in the works of such nineteenth-century authors as Leo Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy, and Anton Chekhov (n.pag.). These authors, in Lahiri's mind, marvelously illustrate how human beings and nature are interconnected with each other. Her words suggest that she connects such botanical roots to her own serious problem of putting down roots as an Indian-American. This interest in the literal and metaphorical connection between the earth and roots suggests that she too would be conscious of the

plight and position of the peasantry in India.

Moreover, Lahiri's works indicate that she is also interested in the working class. In *The Namesake*, the protagonist Gogol devotes himself to the Beatles, especially John Lennon. The teenage boy is a "passionate devotee" who tacks Lennon's obituary to the school bulletin board (Lahiri, *The Namesake* 74) He does not listen to what his father says but turns up the volume of "Revolution 1," which Lennon composed (77). What is more, the reference to the working class and Lennon reminds us that he composed a song called "Working Class Hero." These songs may be associated with the Naxalite movement although Lahiri makes no reference to popular music in *The Lowland*.

Yet, just as Gogol resists his father in *The Namesake*, a similar resistance to the older generations can be found in *The Lowland*. Subhash and Udayan's father is a government employee, and the younger brother attacks her father: "If he [his father] was so proud that India was independent, why hadn't he protested the British at the time?" (25). Although he asks these questions, he knows that government employees are banned from opposing such rules and are prohibited from speaking out. Nonetheless, Udayan continues to take the older generation as the object of his resistance. His marriage to Gauri serves as an example of this. In Indian convention, marriage is arranged by parents. Despite this tradition, Udayan decides to marry her without his parents' consent. While studying in Rhode Island, Subhash receives a letter in which his parents express their dissatisfaction with his younger brother: "We hope, when the time comes, you will trust us to settle your future, to choose your wife and to be present at your wedding. We hope you will not disregard your wishes, as your brother did" (63). The marriage of Udayan and Gauri represents the conflict between generations. The parents believe that they must determine their children's future. As a result, the convention gets repeated as a cycle. The Naxalite movement represents a breakthrough in this cycle.

## Struggle with the Older Generation: Higher Education as a Means of Rebellion

While Udayan engages in the Naxalite movement, his elder brother Subhash does not seem to be interested in revolution. His decision to study abroad, entering a doctoral program in the United States, suggests that he has turned away from the conflict in India. However, it is worth considering the following words of Udayan, which were directly toward Subhash: “You’re the other side of me, Subhash. It’s without you that I’m nothing. Don’t go” (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 31). His imploring tone makes us assume that if Subhash goes to the United States, the two brothers would go their separate ways. In fact, when Subhash comes to Rhode Island, he himself is overwhelmed by the difference between the two countries: “The difference was so extreme that he could not accommodate the two places together in his mind. In this enormous new country, there seemed to be nowhere for the old to reside” (34). The ocean that divides India and the United States may be a symbol of the separation between the brothers. They are separated geographically; still, in terms of their resistance to the older generation, Subhash is not separated from Udayan because the former is also being educated in a western way in the United States, and that very education stands as a form of resistance to the older generation.

Therefore, although Subhash does not choose a direct path toward revolting against the convention, we may say that he engages in a revolution that is at the other side of Udayan in a land that has “nowhere for the old to reside.” We can see his first resistance to the older generation when he comes to have an affair with Holly, who is estranged from her husband: “. . . he divulged nothing about Holly to anyone. The affair remained concealed, inaccessible. His parents’ disapproval threatened to undermine what he was doing, lodged like a silent gatekeeper at the back of his mind. But without his parents there, he was able to keep pushing back their objection, farther and farther, like the promise of the



horizon, anticipated from a ship, that one never reached” (77). By crossing the ocean and studying in the United States allows Subhash is able to brush off the traditional conventions just as Udayan does by engaging in the Naxalite movement. Hence, he thinks, “Udayan would have understood. Perhaps he would even respect him for it” (77). The horizon of America seems to break the cycle of traditional conventions in Indian society.

Subhash keeps on pushing back the objection of his parents. The most outstanding example of his revolt is his marriage to Gauri after Udayan is shot to death by the police. Subhash decides to take Gauri away from his parents’ home in Calcutta because they are treating her stonily: “He [Subhash] thought of her [Gauri’s] remaining with his parents, living by their rules. His mother’s coldness toward Gauri was insulting, but his father’s passiveness was just as cruel” (115). When two policemen come to investigate the home in Calcutta after Udayan’s death, one of them says to Subhash, who explains that he studies chemical oceanography, “You’re nothing like your brother” (116). His remark sounds appropriate superficially; yet, he does not detect that Subhash is planning his own rebellion, just as his brother did. That is, he aims to subvert the value of the older generation by marrying the ex-wife of his brother and taking her to the United States.

So it becomes apparent that Gauri is not necessarily a passive woman who obeys what her parents and husband decide. Rather, she too could be considered to be involved in a rebellion. It is noteworthy that Gauri studies at Presidency College. Unlike Udayan, she does not pursue a direct means to revolt. However, her words lead us to suppose that she has inner cravings to destroy the current status surrounding her. Recalling her childhood, she tells Udayan that she “loved waking up out-of-doors, without the protection of walls and a ceiling” (54). Her words imply that she does not want to be enclosed in a fixed space. She lives apart from her parents in a village from west of Calcutta, and Udayan is fascinated with her independence (57).

The Naxalite movement was significant for Indian women in terms of their independence. Rajeshwari Dasgupta mentions the role of women in the Naxalite movement: “. . . as women attempted to forge an identity that would signify their equality with men, their leadership saw women’s primary role as that of a ‘helper’ to Naxalite men and as a ‘nurturer.’ Thus the tasks assigned to women were to provide shelter and food to their male comrades, deliver litters and act as nurses to wounded male compatriots” (1926). Even though women were engaged in the movement, most decisions within the CPI(ML) were made by men. Yet, in the mind of Mallarika Sinha Roy, who rereads the Naxalite movement from the perspective of feminism, the engagement in the movement was significant for women in terms of their emancipation from the patriarchal domination. One woman Naxalite recalls the days when she engaged in the movement: “. . . in those years I lived as a human being” (qtd. in Roy x). The role of women who were oppressed in the traditional hierarchy should not be overlooked.

Unlike this Naxalite woman, Gauri does not embark on the movement. Nonetheless, she continues to pursue a rebellion of her own against the tradition. After Udayan’s death, she marries Subhash “as a means of staying connected to Udayan” (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 127). As she is on her way to the airport in Calcutta leaving for the United States, the fog outside becomes so thick that the driver is forced to stop the car. This impenetrable fog is like death, Gauri thinks, drawing everything to a halt. And this, she thinks, is what Udayan also sees (129). The death of Udayan seems to represent an end to her revolution ends. However, she finds a catalyst that revives her rebellious nature in Rhode Island. It is higher education. While Subhash is studying at the university, she walks around the campus. There, she comes across the philosophy department. Philosophy used to be her major at Presidency College. From this point, she starts to attend a philosophy class as an unregistered student, and she gradually uncovers what has been submerged deep inside of her. She becomes fed up with getting along with the Indian friends of Subhash’s (140). One day, when Subhash comes

home, he finds Gauri has had her hair cut and is wearing slacks and a gray sweater instead of sari. Her new style allows her to expose the shape of her body (141). This radical change obviously delineates Gauri's decision not to be captured by the Indian tradition. Although she felt as if death surrounded her in Calcutta, she attempts to liberate herself through a personal revolution.

Moreover, her resolution to apply for a doctoral program accelerates her rebellion. For her, even Subhash, who resists Indian conventions, represents the old world. Thus, she wishes to get away from him. Even when she was in bed with him, she imagines that she is with another man (172). No matter how much she wants to separate from Subhash, she cannot leave behind her daughter Bela. In addition, the lack of income is another reason why she cannot separate (176). This economical dependence reminds us of India's semi-colonial condition. It is not hard to imagine that this dependence on Subhash is stressful for Gauri, who has long craved to be free from containment.

Thus when Gauri leaves Subhash and Bela while the two are visiting Calcutta for Subhash's father's death, it is no great surprise. She moves to California for a job to teach at a college (211). Lahiri has rarely dealt with colleges on the west coast. She has mainly chosen schools on the east coast where the author herself was educated. That Gauri moves to California indicates that she is continuing to resist that which confines the confinement while Subhash appears to have stopped his rebellion after marrying her. Once years earlier Udayan had asked her why she studied philosophy, and she answered with Plato's words explaining that the purpose of philosophy is to teach us how to die (55). The problem of how to die is related to that of how to live. In other words, if to study philosophy allows Gauri to learn how to die, the study also makes her conscious of how to live. As shown by the scene in which Gauri associates the fog in Calcutta with death, she continues to be haunted by death after Udayan was killed. Because the study of philosophy makes her continually conscious of death, which may have become more urgent after Udayan's death, she unconsciously

has to keep her rebellion to “live as a human being,” to borrow the words of the woman Naxalite. By marrying Subhash and giving birth to Bela, she has nearly become a full participant in the conventions of traditional India, although that is not her intention. Yet, the higher education she receives in the United States ignites her revolution again. The horizontal image of moving from Rhode Island to California cuts through the hierarchical system of India.

### **Forming a Rebellious Space: The Unity of Indians under English Education**

In her previous works, Lahiri’s most remarkable way of describing a revolution is to deal with popular music, especially rock music. Hence her inclusion of the Beatles in *The Namesake*, as I already mentioned. In the meanwhile, in *The Lowland*, Lahiri does not refer to any particular artists of rock music. Instead, her academism is emphasized throughout the work. What she foregrounds there is a revolution of Indians through education, especially English education. No other works of hers have spelled out the relation between education and revolution. We can recognize her academism in the bibliographic footnotes at the end of the book. Her items include the books, journals, and a website she referred to in writing the novel. These acknowledgments suggest that she did a great deal of research into the Naxalite movement. It appears that Lahiri’s way of writing may have drastically changed because she does not mention popular culture in *The Lowland*. Yet, as Terry Eagleton examines, the construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic artifact is closely intertwined with that of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society (3). To put it simply, popular culture should not be as antithetical to political ideology; rather, they are inseparable from each other. Therefore, it would be misguided to conclude that Lahiri deals with different themes in *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*, even though the two works demonstrate a different approach to writing. On the contrary, what be-

comes clear is that both works give expression to the same theme, namely, the enactment of a revolution against the older generation.

Furthermore, we should not overlook the fact that all of her references for *The Lowland* are written in English. That is to say, Lahiri acquired her knowledge about India through the English media. We can illustrate this transmission of knowledge across continents with Mahatma Gandhi's reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* in English when he studied as a student. As Wai Chee Dimock points out, he had not read the Hindu scripture until he was twenty because his knowledge of Sanskrit was limited. Coming to know of this Indian classic while he was in South Africa and studying Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," he went on to read Sir Edwin Arnold's English translation in England (Dimock 20-21). In his autobiography, he recalls when he read the *Bhagavad Gita*: "though my knowledge of Samskrit was meagre, still I hoped to be able to understand the original to the extent of telling where the translation failed to bring out the meaning" (57). The philosophy of the scripture evolved into Gandhi's nonviolence as a means of resistance. By reimporting the Indian classic through the medium of English, Gandhi was able to apply it to the struggle for an independent India.

As Gandhi implies, translation often fails to convey the full meaning of the original. In other words, in the process of translation, the original meaning can become fragmented. Yet, we may say that an original text could acquire a new context through translation rather than lose meanings. The argument about translation by Dimock is suggestive: "Translation – the movement of a corpse by a vehicle driven by something other than himself, and the movement of a text driven by a vehicle driven by something similarly alien – unites the living and the dead in a gesture steeped in mortality and inverting it, carrying on" (16). Dimock considers the unity of the living and the dead to be a form of reproduction. This reproduction does not mean that the same thing is repeated; rather, to be reproductive indicates that a new context is added to a fixed fact through translation. In other words, translation gives life to a dead and unchangeable

fact. Dimock refers to the Hindu god Krishna, who is an avatar or incarnation of Vishnu and appears in the *Bhagavad Gita*. As Dimock remarks, Krishna restores the eternity of the soul to the deceased. What translation brings about is similar with what Krishna does in mythology.

In this respect, the significance of translation penetrates *The Lowland*. In particular we see Gauri moving around the unity of life and death. And at the center of it is the death of Udayan. Gauri's daughter Bela represents the unity of the dead and the living. It is important to recall that when Gauri comes to the United States for the first time, she is pregnant. During that period, she senses that Udayan is within her: "She felt as if she contained a ghost, as Udayan was. The child was a version of him, in that it was both present and absent. Both within her and remote" (Lahiri, *The Lowland* 124). Once she gets to Rhode Island, she also comes to know that the word "providence," which is the name of the capital, indicates "foresight, the future beheld before it was experienced" (125). For Gauri, India represents death because she is haunted by the death of Udayan and contained by its traditional conventions. Just as Bijoli, the mother of Subhash and Udayan, believes Udayan's ghost lurks around her (181), his death always hovers over Gauri in India. Meanwhile, the United States appears to give her a new life, even though she does not necessarily come according to her will. Therefore, taking into consideration that Gauri becomes pregnant in India and gives birth to the baby in the United States, there might be value in seeing Bela as representing both death and life.

As I have already discussed, Gauri regains her life after starting to study philosophy again in the United States. What should not be forgotten is that Gauri studies philosophy in English. Her professor Otto Weis lectures her on the influence of the Upanishads on Schopenhauer, comparing Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's concepts of circular time (165). That is, Gauri studies Indian philosophy through Schopenhauer; moreover, that knowledge comes to her through English translation. Her studying of the concept of time thus proves indicative. When

reading about the concept of time in Hindu philosophy at the university library in Rhode Island, she learns: “In Hindu philosophy the three tenses – past, present, future – were said to exist simultaneously in God. God was timeless, but time was personified as the god of death” (151). Once again, Gauri learns Indian philosophy in English. The timelessness of Hindu philosophy is applied to *The Lowland*. One such examples is related to Bela. When she is a child, she cannot tell the past from the future. Lahiri introduces the concept of Hindu time: “It was in English that the past was unilateral; in Bengal, the word for yesterday, *kal*, was also the word for tomorrow” (italics original; 149). She claims that three months ago and the day before were the same, and even says “the day after yesterday” (149). As we see in Bela’s perception of time, Lahiri causes the flow of time to collapse. Even after Udayan’s death, the descriptions of the times when he was alive are inserted here and there in the novel. This structure implies that Lahiri adopted the Hindu philosophy of time to this novel written in English.

Furthermore, she succeeds in uniting the living and the dead through her dexterous framework of time. She closes the last chapter with the perspective of Udayan, who is shot by the police. Although he is shot, his view continues: “For a fraction of a second he heard the explosion tearing through his lungs. A sound like gushing water or a torrent of wind. A sound that belonged to the fixed forces of the world, that then took him out of the world. The silence was pure now. Nothing interfered” (339). These descriptions of his execution show that he is physically dead. Nonetheless, we recognize that he is not alone because Gauri appears in front of him (339). Lahiri blurs the border between the dead and the living here, turning “a fraction of a second” into an eternity by uniting the two in Udayan’s consciousness. In other words, Lahiri creates the timeless space suggested in Hindu philosophy. By translating the philosophy into this novel written in English, she intentionally breaks the horizontal time that proceeds from the past to the present to the future. In this timeless space, there is no distinction between the dead and the living, and it would be possible, within such a space,

for both Udayan and Gauri to meet each other, even though the former is dead but the latter is alive.

The translation of Hindu philosophy allows Lahiri to add a new context: the unity that exists under the English language. This collapsing of time serves as a means of resisting the older generation that represents the past. Moreover, we should not forget that the rebels are educated in the western way, especially in English. The language brings about a connection of Indians inside and outside the country. Discussing various backgrounds within the Indian diasporas, Ravindra Jain maintains: “while Indian diasporas are ethnically heterogeneous they appear continuous and unified thanks to the colonial heritage of the English language” (187). Though Jain’s argument is about Indians outside the country, the unity under the English language can be applied to the domestic Indians as well because a few elites who studied at universities established under the British colonialism were educated in English. In short, under the English language, Indians are globally unified.

In addition, Lahiri’s text represents an English language that is not limited to a particular area. Throughout *The Lowland*, we cannot help but notice that the author does not use quotation marks. This method allows the text to be categorized as either American or British, in terms of the way of writing based on the different rules of punctuation in each of those countries. The characters in the novel do not belong to any particular nation such as the United States or India. We recollect Hofstadter’s assertion that immigrants become more American by gaining higher status. Yet, the characters Lahiri describes do not seem to turn their backs on India in order to become more American, even though they acquire a higher status. Instead, it seems that they are haunted by the old world that they could have completely left behind. For example, although Gauri moves to the west, she continues to be haunted by the east where Udayan was killed in the class conflict by the Naxalites. That Indians outside India do not forget their country does not mean that they have a feeling of nostalgia. On the contrary, it



suggests that they continue to resist the traditional hierarchical system of India even though they are outside the country. That is, the class conflict is what they always keep in mind because Indian immigrants are not liberated from that class structure, as Sathi S. Dasgupta suggests (41). I do not intend to disapprove Hofstadter's argument; still, as far as Indians are concerned, his assertion does not necessarily apply. We need to take into consideration this very peculiar situation in which the Indian elite have been so strongly influenced by the English education. As a result, Indians, both outside and inside of the country, are connected by the English language and form one imaginary space to rebel against the conventional class system. Lahiri's text delineates the framework of that space, which does not belong to any particular nation. To realize this space, English education at academic institutions plays the essential role of globally unifying Indians.

## Conclusion

As rock music was a symbol of revolution in *The Namesake*, Lahiri presents higher education by English as a means of rebellion in *The Lowland*. The novel gives us the impression that the author has moved away from her interest in popular culture which often appears in her previous works. Instead of using popular culture, she emphasizes her academism. Nonetheless, if we focus on the rebellion against the older generation and the conventional class system, we acknowledge that Lahiri pursues a coherent theme throughout her works. She refuses to present characters who belong to a particular nation; rather, she describes Indians as connected by higher education in English. She also does not use an English that can be judged as either American or British at a first glance. Through this strategy, she succeeds in illustrating an imaginary space of Indians unified by the English language. Both outside and inside India, they continue to engage in class conflict. In these ways, *The Lowland* can be seen as Lahiri's attempt to present

the possibility of an English language that cannot be distinguished by specific national borders. Just as people in the New England colonies united to achieve a revolution that liberated them from the old world in the eighteenth century, Lahiri, who grew up in New England, demonstrates that Indians in the twenty-first century are integrated under English education for their own revolution against the traditional system.

### Note

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