



## BELA – A MIRROR IMAGE OF UDAYAN

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### ABSTRACT

Every individual is an entity by himself. No two persons on this earth are totally alike. They are different either physically or psychologically. Two forces i.e. heredity and environment influence many with no exception to even twins. Genes are the basis for this variation and thus determine hereditary traits that are passed from one to the other generation. Heredity determines both physical as well as psychological characteristics. Physique, intelligence and mental disposition, reflexes are all inherited.

In this regard, the role of environment too cannot be undetermined. Environment here refers to the environment in mother's tummy after the conception till delivery of the baby as well as environment at home and outside.

According to Douglas and Holland environment includes all the extrinsic forces, influences and conditions which affect life, nature, behavior, growth, development and maturation of living organism. Parental love and affection basically play a crucial role in shaping an individual.

My paper shall discuss the influence of both the forces- heredity and environment on Bela- the girl who the readers of the novel "The Lowland" cannot stop pitying, for she lost her father while in womb and was abandoned by her mother Gauri, when she was just twelve without a hint or provocation. She was too young to understand the circumstances, too big a punishment to undeserving of a young girl. The qualities she inherited from her humane and rebellious father and the effect of the cold act of her mother molded her personality, are vividly discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Heredity, Environment, genes, mental disposition, transmission

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The latest novel of Jhumpa Lahiri "The lowland" short listed for Man Booker Prize reproduces the prevailing situation of the days during naxalite movement of 1970's. The life of two brothers, the ups and downs, the trials and tribulations they face in course of their journey of life is the theme of this novel. The rebellious younger one of the two Udayan, gets killed in the

movement leaving his unborn child fatherless. The docile, conventional elderly brother, Subhash, under compelling circumstances marries Udayan's widow, so as to provide a relief from the austere life a widow is expected to lead. Thus Gauri, Udayan's wife, lands in the US having married Subhash, her brother-in-law, gives birth to a baby girl and my paper shall discuss the similarities between Bela, the

baby girl and her father Udayan to prove the influence of genes or heredity on the offspring.

Bela echoes her father Udayan's ideology. Udayan can be called as what Appaiah calls a "cosmopolitan patriot" a symbol of neo-cosmopolitanism as he is inclined towards various international ideologies though remain committed to the political ideology of India. Appaiah states that that ' "the cosmopolitan patriot can enter the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his own, with its own particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other different people." (91) Unlike Subhash, Udayan doesn't entertain the idea of immigrating to another country in search of greener pastures. However he readily imports radical ideologies from movements aboard to reform the society he lives in. he couldn't tolerate the manipulation of the tribal peasants by the wealthy land owners in some of the villages in Darjeeling district. Moreover the money lenders sucked their blood like leeches resulting in retaliation b some of the laborers. The deeds and records that deceived them were burnt and lands were taken over by force under the leadership of Charu Mazundar and Kanu Sanyal-dissidents of the CPI(M) ownership rights were demanded followed by an encounter between the sharecroppers and police resulting in violence and bloodshed. Udayan-a daredevil took part in this, "Battle for justice" for he believed in the statement released by the Chinese press, "The spark in Darjeeling will start a prairie fire and will certainly set the vast expanses of India ablaze." He argues vehemently with his father that they should do their bit to ease the crisis. He grew listless and his schedule became erratic, an indication that he started inching towards this revolution that was set to wage a war against the obsolete pedagogy and the unjust system. Capitalism and feudalism were their prime causality. The youth especially from college visited poor peasants on plantation by foot, walking miles together. Udayan saw. "how the system coerced them, how it humiliated them, how it had stripped their dignity away." Surviving on coarse grains of rice and thinned lentils and water that never quenched their thirst defecating in fields, they

seldom bathed. They didn't have a wink of sleep as they were tormented by swarms of mosquitoes.

Udayan started living two lives after the party CPI (M) was declared by Charu Mazundar and Kanu Sanyal. After Subhash's departure to the US, comrades (followers of the party mentioned) became his friends. One life that he led at home with Gauri, his parents and his students while the other he lead in the party circles-feeling upset about the things he hears and sees, he stealthily involves himself in the violence against the government. Believing strongly that change is inevitable, he assured that a just society is not a farfetched dream.

Bela, the baby girl that Udayan's wife gives birth to, after his death is a replica of her father in terms of her outlook on society. Raising teenagers itself is a big challenge. It's like nailing jelly to a tree. To add to this was Gauri, Bela's mother leaving her to her fate. However he's well aware of Udayan's blood coursing through Bela's veins. She shares similar ideology as her father. As soon as she received her driving license she visited local restaurants collecting leftovers, delivering them to shelters. This unusual behavior of her puzzled Subhash initially.. This reminds the readers of Bizoli-Udayans mother recalling a scene from Udayan's childhood. "Of him sitting with a piece of chalk in the courtyard, teaching boys and girls who used to work for them, who had not gone to school, to read and write. He befriended these children eating beside them involving them in his games, giving them the meat from his own plate if his mother has not set enough aside. He would come to their defense if she happened to scold them. When he was older he collected worn out items, old beddings, pots and pans to distribute to family living in colonies, in slums. He would accompany a maid to her home, into the poorest sections of city, to bring medicine, to summon a doctor if a family member was ill, to see a funeral if someone died."Is it not a pity that such a compassionate being was called a miscreant, an extremist!

Just as Udayan lost interest in studies Bela too was not after acquiring degrees. Though she majored in environmental science and conducted research on the ill effects of pesticide run off in a local river. Great minds have a purpose, others have

wishes. As no other girl of her time would do it, she opted for a job on a farm in Western Massachusetts, as an agriculture apprentice. "Putting in irrigation lines, weeding and harvesting, cleaning out animal pens, packing crates to sell vegetables, weighing them for customers on the side of the road.

A difficult time can be more readily endured if we retain the conviction that our existence holds a purpose, a cause to pursue, a person to love, a goal to achieve. Bela's inconsolable grief found a vent in social work. The purpose in her life was to enrich the society, contribute her bit to better it. The vacuum that her mother's abandonment created in her was thus filled. More often than not Bela zipped her bag and left home never saying when she would be back, where she was going. Here too she duplicates her father. Udayan too left home as if he was heading out for a day with nothing but a cloth bag over his shoulder, just enough money in his pocket for the train fare. He said that he was travelling outside the city, he didn't specify where. And for weeks he was gone! Sometimes a piece of information camouflaging itself as a note appeared at a local stationary requesting for a pair of clothes or thyroid pills. But there was no letter and no way of knowing whether he was alive or dead. When the chance of hiding had become remote he came home, thinner and unkempt. With a perennial fear that haunted him exerted tremendous pressure on his mind that manifested itself as a persistent tremor, racing heart and breaking into cold sweat. However Bela was an exception to this kind of mental trauma though her visits to her home were as erratic as her father's-sometimes in summer other times during Christmas. Subhash would receive a post card with the details of her whereabouts sometimes and other times he would get gifts. Just as part of Udayan was closed off from his parents and brother, Bela too had the same tendency-to draw a line between her freedom and her commitment to her father.

While her friends struggled to win the rat race in academics, she did her best to safe guard the interest of our planet Earth. She went round her community getting signatures for recycling bottles or hiking wages. Like Udayan, Bela was least interested in materialistic wealth. When she came

home, her appearance could no way be compared to her peers'. "Her hands were being altered by the demands of her labor, subhash noticed calluses on her palms, dirt beneath her nails. Her skin smelled of soil. The back of her neck and her shoulders, her face turned a deeper brown."

Like Udayan, Bela too was paid no cash but provided food and accomodation for the service rendered. "She lived in tents and with people who pooled their income. Paying no heed to her future, she lived without insurance." Like Udayan, she wanted to make a difference thus assisted low income groups to grow vegetables in their yards to make them less dependant on food banks, to transform abandoned properties into community gardens that supplied their daily needs, at the same time not feeling that she was sacrificing her own comforts or risking her own life to improve the state of affairs. Udayan too felt the same so accused his father subhash brother to be selfish and goaded them to stand upto the unfair sytem. Subhash was worried about Bela's waywardness initially but eventually the ideology behind her work seems to be clear. "There was a spirit of opposition to the things that she did."

Bela demanded subhash buy local stuff and not the one that comes from far. "What we eat is what we support." She maintained. She vehemently opposed patenting of seed. Like Udayan she spoke about the most deprived peasants, starving and dying from famines and she blamed the unequal distrubuiton of wealth-the same opinion that her father expressed and fought against. Being a staunch environmentalist, she advocated composting of the waste from kitchen. Subhash was quietly influenced by Bela's words-bought from farm stands, became aware of what he ate. Having experienced the loss incurred due to the precarious path his brother had chosen to better the world, subhash was weary of Bela walking in his footsteps. At the same time it was gratifying for him to know that she found some meaning in her life.

So dedicated to politics, so scornful of convention, it was quite a shock to Udayan's parents to know that he has taken a wife. Similar shock awaited subhash when Bela declared she was pregnant and not particular who the father was.

Given her parents' example, given that she never endured any romantic relationship for long, given the difficulties that a single parent faces raising a kid, one would assume that Bela wouldn't think on these lines. Subhash tried to impress the same on her but in vain. A difficult time can be more readily endured if we retain the conviction that our existence holds a purpose—a cause to pursue, a person to love, a goal to achieve.

The statement that heredity and environment mould personality traits cannot be underestimated in this light. Bela is one good example of the role genes play in making a man. Like father like daughter!

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