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EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EXILE: THE ROLE OF MIGRATION IN SHAPING  
WOMEN'S IDENTITIES IN *THE LOWLAND* AND *THE LAST FLICKER*

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**Abstract:**

Women's identities are frequently significantly shaped by migration, whether it be forced or voluntary, as it upends established conventions and opens up new possibilities for personal growth. *The Last Flicker* by Gurdial Singh and *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri both show female protagonists negotiating cultural shifts, exile, and displacement. This article explores the ways in which exile affects women's autonomy, self-perception, and societal roles while also acting as a site of empowerment. By contrasting these two books, the research demonstrates how migration reshapes gender roles and identities, ultimately giving women unexpected power.

**Keywords:** Migration, Exile, Identity, Empowerment, Gender Roles, Displacement, Lahiri, Singh.

Literary works have long explored the idea of migration, particularly in postcolonial and diasporic themes. However, as women frequently experience exile in very different ways than males, research on the gendered effects of migration is still crucial. The journey of Gauri, a woman whose relocation from India to the United States reconfigures her identity in ways she could not have predicted, is examined by Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Lowland*. In contrast, Gurdial Singh's *The Last Flicker*, originally titled *Marhi Da Deeva*, offers a distinct although no less gripping account of women's suffering in rural Punjab under strict patriarchal systems. Exile—whether forced or self-imposed—is essential to redefining a woman's identity, as both works show.

After her husband Udayan's revolutionary actions caused political unrest in India, Gauri moved to the United States, which influenced her story in *The Lowland*. At first bound by her obligations as a wife and daughter-in-law in a traditional Bengali family, Gauri's migration upends these roles and compels her to reestablish herself in a strange Western environment. Although her exile frees her from the limitations of conventional Indian womanhood, it also



causes her to become estranged from the same connections that used to define her. The stark tension between individual freedom and social norms is highlighted by her choice to abandon her daughter; Bela. Lahiri portrays Gauri as a woman whose exile empowers her, but at a high personal cost: she gains independence at the expense of emotional detachment and solitude.

For many migrant women who have to deal with a difficult duality, Gauri's metamorphosis in the US is representative of a larger reality. They are freed from some sociocultural restrictions by migrating, but they are also cut off from the social and familial networks that used to give them a feeling of identity. Gauri defies conventional ideas of parenting and female responsibility by choosing to pursue an academic profession and lead an autonomous life. Nevertheless, there are drawbacks to this empowerment. Her self-imposed seclusion causes her relationships to suffer, and she continues to be emotionally distant from Bela. The paradox of migration—while it provides agency, it also complicates ideas of identity and belonging—is illustrated by Lahiri through Gauri's character.

Gurdial Singh's *The Last Flicker*, on the other hand, depicts a distinct kind of exile that is firmly ingrained in social institutions rather than being geographical. The women in Singh's book undergo some kind of displacement inside their own communities, but they do not literally move across borders. The novel's depiction of oppressed women in rural Punjab emphasizes how patriarchal tyranny results in a symbolic exile in which women are deprived of their autonomy and excluded from decision-making processes. The women in *The Last Flicker* are powerless over their situation, in contrast to Gauri, who consciously chooses her exile. Despite these limitations, they challenge the authority that aims to imprison them by displaying subtle yet potent forms of resistance.

Singh's story highlights the pervasive misogyny that condemns women to life of enslavement and hardship. His female characters experience exile through their lack of agency and power in their own homes, rather than through migration. Their resistance, however, shows that exile, even when forced, can result in empowerment, whether it takes the shape of minor acts of disobedience or a complete rejection of conventional norms. Even if they face different challenges than Gauri, they both go through a similar process of self-redefinition and discover methods to exercise agency in spite of the constraints placed on them.

The kind of empowerment that the female protagonists receive from exile is a significant distinction between the two books. Exile gives Gauri the opportunity to rebel against convention in *The Lowland*, but it also causes her to become emotionally isolated. Although she attains both professional and personal autonomy, her feeling of belonging is nonetheless shattered. The women in *The Last Flicker*, on the other hand, do not become physically independent, but they do acquire a distinct kind of agency via their resistance to patriarchal oppression. Their empowerment is based on resistance rather than personal freedom and is more collective in nature. This comparison demonstrates how, depending on the social and cultural settings in which they take place, migration and exile have varying effects on women's identities.

The idea that exile, whether through migration or social isolation, functions as a transforming force in shaping women's identities is emphasized in both stories despite these distinctions. Both novels' female characters are forced to reevaluate their place in the world as a result of exile, which upends conventional gender roles. Although Gauri's path is characterized by self-imposed seclusion, the women in *The Last Flicker* fight against their marginalization by doing whatever they can to challenge repressive systems. The novels as a whole imply that, despite its potential for suffering, exile may be a potent tool for empowerment and self-discovery.



These two works' intersections of gender, migration, and exile provide important insights into how women are impacted by relocation in different ways than males. In literature, men migrants frequently struggle with cultural assimilation and economic survival, but female migrants also face the additional pressure of gender norms. Through their nuanced depictions of women who manage to regain agency in spite of their varied situations, Lahiri and Singh shed light on these difficulties. Both authors demonstrate that exile is not only a place of loss but also a place of change, whether it is through Gauri's intellectual independence or Singh's female characters' silent resistance.

*The Last Flicker* and *The Lowland*, in conclusion, portray exile as a complicated and varied experience for women. While some liberties are brought about by migration, it also presents fresh difficulties that compel female characters to reevaluate who they are. In order to show the complex ways that displacement affects women's life, Lahiri and Singh portray exile as a place of both empowerment and estrangement. Finally, both books imply that migration does more than just uproot women; it transforms them, forcing them to negotiate their identities in ways that go against conventional gender roles. Through their exile, these women show that empowerment frequently results from the act of displacement itself, emerging not as victims of their circumstances but as people who seize new opportunities.

#### References

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