

**SUBHASH'S REPRESSION AND SUPPRESSION AS DEFENSE
MECHANISMS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE LOWLAND***

THESIS

By:

Siti Sundari

NIM 220302110046



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK
IBRAHIM MALANG
2026**

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THESIS**

Presented to

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Sarjana
Sastra (S.S.)

By:

Siti Sundari

NIM 220302110046

Advisor:

Dr. Muzakki Afifuddin, S.S., M.Pd

NIP 197610112011011005



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK
IBRAHIM MALANG
2026**

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that the thesis entitled "**Subhash's Repression and Suppression as Defense Mechanism in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland***" is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

Malang, May, 7 2026

The Researcher



Siti Sundari

NIM 220302110046

APPROVAL SHEET

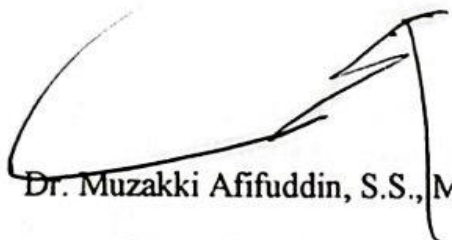
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Malang, May, 7 2026

Approved by:

Advisor

Head Department of English Literature



Dr. Muzakki Afifuddin, S.S., M.Pd.

NIP 197610112011011005



Dr. Agwin Degaf, M.A.

NIP 198805232015031004

Acknowledged by
Dean,



Prof. Dr. M. Faisol, M.Ag
NIP 197411012003121003

LEGITIMATION SHEET

This to certify that Siti Sundari's thesis entitled "Subhash's Repression and Suppression as Defense Mechanism in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*" has been approved for thesis examination at Faculty of humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, as one of the requirements for the degree of Sarjana Sastra (S.S.)

Malang, May, 7 2026

The Board of Examiners

The Chair

1. Muhammad Edy Thoyib, M.A
NIP 198410282015031007

First Examiner

2. Dr. Muzakki Afifuddin, S.S., M.Pd.
NIP 197610112011011005

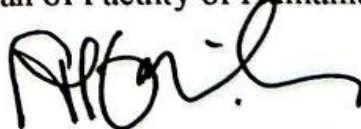
Second Examiner

3. Agung Wiranata Kusuma, M.A.
NIP 198402072015031004

Signatures



Approved by
Dean of Faculty of Humanities



Prof. Dr. M. Faisol, M.Ag
NIP 197411012003121003

MOTTO

لَنْ تَرْجِعَ الْأَيَّامُ الَّتِي مَضَتْ

"The days gone by will never return."

"If you can't fly, run. Today we will survive. If you can't run, walk. Today we will survive. If you can't walk, crawl." Not Today by BTS

"Don't be hurt and be happy! You have to try hard to be happy, you know that right. You have to search for it yourself, and Don't lose yourself, You're the main character of your life" Jeon Jungkook

DEDICATION

Bismillahirrahmanirrohim with respect I dedicate this thesis to my parents Soliken and Sopiah two great people who sacrificed a lot for me, also to all my older brothers and sisters, Abdul Matin and his wife Sholikhatin, Ahmad Syaifudin and his wife Nur Isro' Ningrum, Uswatun Hasanah and her husband Masrukin, and Muhammad Darus Salam who have been an inspiration and given a lot of help in terms of material and inspiration, thank you to all my nieces and nephews who have given me the spirit to be the rich aunt. The author dedicates this paper and degree to you as proof of your greatness for all the resilience, suffering, and humiliation that you have experienced.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, the author would like to express her deepest gratitude to Allah SWT who has bestowed His grace and blessings, so that I can complete this thesis entitled **“Subhash’s Repression and Suppression as Defense Mechanisms in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland*”**. Second, I always convey prayers and greetings to the Prophet Muhammad SAW who has guided us from darkness to light, from ignorance to intelligence, namely the religion of Islam.

As a prerequisite for obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree, this research was submitted to the Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities. Without the help, encouragement, advice, criticism, and recommendations of many people, this thesis would not have been possible. In completing this thesis, the researcher would like to express her sincere gratitude to:

1. Prof. Dr. Hj. Ilfi Nurdiana, S.Ag., M.Si, Rector of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
2. Prof. Dr. M. Faisol, M.Ag., Dean of the Faculty of Humanities Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
3. Dr. Agwin Degaf, M.A., Head of the English Literature Department, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
4. Zainur Rofiq, M.A., as my academic advisor, thank you for your guidance in the English Literature Department during my studies at UIN Malang,

giving advice, messages and how to face lectures in the coming semester. I will always remember your kindness.

5. Dr. Muzakki Afifuddin, S.S., M.Pd., as my Thesis Advisor, who not only provided academic guidance but also acted as a guide when I had difficulty finding direction. My deepest gratitude for your willingness to take time out of your busy schedule, for your patience, guidance, and advice delivered with soothing words. for reminding me of my repeated mistakes and explaining all the difficulties that existed in the process of working on my thesis. Thank you for making every process easier, always opening the door to consultation with open arms, and understanding every difficulty I faced. May Allah SWT always gives you health, blessings, and the best reward for every good thing you have given.
6. I would like to thank my closest friends in the Let's Get Rich group, Deshinta Setyawan Putri, Maizatul Akma Wibowo, Wulan Cipta Madhani, and Rizka Fadilla Naila Sa'adah who have accompanied me at my lowest point and given me countless inputs from the first year until the last, thank you for your support, input and everything you have done for me.
7. My deepest gratitude also goes to all my dear friends, especially the entire English Literature class of 2022. Thank you for all your support, encouragement, and prayers. Let's fight together.
8. Thank you to my support system Bangtan Sonyeondan for all their songs, especially their latest album "ARIRANG" which has accompanied me in working on my thesis with more enthusiasm.

9. And the last I express my deepest appreciation to all my online gaming friends in We play, thank you for accompanying me during my difficult days.

The researcher realizes that this thesis still needs improvement and has several weaknesses. Therefore, criticism and suggestions to improve this work are greatly appreciated. Hopefully, this thesis will be beneficial for both the researcher and the general readership.

Malang, May, 7 2026

The Researcher

Siti Sundari

NIM 220302110046

ABSTRACT

Sundari, Siti. (2026). "Subhash's Repression and Suppression as Defense Mechanisms in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*" Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Dr. Muzakki Afifuddin, S.S., M.Pd.

Keywords: Repression, Suppression, Defense mechanism, Psychoanalysis, Subhash, *The Lowland*

This study examines repression and suppression as coexisting defense mechanisms in the character of Subhash in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* (2013), using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as the primary analytical framework. It addresses two research questions: how repression and suppression manifest as defense mechanisms in Subhash, and how these mechanisms influence his relationships with other characters. The study employs qualitative descriptive methods in literary criticism, drawing on textual evidence in the form of narrative descriptions and dialogues, analyzed through Freud's structural model of the mind: the id, ego, and superego, and the theoretical distinction between repression as an unconscious and automatic defense mechanism and suppression as a conscious and deliberate defense mechanism. The findings reveal two main patterns. Repression manifests in three domains: unconscious suppression of grief, hatred for Udayan, and desire for Gauri. These repressed emotions persist in the unconscious, resulting in identity confusion, emotional insecurity, chronic low self-esteem, and ego collapse. Both mechanisms significantly damage Subhash's interpersonal relationships through structurally distinct processes. Repression results in unconscious relational withdrawal reinforces dependence on Udayan and emotional unavailability toward Gauri. Suppression creates deliberate relational asymmetry, constructing Bela's status as a paternal figure based on concealed truths, and generating increasing psychological tension with Gauri. This study concludes that while both mechanisms serve as protective strategies, they operate through fundamentally different psychological processes and produce distinct but equally devastating consequences for Subhash's inner life and relationships throughout the novel.

ABSTRAK

Sundari, Siti. (2026). "Subhash's Repression and Suppression as Defense Mechanisms in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*". Skripsi Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Dosen Pembimbing: Dr. Muzakki Afifuddin, S.S., M.Pd.

Kata Kunci: Repression, Suppression, Defense mechanisms, Psychoanalysis, Subhash, *The Lowland*

Studi ini meneliti represi dan supresi sebagai mekanisme pertahanan yang berdampingan dalam karakter Subhash dalam novel *The Lowland* (2013) karya Jhumpa Lahiri, menggunakan teori psikoanalitik Sigmund Freud sebagai kerangka analitis utama. Studi ini membahas dua pertanyaan penelitian: bagaimana represi dan supresi bermanifestasi sebagai mekanisme pertahanan dalam diri Subhash, dan bagaimana mekanisme ini memengaruhi hubungannya dengan karakter lain. Studi ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dalam kritik sastra, berdasarkan bukti tekstual berupa deskripsi naratif dan dialog, yang dianalisis melalui model struktural pikiran Freud: id, ego, dan superego, serta perbedaan teoritis antara represi sebagai mekanisme pertahanan bawah sadar dan otomatis dan supresi sebagai mekanisme pertahanan sadar dan disengaja. Temuan menunjukkan dua pola utama. Represi bermanifestasi dalam tiga domain: supresi bawah sadar terhadap kesedihan, kebencian terhadap Udayan, dan keinginan terhadap Gauri. Emosi yang direpresi ini terus berlanjut di alam bawah sadar, mengakibatkan kebingungan identitas, ketidakamanan emosional, harga diri rendah kronis, dan keruntuhan ego. Kedua mekanisme tersebut secara signifikan merusak hubungan interpersonal Subhash melalui proses yang berbeda secara struktural. Represi mengakibatkan penarikan diri relasional secara tidak sadar, yang memperkuat ketergantungan pada Udayan dan penarikan emosional terhadap Gauri. Penekanan menciptakan asimetri relasional yang disengaja, membangun status Bela sebagai figur ayah berdasarkan kebenaran yang disembunyikan, dan menghasilkan peningkatan ketegangan psikologis dengan Gauri. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun kedua mekanisme tersebut berfungsi sebagai strategi perlindungan, keduanya beroperasi melalui proses psikologis yang pada dasarnya berbeda dan menghasilkan konsekuensi yang berbeda namun sama-sama menghancurkan bagi kehidupan batin dan hubungan Subhash sepanjang novel.

ملخص

سونداري، سيتي 2026 قمع سوبهاش في رواية جومبا لاهيري "الأراضي المنخفضة." «أطروحة بكالوريوس في قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية المشرف: الدكتور مزاكي عفيف الدين، الماجستير في التربية المنخفضة الأراضي» سوبهاش، النفسي، التحليل الدفاع، آليات الكبت، القمع،: المفتاحية الكلمات

تيسفنا تيليلحتا تيرظنا مادختساب، يريهلا ابموج تبتاكلا (2013) «تصفخنملا يضارلا» تياور في «شاهيوس» تيصخش «شاهيوس» يدل تيرعافد تايلك معقلاو تيكلا لجتيفيك: نييئح نيلأوس تساردلا لواننتو. سياسا ليلحت رايطاك ديورف دنومغيسل لا دنتسم، يبدلا دقلا في تيعود تيفصو بيلاسا تساردلا مدختستو. يرخلا تايصخشلا مع متاقلا علىء تايللا مذهب رثوت فيكو اندلاو، اندلاو، وهلا: ديورف معصو ذلا لقللا ليكيهلا جومندا للاحن ماهليلحت متي، تاراوحو تيردس فاصوا لكش في تيصن تدا نبيسئر نيظمن عجاتنلا فشكة. دمعتمو تيرعاو عافد تيلك معقلاو، تيناقلنو تيرعاو لا عافد تيلك تيكلا نيبي رظنا زبيمتلاو، ايلعلا تيوبكلا رعاشملا مذهب رمتستو. يروغ في تيرغللاو، نايادوا ماجت تيهار كلاو، نرحلا يعاو لا تيكلا: تلاجم تثلث في معقلا لجتيف اتلك قحلنو. اندلاو رايهناو، تاذلا ريدقتي في نمزم ضافخناو، يقطاعلا ناملا مادعناو، تيوهلا لكابترا على يديو امم، يعاو لا في يروغش لا تاقلاع باحسنلا على معقلا يديو. أليكيه تفلتخم تايلمع للاحن من يرخلا عمشاهيوس تاقلاع اريبك ارض نيتيللا، دمعتمي تاقلاع سانت مدع قليف تيكلا اما. يروغ ماجت تيفصحا ريغ تيفطاعلا تافر صتللو نايادوا علىء دامعلا ززعيم امم في بنا على تساردلا مذهب صلخت. يروغ عم ادياز تم ايسف ارتوت دلويو، تيفخم قناقد علىء تمناق تيوبا تيصخشك لايب تناكم ينيبو قزيمتم بقاوع اجنتنتو ايرذج تفلتخم تيسف تايلمع للاحن من لامعت امهنا لا، تيناقلو تايجيتار تساك نلامعت نيتيللا للاحن ايد.. تياورلا لواط متاقلاعو شاهيوس تيلخادلا قايحلا علىء ردقلا سقنب قردم امهنگلو

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the background of the study, problems of study, significance of the study, scope and limitation, and definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

Mental health has become one of the most discussed issues in contemporary academic and social discourse. The World Health Organization (2022) states that mental health is a fundamental human right and an essential component of overall well-being, encompassing how individuals think, feel, and behave in response to life's challenges. One of the most significant yet least visible threats to mental health is the psychological burden carried internally emotions and thoughts that individuals cannot or will not express. In the face of grief, guilt, family obligation, and social pressure, the human psyche develops protective strategies known as defense mechanisms. Among the most prominent of these mechanisms, as identified by Sigmund Freud, are repression and suppression two related but distinct psychological processes that shape how individuals manage overwhelming inner conflict. This study examines repression and suppression as two coexisting yet structurally distinct defense mechanisms in Subhash's character, neither of which is treated as secondary to the other. While repression operates unconsciously and automatically, excluding distressing material from awareness without the individual's knowledge, suppression operates consciously and deliberately,

involving the intentional avoidance or concealment of acknowledged thoughts, emotions, or truths.

The relationship between social pressure and psychological defense is particularly relevant when considering the role of the superego. In Freudian structural theory, the psyche is divided into three agencies: the id, which represents primitive desires and impulses; the ego, which mediates between the id and reality; and the superego, which internalizes social norms, moral expectations, and cultural prohibitions (Freud, 1923). When the superego, shaped by family values and societal expectations, imposes standards that conflict with the individual's desires, the ego is forced to repress or suppress those desires in order to maintain psychological balance. Thus, social and familial pressure functions as a superego mechanism that triggers defensive responses. This theoretical framework is essential to understanding why certain individuals particularly those raised in environments with rigid emotional norms develop habitual patterns of repression and suppression as their primary mode of psychological survival.

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* (2013) offers a rich literary context in which these psychological mechanisms can be observed through the character of Subhash. The novel is set primarily in Calcutta (now Kolkata), India, during the political turbulence of the late 1960s and 1970s a period marked by the rise of the Naxalite movement, violent political repression, and intense social upheaval. Subhash grows up in a conservative Bengali family in which emotional restraint is culturally normative. Within this setting, emotional expression particularly among men is implicitly discouraged, and conformity to family expectations is treated as a

measure of moral character. These cultural conditions form the socio-familial superego that bears down on Subhash throughout his life. His brother Udayan, bold and ideologically driven, consistently overshadows him within the family, while Subhash is praised precisely for his obedience and passivity. This dynamic establishes the initial conditions for a lifetime of psychological defense.

The Lowland follows two brothers, Subhash and Udayan, who grow up inseparable in Calcutta during the 1950s and 1960s, sharing nearly every experience of childhood despite their contrasting temperaments. As they reach adulthood, Udayan becomes increasingly drawn to radical politics, eventually joining the Naxalite movement, a Maoist insurgency that sought to overthrow the Indian state through armed struggle. Subhash, in contrast, chooses a quieter path, leaving for Rhode Island in the United States to pursue doctoral studies in chemical oceanography. While Subhash is abroad, Udayan marries Gauri, a university student who shares his political convictions, and continues his clandestine involvement with the movement. Udayan is eventually killed by the police in front of his family as punishment for his role in a political killing, leaving Gauri pregnant with his child. Upon learning of his brother's death, Subhash returns to Calcutta, where he makes the decision that will define the rest of his life: he marries Gauri and brings her back to Rhode Island, raising her daughter, Bela, as his own. The novel then follows Subhash, Gauri, and Bela across several decades, tracing the long psychological aftermath of Udayan's death and the choices Subhash makes to hold his family together choices built, in large part, on what he chooses not to feel and what he chooses not to say.

Subhash's situation becomes dramatically more complex after Udayan's death as a result of his involvement in the Naxalite movement. Subhash, who has emigrated to Rhode Island in the United States to pursue doctoral studies, returns to India and makes the consequential decision to marry Gauri, Udayan's widow, and raise Bela, Udayan's unborn child, as his own. This decision driven by a combination of obligation, guilt, and suppressed desire places Subhash in an emotionally impossible position: he must repress his authentic feelings about his brother, his marriage, and his identity as a father, while simultaneously managing the social and familial expectations that demand his silence and sacrifice. The displacement from Calcutta to Rhode Island further intensifies this psychological condition, as Subhash's immigrant experience creates an additional layer of isolation, detachment, and emotional suppression. He is a man caught between two worlds geographically, culturally, and psychologically with no space to process his inner life.

This study aims to analyze repression and suppression as defense mechanisms in the character of Subhash, and to examine how these mechanisms influence his psychological condition and his relationships with other characters in the novel. Previous research has extensively studied the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis. Emir (2016) revealed that literary works function as a medium to depict mental states through fictional characters. Bishwas (2018) highlighted the reciprocal relationship between the two disciplines. Dudek (1977) viewed literature as a byproduct of the author's psychological condition and as a symbolic resolution to an internal crisis. Roetzel (2019) analyzed the effects of

information overload on decision-making and its psychological consequences on fictional subjects.

Previous research has also applied Freudian psychoanalysis specifically to literary works. Masyhur, Fithratullah, and Kasih (2023) examined how Bruce Wayne's repression manifests as a defense mechanism in *The Batman* (2022). Similarly, Farihah (2023) analyzed repression in Ahmad Fuadi's novel as a response to social and ideological pressure. Zahrah and Wijayanti (2023) examined psychological defense in Pünktchen and Anton. Gonibala and Mariana (2022) investigated repression in Joyce's *Dubliners*, Homans (1978) in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Nepali (2021) in John Donne's poetry, Ramirez (2021) in Dostoevsky's *Poor People*, and Abid et al. (2022) in *The Half Mother*.

The Lowland has been studied from various critical angles. Bhattacharya (2022) examines gender identity through the character of Gauri. Arianto and Ambalegin (2018) analyze patriarchal structures in the novel. Badjak, Majid, and Magfirah (2022) focus on postcolonial identity and hybridity, while Mishra (2024) discusses diaspora and national identity. Previous psychological studies of the novel have tended to treat repression as a secondary element rather than a primary analytical framework. Moreover, none of these studies have examined the interplay between suppression and repression as co-existing defense mechanisms in a single character.

This study fills that research gap by offering a focused psychoanalytic reading of Subhash's defensive psychology one grounded in Freud's theoretical

framework and attentive to the socio-cultural conditions that give rise to his inner conflict. Based on the previous studies above, it appears that although previous studies have explored the relationship between psychology and literature extensively, ranging from internal conflict analysis to diasporic identity issues in the novel *The Lowland*, the focus of these studies still tends to place Repression as a secondary theory or part of a cultural metaphor. There is still a research gap where the mechanism of Repression has not been studied comprehensively as the main focus in the novel. his study aims to fill this gap by specifically analyzing how repression and suppression operate together in *The Lowland*, revealing how both defense mechanisms shape Subhash's psychological life and his relationships with the characters around him.

B. Problems of the Study

Considering the background of the study above, the researcher formulates the Problems of the Study as follows:

1. How do repression and suppression, as defense mechanisms, manifest in the character of Subhash in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*?
2. How do repression and suppression, as defense mechanisms influence Subhash's behavior and his relationships with other characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*?

C. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the fields of literature and psychology, especially the discussion of Repression and suppression.

This study shows that Repression and suppression are a dynamic process that always develops over time starting from feelings. The focus of this study is from the Repression and suppression as a defense mechanism carried out by Subhash in the novel *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri which can make literary criticism expand not only showing Repression and suppression as a secondary psychology but as a source of internal conflict and ongoing emotional disturbance.

D. Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the analysis of the suppression and repression and suppression experienced by Subhash as the main character in the novel *The Lowland* (2013). The scope of this study is to analyze the narrative elements, the dialogue written in the novel. This study applies Freud's psychoanalytic theory to examine how Repression and suppression arise, operate, and influence the psychological state of the character as depicted in the text. This study does not examine Jhumpa Lahiri's personal biography, the historical background, or the socio-political context in which the novel was written.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Repression

Repression is an unconscious defense mechanism in which distressing thoughts, memories, or emotions are suppressed to reduce psychological distress.

2. Suppression

Suppression is a conscious defense mechanism in which an individual deliberately and intentionally avoids thinking about, confronting, or disclosing

distressing thoughts, emotions, or truths in order to manage psychological discomfort (Freud, 1915; McLeod, 2025). Unlike repression, suppression involves an element of conscious agency and intent.

3. Defense Mechanism

A defense mechanism is a psychological strategy employed by the ego to protect the individual from anxiety generated by internal impulses or external threats. Defense mechanisms operate by distorting, redirecting, or excluding threatening mental contents, thereby allowing the individual to maintain psychological stability (Freud, 1926; Vaillant, 1992).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explains the theoretical foundations used in this study: the Psychology of Literature, Psychoanalysis, the Freudian structural model of the mind (Id, Ego, and Superego), Defense Mechanisms, Repression, and Suppression.

A. Psychology of Literature

In literary studies, the psychology of literature serves as a bridge between psychological theory and the analysis of fictional narratives. According to Wellek and Warren (1956), literary works are not only considered art but also as psychological documents which expressions of experiences shaped by the emotional and psychological states of the characters depicted within them. They proposed that the relationship between psychology and literature operates through three main dimensions: the psychology of the author, the psychology of fictional characters, and the psychology of readers. Among the three, psychological analysis of characters is considered the most accessible and analytically productive, because fictional characters are deliberately constructed to resemble real people with coherent emotional and mental structures.

Literary works reveal how psychological realities are played out in human experience through the depiction of characters, their development, and the symbolic representations embedded in narrative. The texts of literary works provide insight into unconscious desires, emotional repression, and internal conflicts that may not be readily accessible through empirical psychological investigation. The

psychology of literature, therefore, offers a critical framework that allows researchers to interpret literary narratives as psychological documents, which reveal how human consciousness, emotions, and behavior are depicted in imaginative and fictional yet profoundly relevant ways.

Dar (2022) stated that the psychology of literature is not only concerned with literary works as artistic creations, but with what those works reveal about the inner life of human being emotions, thoughts, subconscious desires, and the psychological conflicts that constitute lived human experience. In this sense, a literary text is simultaneously an aesthetic object and a psychological document. Moghaddam (2004) further argues that psychology and literature are interrelated disciplines, both defined by narrative, interpretation, and language that construct meaning about human experience. Written narratives are culturally situated, making them in his formulation a form of written psychology. Santos, Santos, and Silva (2018) reinforce this view, arguing that literature plays a crucial role in psychological inquiry because narratives reflect emotional experiences and social interactions in a contextually nuanced manner that experimental research often cannot replicate.

B. Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is a psychological theory and clinical practice that explains human behavior through the interaction of conscious and unconscious mental processes. Freud (1917) defined psychoanalysis as both a method of treatment and a comprehensive theory of the mind that attempts to uncover the unconscious conflicts underlying neurotic symptoms, dreams, and everyday psychological

phenomena. He argued that psychological life is fundamentally shaped by repressed material, and that symptoms are meaningfully connected to unresolved early experiences, memories, and desires. From this perspective, psychoanalysis demonstrates that what occurs in the unconscious mind can profoundly shape an individual's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that making the study of unconscious processes essential to any comprehensive understanding of personality and psychological functioning.

Jung (1915) expanded the concept of psychoanalysis by emphasizing the dynamic movement of psychic energy between consciousness and the unconscious. Jung reframed it as a generalized psychological energy that drives mental activity and development. While Freud emphasized the role of repressed unconscious material in producing psychological symptoms, Jung stressed the importance of integration, the ongoing psychological work of reconciling the conscious and unconscious in order to achieve psychic wholeness. Honari (2018) explains that individual behavior is profoundly influenced by the psychological processes operating within the unconscious. Psychoanalysis provides the analytical tools to read these representations to identify repressed desires, unconscious conflicts, and defensive patterns that shape character behavior. Eagle (2007) adds that psychoanalysis, as a developing science, should remain open to self-reflection and integration with other fields, and should not confine itself solely to classical Freudian categories. This openness is reflected in the present study, which draws on both Freud's foundational structural theory and more recent theoretical articulations of the defense mechanisms of repression and suppression.

C. The Structural Model of the Mind: Id, Ego, and Superego

In order to understand how repression and suppression function as defense mechanisms, it is essential to first examine the structural model of the mind as Freud proposed in his later theoretical work. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud introduced a tripartite model of the psyche consisting of three agencies: the id, the ego, and the superego. This structural theory which supplements his earlier topographic model of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how psychological conflict arises, how the ego responds to that conflict, and why individuals develop characteristic patterns of psychological defense.

The structural model of the mind, as Freud (1923) proposed, consists of three interrelated agencies that together produce the psychological dynamics underlying defense mechanisms. The first is the id the most primitive and foundational part of the psyche, operating entirely within the unconscious and governed by the pleasure principle, which demands immediate gratification of instinctual needs and desires without regard for social norms, moral constraints, or the demands of reality.

Freud (1923) described the id as a reservoir of psychic energy fueled by two fundamental drives: Eros, the life drive encompassing sexuality, attachment, and self-preservation, and Thanatos, the death drive encompassing aggression and the compulsion toward dissolution. The id does not distinguish between fantasy and reality or past and present; it seeks only discharge and satisfaction, making it the raw psychological material that the ego must manage and contain. The ego, which

develops out of the id through early contact with external reality, operates according to the reality principle it acknowledges the demands of the external world and seeks to gratify the id's impulses in ways that are socially acceptable and realistic. The ego is the seat of rational cognition, decision-making, and voluntary action, and, critically for the purposes of this study, it is also the agency responsible for deploying defense mechanisms. When the ego perceives that acting on an id impulse would result in punishment, guilt, shame, or social rejection, it initiates a defensive response in order to protect itself from the anxiety generated by this conflict what Freud (1926) described as signal anxiety, a warning response that sets in motion the deployment of repression and suppression as defensive strategies. The third agency, the superego, represents the internalized voice of moral authority, social expectation, and cultural prohibition

Freud (1923) explained that the superego develops primarily through the resolution of the Oedipus complex and the internalization of parental figures, particularly the prohibitions and ideals associated with the father. Once established, the superego functions as an internal critic, generating feelings of guilt, shame, and inferiority whenever the individual's desires or behaviors conflict with its standards, operating both consciously in the form of explicit moral values and unconsciously in the form of internalized prohibitions. In societies with rigid social norms such as the conservative Bengali culture depicted in *The Lowland* the cultural superego becomes particularly powerful, demanding emotional restraint, family loyalty, and self-sacrifice, and generating chronic signal anxiety in individuals whose authentic desires conflict with these cultural mandates.

D. Defense Mechanisms

The concept of defense mechanisms is central to Freudian psychoanalysis and to the present study. Freud (1894) first introduced the term in his early clinical writings to describe the ego's strategies for managing internal conflict and protecting itself from anxiety. In its broadest sense, a defense mechanism is a psychological operation employed by the ego to protect the individual from the anxiety generated by conflicting internal impulses, painful memories, or threatening external realities. Defense mechanisms work by distorting, redirecting, or excluding threatening mental contents from conscious awareness, thereby allowing the individual to maintain psychological stability even in the face of unresolved internal conflict.

Anna Freud systematized and expanded her father's account of defense mechanisms in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936), arguing that the ego employs a range of protective strategies to manage anxiety arising from internal conflict. Rather than treating defense mechanisms as signs of pathology, Anna Freud emphasized that they are essential features of normal psychological functioning problems emerge not from their use per se, but from their overuse, rigidity, or the extent to which they prevent the individual from engaging with reality in a productive way. Within this broader taxonomy, repression and suppression occupy particularly significant positions because they represent structurally opposite poles of the defensive spectrum: repression operates entirely below the threshold of conscious awareness, while suppression involves a deliberate and intentional act of withholding at the level of consciousness. This

structural distinction between the two mechanisms is the central theoretical concern of the present study.

Defense mechanisms can be broadly categorized according to their relationship to conscious awareness. Unconscious defense mechanisms, of which repression is the prototype, operate automatically and below conscious awareness the individual has no knowledge that a defensive process is taking place. Conscious defense mechanisms, of which suppression is the primary example, involve deliberate and intentional psychological effort the individual is aware of the painful material but chooses not to engage with it. The behavioral consequences of both mechanisms extend beyond the individual's internal psychology and shape their patterns of interpersonal interaction, rendering the person emotionally unavailable, communicatively constrained, and progressively isolated from the possibility of genuine intimacy a pattern that defines Subhash's relational life across the entirety of *The Lowland*.

E. Repression

Repression is considered the most fundamental of all defense mechanisms in Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud (1915) defined repression as an unconscious process through which unacceptable thoughts, wishes, or memories are excluded from conscious awareness and retained in the unconscious mind. The key characteristic of repression that distinguishes it from all other defense mechanisms is its entirely involuntary and automatic nature: the individual does not choose to repress. Rather, the ego initiates repression automatically, without conscious deliberation, in response to a perceived internal threat. Repressed material is not

destroyed or neutralized it continues to exist and remain psychologically active in the unconscious, where it continues to influence the individual's emotions, behavior, and interpersonal relationships, often without their awareness.

Freud (1915) further distinguished between two forms of repression. The first is primal repression (*Urverdrängung*), which refers to the earliest form of repression in which certain instinctual impulses are denied access to consciousness from the very beginning of psychological development before they ever reach conscious awareness. These are the deepest repressions, typically rooted in the earliest experiences of childhood and in the initial formation of the ego and superego. The second form is repression proper (*Nachdrängung*), which refers to the active exclusion from consciousness of material that was once accessible but has become too threatening to tolerate consciously. Both forms can operate simultaneously in an individual's psychological life, with primal repressions providing the unconscious scaffolding on which later repressions are built.

F. Suppression

If repression is defined by its involuntary and unconscious character, suppression occupies the opposite pole of the defensive spectrum: it is a conscious, deliberate, and intentional act by which the ego actively withholds distressing thoughts, emotions, or truths from expression, even while remaining fully aware of their existence. Freud (1915) acknowledged this distinction in his metapsychological writings, identifying suppression as a process in which the individual retains access to the painful material at the level of consciousness but consciously chooses not to act upon it, speak about it, or allow it to generate

behavioral expression. The essential difference, then, between repression and suppression is not a difference in the content that is managed, but a difference in the level of psychological awareness at which the management takes place: repression operates below consciousness, while suppression operates within it.

Freud (1915) formulated suppression within the broader framework of his defense theory as a mechanism through which the ego exercises conscious control over threatening material. Rather than excluding the content from consciousness entirely as in repression, the ego in suppression acknowledges the distressing thought or emotion but withholds it from further psychological processing or external expression. This withholding is always purposeful: the individual suppresses because the conscious confrontation of the material is experienced as too threatening, too painful, or too socially unacceptable to be voiced. In this sense, suppression represents a higher-order form of psychological defense than repression, because it requires not only awareness of the threatening content but also the sustained exercise of conscious will to prevent that content from surfacing into behavior or communication.

Anna Freud (1936) further clarified the position of suppression within the broader taxonomy of defense mechanisms, distinguishing it from repression on the grounds that suppression involves a conscious ego operation rather than an unconscious one. She noted that while repression removes threatening material from consciousness before it can be acknowledged, suppression begins after conscious acknowledgment and consists of the active effort to prevent that acknowledged material from generating emotional, communicative, or behavioral

consequences. Unlike the individual who represses, who is genuinely unaware of the excluded content, the individual who suppresses carries the suppressed material as a conscious weight, and the sustained effort required to maintain suppression over time creates its own form of psychological strain.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

In this chapter, the researcher explains the research method and theoretical approach used in this study. This chapter consists of research design, data source, data collection, and data analysis.

A. Research Design

This study uses a literary criticism approach because it focuses on analyzing a literary work based on theories within the field of literary studies (Peck & Coyle, 1988). To conduct this literary analysis, the researcher applies Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly the concept of repression and suppression, as the main theoretical framework. This study aims to examine how repression and suppression operate in the character of Subhash in *The Lowland*.

B. Data Source

The data source of this study is Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*, published in 2013 by Bloomsbury. The researcher used the 324 pages e-book version of the novel. The data analyzed in this study consist of words, sentences, dialogues, and narrative descriptions relevant to the theme of repression and suppression. The researcher focuses on textual evidence related to Subhash's repression and suppression and analyzes them using literary criticism and Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

C. Data Collection

The data collection method used in this study is a note-taking technique. The researcher begins by reading *The Lowland* thoroughly from beginning to end to gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot, characters, and emotional dynamics. After that, the researcher identifies and underlines passages related to Subhash's emotional repression and suppression. The selected data are then recorded and categorized according to psychoanalytic concepts, particularly the processes of repression and suppression.

D. Data Analysis

The data analyzed consisted of excerpts taken from the novel. The researcher analyzed the data through several steps. First, the researcher carefully read the novel and identified textual evidence and dialogues that showed how repression and suppression manifested in Subhash's character, focusing on the domains in which each mechanism emerged: repression of grief, hatred for Udayan, and desire for Gauri, as well as the suppression of grief and the truth about Bela's origins. Next, the data were classified to determine how repression and suppression were each carried out by Subhash, distinguishing unconscious and automatic repression processes from conscious and deliberate suppression processes. The researcher then examined the relational effects produced by both mechanisms. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions based on the research objectives, discussing how repression and suppression together shape Subhash's psychological state and his relationships with other characters in *The Lowland*.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion based on the analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*. The analysis is organized into four sections corresponding to the two research questions. The first two sections address the first research question by examining how repression and suppression manifest as defense mechanisms in the character of Subhash. The third and fourth sections address the second research question by examining how these two defense mechanisms influence Subhash's relationships with other characters specifically Udayan, Gauri, and Bela. The analysis draws on Freudian psychoanalytic theory, particularly the structural model of the id, ego, and superego, and the theoretical distinction between repression as an unconscious, automatic defense and suppression as a conscious, intentional one.

The novel follows the story of two brothers, Subhash and Udayan, who grow up in Calcutta during the politically turbulent 1960s and 1970s. While Udayan becomes involved in the Naxalite movement and is ultimately killed by the state, Subhash obedient, quiet, and emotionally restrained emigrates to Rhode Island to pursue doctoral studies. After Udayan's death, Subhash returns to India and marries Gauri, Udayan's widow, bringing her and her unborn child Bela to America. This decision places Subhash in a psychologically impossible position: he must manage his grief over Udayan, his suppressed desire for Gauri, and the sustained concealment of Bela's true parentage all while navigating the superego pressures of family obligation and cultural expectation. It is within this context that both

repression and suppression emerge as the dominant psychological strategies through which Subhash survives his emotional life.

A. The Manifestation of Repression as a Defense Mechanism in Subhash's Character

Repression and suppression, as defense mechanisms, manifest in the character of Subhash. This section focuses on repression the unconscious, automatic process through which distressing emotions, memories, and desires are excluded from conscious awareness without the individual's knowledge or intention. As Freud (1915) argued, repression is not a deliberate act but an automatic response of the ego to signal anxiety the warning generated when an internal impulse or painful truth threatens to overwhelm the ego's capacity to cope. The defining characteristic of repression, which distinguishes it analytically from suppression, is that Subhash does not know he is repressing; he is unaware of the emotions driving his behavior, unaware of the patterns his psychological defenses produce, and unaware of the degree to which his unconscious conflicts shape his sense of self. In Subhash's character, repression manifests across three primary domains: the repression of sadness, the repression of hatred toward Udayan, and the repression of desire toward Gauri.

1. Repression of Sadness

The most pervasive and psychologically consequential form of repression in Subhash's character is the repression of sadness. Across the novel, Subhash confronts a series of profound losses the loss of his brother's presence, the erosion

of his own identity in the shadow of Udayan, and the progressive collapse of his sense of self yet in each case, the sadness produced by these losses does not surface as conscious grief. Instead, it is automatically excluded from awareness and manifests in indirect forms: emotional relief, behavioral passivity, and the gradual disintegration of his psychological coherence. The first and most telling instance of this repression appears in an early passage describing Subhash's response to Udayan's absence:

Though Subhash missed his brother's company, at times it came as a relief to sit down at the study table by himself. (p. 31)

The structure of this passage is psychologically revealing: Subhash acknowledges the sadness of missing Udayan, but the acknowledgment is immediately displaced by an experience of relief. This displacement is not a conscious reframing it is the ego's automatic substitution of a psychologically safer emotion (relief) for one that is threatening (grief). The sadness has not been processed or resolved; it has been repressed and replaced by a feeling that does not require confrontation. As Freud (1915) originally established, repressed material does not simply vanish but persists in the unconscious and continues to exert indirect pressure on conscious behavior a theoretical claim that Axmacher et al. (2010) demonstrated empirically, showing that repressed grief remains active in the unconscious and continues to influence behavior indirectly, transforming into self-doubt and an inability to act decisively a pattern that defines Subhash's psychological trajectory throughout the novel.

The unconscious dimension of this repression is most strikingly illustrated in a passage that describes a domestic scene of devastating psychological significance:

His mother called him Udayan instead of Subhash. And more than once he answered, not correcting her (p. 92)

This passage captures repression in its purest form: Subhash answers to his dead brother's name without consciously registering the profound psychological injury this represents. His failure to correct his mother is not a deliberate choice it is an automatic behavioral response generated by the unconscious repression of the grief and anger that the mother's confusion produces. He does not think: "I will not correct her." He simply does not correct her, because the ego has automatically excluded from consciousness the emotional content the grief of being invisible, of being erased in favor of a dead brother that would make correction feel urgent and necessary. This is the mechanism of primal repression that Freud (1915) described: the exclusion of threatening material before it can reach full conscious representation.

The long-term consequence of this sustained repression of sadness is the progressive collapse of Subhash's psychological identity, captured most explicitly in a passage from the later sections of the novel.

But he had lost that confidence, that intrepid sense of direction. He felt only aware now that he was alone, that he was over sixty years old, and that he did not know where he stood (p. 227)

This passage represents the cumulative effect of a lifetime of repressed sadness. Subhash has spent decades repressing his grief over Udayan, over his marriage, over his identity and the result is not psychological stability but ego collapse: a complete loss of confidence, direction, and self-knowledge. Freud (1926) argued that repression does not resolve emotional conflict but prevents it from being processed, allowing it to accumulate in the unconscious until the ego can no longer sustain the weight of what it has excluded. In Subhash's case, the repression of sadness across a lifetime produces precisely this outcome: rather than achieving stability, he ends in a state of profound psychological depletion, unable to locate himself in his own life.

2. Repression of hatred towards Udayan

The second domain in which repression manifests in Subhash's character is his repression of negative feelings toward Udayan specifically, the resentment, jealousy, and sense of inferiority that Udayan's dominance generates in him. These feelings belong to the id: they are authentic, instinctive responses to a relational dynamic in which Subhash is consistently overshadowed, undervalued, and psychologically diminished. However, because these feelings are morally unacceptable within the framework of the family superego which demands fraternal loyalty and prohibits negative emotions toward a brother, particularly one who is later martyred the ego represses them automatically, preventing them from reaching conscious awareness. The result is that Subhash does not know he harbors hatred toward Udayan; he experiences it only indirectly, as frustration, inadequacy, and existential anxiety.

And part of him felt defeated by Udayan all over again, for having found a girl like that. (p. 51)

This passage reveals the displacement that accompanies repressed hatred: because Subhash cannot consciously acknowledge his hostility toward Udayan, it resurfaces as a sense of defeat and inadequacy. The feeling of being "defeated" is not an emotion Subhash consciously chooses to experience it erupts involuntarily, without deliberation, as the return of repressed material in a psychologically safer form. As Freud (1917) argued, repressed emotions do not disappear but continue to exert pressure in the unconscious, seeking indirect expression. Here, the repressed hatred toward Udayan finds expression as self-directed inadequacy a form that is more acceptable to the ego because it does not violate the superego's prohibition on hostility toward a loved and martyred brother.

And yet sometimes he felt threatened, convinced that it was Udayan's inspiration; that Udayan's influence was greater. Gauri had left them, and by now Subhash trusted her to stay away. But there were times Subhash believed that Udayan would come back, claiming his place, claiming Bela from the grave as his own. (p. 211)

This fantasy of Udayan's return is among the most psychoanalytically significant passages in the novel. The belief that a dead man could return from the grave to reclaim his place is rationally impossible yet it is psychologically insistent and involuntary. Subhash does not choose to think this; the thought arrives unbidden, the product of unconscious material forcing its way into conscious experience. This is precisely what Freud (1919) theorized as the return of the repressed: the process by which repressed material, denied direct expression by the

ego's defenses, returns to consciousness in a transformed, unrecognizable, or distorted form.

Freud (1919) argued that repressed content is never permanently neutralized it retains its cathexis, its psychic charge, in the unconscious, and the pressure it exerts will eventually find an outlet, typically in disguised form so that the ego does not recognize it as the original repressed material. In Subhash's case, the hostility and rivalry toward Udayan that he has spent his entire life repressing resurfaces not as conscious hatred which the ego's defenses would immediately suppress but as paranoid anxiety about Udayan's posthumous dominance, a form sufficiently disguised that Subhash experiences it as external threat rather than internal conflict. Freud (1915) further established that this transformation of repressed aggression into anxiety is one of the most characteristic outcomes of failed repression: the repressed drive, unable to achieve direct discharge, converts its energy into anxiety, which then attaches itself to an object in this case, the phantom of Udayan that feels threatening rather than desired.

3. Repression of Desire toward Gauri

The third domain of repression in Subhash's character concerns his desire toward Gauri. This repression is psychologically complex because it involves a desire that is not only emotionally threatening but morally prohibited by the superego: Gauri was Udayan's wife, and Subhash's desire for her therefore constitutes a transgression against fraternal loyalty, familial honor, and the self-image he has constructed as a man of duty rather than desire. Because the desire

cannot be consciously acknowledged without generating overwhelming superego-produced guilt, the ego represses it automatically. The repressed desire does not disappear. it resurfaces involuntarily, most dramatically in the following passage:

He woke up, confused, still aroused. He was alone on the couch in the living room, Gauri asleep behind the bedroom door. (p. 134)

The confusion Subhash experiences upon waking is the defining marker of repression in this passage. He is physically aroused the desire is undeniably present in his body but he is mentally confused, unable to integrate the bodily experience with his conscious self-understanding. This disconnection between body and consciousness is precisely what Freud (1915) identified as the signature of repression: the desire has been excluded from consciousness but continues to operate in the body and the unconscious, surfacing during sleep when the ego's repressive mechanisms are temporarily relaxed. The spatial setting reinforces the psychological dynamic: Subhash is on the couch. Gauri is behind a closed bedroom door. The physical arrangement is the spatial literalization of the repression the desire exists, but is structurally contained by a barrier that Subhash has unconsciously erected and maintains without knowing why.

As the marriage deteriorates, the repression of desire progresses from involuntary eruption to behavioral withdrawal a more advanced and more deeply unconscious stage of the same process:

He no longer wanted to touch her in bed, he no longer brought up the possibility of a second child. (p. 166)

The phrase "no longer wanted" is psychoanalytically the most significant construction in this passage. Grammatically, it presents the situation as one of resolved desire as if the conflict no longer exists because the wanting itself has ceased. But Freud (1915) argued explicitly against this interpretation of apparent desirelessness: in his account of repression, the disappearance of a wish from conscious experience does not indicate that the wish has been resolved or extinguished, but that it has been successfully driven into the unconscious where it continues to exist with full intensity, deprived only of its access to consciousness and motor expression.

What appears to the conscious subject as the natural fading of desire is, in Freudian terms, the completion of repression the point at which the defense has become so thoroughly established that the repressed material no longer generates the surface disturbances, the intrusive thoughts, or the anxious eruptions that mark earlier and less complete stages of the process. this total absence of self-awareness about the defensive process, is precisely what Freud (1915) identified as the criterion that distinguishes repression from suppression: the suppressing individual always knows what they are setting aside, while the repressing individual does not. Subhash experiences his withdrawal as natural, inevitable, and self-generated, with no awareness that it is the behavioral outcome of an unconscious defensive process that has been operating, accumulating, and consolidating since the earliest stages of his marriage.

B. The Manifestation of Suppression as a Defense Mechanism in Subhash's Character

While repression operates below the threshold of Subhash's conscious awareness, suppression operates at the level of deliberate, intentional choice. As Freud (1915) distinguished, suppression involves the conscious and purposeful decision to withhold, avoid, or conceal distressing material the individual is aware of what they are setting aside and makes a calculated decision not to engage with it. The defining criterion for identifying suppression in the novel's data is evidence of conscious awareness combined with deliberate non-disclosure: passages in which Subhash demonstrably knows something and demonstrably chooses not to act on or communicate that knowledge. In Subhash's character, suppression manifests primarily in two domains: the suppression of sadness and the suppression of the truth about Bela's parentage, which is the most consequential and most sustained act of suppression in the novel.

1. Suppression of Sadness

These moments are identifiable by the explicit presence of conscious self-awareness in the narrative. The following passage captures such a moment, in which Subhash is acutely aware of his emotional state but suppresses it through deliberate internal management:

He felt cast aside, indicted along with Gauri. He was afraid to exert his authority, his confidence as a father shaken now that he was alone. (p. 201)

Subhash knows exactly what he is feeling: the sadness of being cast aside, the fear of asserting himself as a father. Yet he does not act on these feelings, does not express them to Bela, and does not seek any form of resolution or confrontation. Freud (1915) identified this precise structure as the defining operation of suppression: unlike repression, in which the ego automatically excludes threatening material before it can be consciously registered, suppression begins after conscious recognition has already occurred. The ego, perceiving that the expression of the painful material would generate consequences too threatening to manage in Subhash's case, the collapse of his already fragile authority as a father initiates a deliberate act of containment, preventing the conscious feeling from achieving behavioral or communicative expression.

What Subhash experiences subjectively as restraint or self-control is, in Freudian terms, the conscious deployment of the superego's regulatory function against the ego's authentic emotional state. McLeod (2025) builds on this Freudian foundation in describing suppression as the individual's deliberate calculation that engagement with the painful material would be too costly: Subhash knows what he wants to do and chooses not to do it, managing his emotional response internally rather than allowing it external expression, precisely because the superego's demands for restraint and self-sacrifice override the ego's need for authentic expression.

He remembered first learning that Udayan had married Gauri, and feeling replaced by her. He felt replaced now, a second time. (p. 204)

This passage demonstrates an unusually high degree of conscious self-awareness: Subhash explicitly connects his present grief to a prior wound, consciously recognizing a pattern of emotional displacement that has recurred across his life. The act of remembering and comparing "a second time" is a deliberate cognitive process, not an unconscious one. Yet this conscious recognition does not translate into action or expression. Subhash suppresses the grief by acknowledging it privately and then containing it. Freud (1915) described this operation as the ego's management of preconscious material content that is available to consciousness but deliberately prevented from achieving discharge or external expression.

The critical distinction from repression is that the material is not excluded from consciousness but held within it, acknowledged but not acted upon. This is precisely what occurs in this passage: Subhash consciously recognizes the pattern of his emotional displacement, names it with unusual precision, and then suppresses the grief it generates rather than allowing it to surface as communication or action. Vaillant (1992), extending Freud's foundational account, characterized this as the conscious negotiation of painful reality, in which the individual retains awareness of what they are avoiding rather than excluding it from consciousness.

2. Suppression of the Truth about Bela's Parentage

The most consequential and most analytically clear form of suppression in Subhash's character is his sustained, deliberate concealment of the truth about Bela's biological parentage. This suppression is the clearest example in the novel of what

distinguishes suppression from repression: Subhash is fully, consciously aware of the truth, is aware that Bela has a right to know it, and makes an ongoing, deliberate choice to withhold it. The psychological cost of this sustained suppression is registered with unusual directness in the novel:

Each night, extracting himself from her, for a moment his heart stopped, wondering what she would say, the day she learned the truth about him (p. 148)

The phrase "each night" establishes the chronic and habitual dimension of this suppression: this is not a one-time decision but a nightly repetition of the same deliberate act of withholding. The physiological detail "his heart stopped" registers the anxiety that the suppression generates. As Freud (1915) argued, suppression does not neutralize the psychological cost of the withheld material; rather, the individual remains consciously aware of the gap between what they know and what they communicate, and this gap produces chronic tension. Subhash does not repress his awareness of the truth; he is acutely conscious of it every night. What he suppresses is the act of disclosure a conscious, ongoing, and anxiety-generating choice.

He'd never told her that Udayan was dead. (p. 149)

The brevity and directness of this sentence makes it one of the most analytically unambiguous instances of suppression in the novel. The grammatical construction "he'd never told her" This indicates an ongoing, sustained act of deliberate non-disclosure. This is not forgetting, not unconscious avoidance, but a conscious and consistently maintained choice to withhold a fundamental truth from

the person most affected by it. Freud (1915), whose framework Billig (1999) extended argued that suppression, when normalized over time through repeated practice, becomes a structural feature of the individual's relational identity something maintained not because it is believed to be right, but because the ego has become psychologically dependent on the stability that the concealment provides.

He'd felt that she would have understood. But out of loyalty to Bela he'd said nothing. (p. 251)

The rationalization embedded in this passage "out of loyalty to Bela" is the final and most sophisticated form of suppression in the novel. Subhash consciously transforms his act of psychological self-protection into a moral narrative of care: the suppression is reframed as loyalty, and loyalty is understood as a virtue rather than a defense. This is what Freud (1915), whose framework Billig (1999) extended described as the normalization of suppression the process by which sustained deliberate avoidance becomes morally justified and socially legitimate. Yet the rationalization does not resolve the underlying conflict; it reinforces the suppression by providing an excuse that allows Subhash to continue withholding the truth without confronting its moral cost. The suppression is maintained, the asymmetry of knowledge persists, and its eventual collapse produces the relational rupture that the novel presents as both inevitable and devastating.

C. The Effects of Repression and Suppression on Subhash's Relationships with Other Characters

1. Repression and Its Effect on Subhash's Relationship with Udayan

The relationship between Subhash and Udayan serves as the earliest and most fundamental site of Subhash's repression. The consequence of repressing his resentment and rivalry toward Udayan is not merely the absence of open conflict; rather, it gradually undermines Subhash's ability to develop a coherent and independent sense of self. Because he never consciously acknowledges his authentic emotional responses to Udayan's dominance, he is unable to fully individuate from his brother and establish an identity separate from him.

He was sick of the fear that always rose up in him: that he would cease to exist, and that he and Udayan would cease to be brothers, were Subhash to resist him. (p. 34)

The involuntary nature of this fear "the fear that always rose up in him," unbidden, uncontrolled, and automatic is the precise hallmark of what Freud (1926) theorized as signal anxiety (Angstsignal): a specific form of anxiety generated not by an external threat but by the ego itself, as an anticipatory warning that a repressed impulse is approaching the threshold of conscious expression. Freud (1926) argued in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* that the ego, having learned through prior experience that the emergence of certain impulses generates unbearable psychic consequences, develops the capacity to produce a small, anticipatory dose of anxiety whenever those impulses threaten to surface a signal that automatically

triggers the reinstatement of repression before the threatening material can achieve conscious expression.

The repression is never a deliberate choice but an automatic reflex, which is why Subhash experiences it not as self-censorship but as fear as something that happens to him rather than something he does. Freud (1923) additionally situated this dynamic within his account of the superego's role in psychological development: the fear of ceasing to exist as a brother were he to resist Udayan reflects the internalization of a fraternal law that the superego has made absolute, transforming what is in reality a relational choice into an existential impossibility. The superego, Freud (1923) argued in *The Ego and the Id*, does not merely prohibit; it annihilates it converts the prohibited impulse into a threat to the self's very existence, which is precisely the psychological grammar of Subhash's fear: resistance does not feel dangerous, it feels like non-existence. The relational consequence is the total elimination of Subhash's agency within the fraternal relationship: he cannot resist Udayan, cannot assert himself, cannot individuate not because he lacks the capacity, but because the unconscious repression that Freud (1926) described, reinforced by the superego that Freud (1923) theorized, has rendered these relational acts psychologically equivalent to self-destruction.

2. Repression and Its Effect on Subhash's Relationship with Gauri

The relational consequences of repression in Subhash's relationship with Gauri manifest primarily as emotional unavailability and the unconscious production of relational distance. Because Subhash has repressed his desire for Gauri

automatically excluding it from consciousness to manage the guilt and moral anxiety it generates that he is unable to engage with her as an authentic emotional subject. The repression expresses itself relationally as silence, physical separation, and the unconscious withdrawal from intimacy:

An hour often passed without their speaking. The shared quiet fell over them, binding them more tightly than any conversation could. (p. 93)

The silence between Subhash and Gauri is not a conscious strategy it is the relational expression of unconscious repression. Neither of them chooses the silence; it "falls over them," as the narrative describes, with the involuntary quality of something imposed from outside. Yet it is produced from within from the accumulated unconscious repressions that have made authentic emotional communication between them impossible. The narrative's framing of this silence as something that "binds" them is deeply ironic: what appears to create relational closeness is in fact the shared management of everything that cannot be said, the relational architecture of mutual repression. Freud (1917) identified precisely this dynamic when he argued that repressed material seeks expression in all available channels and when direct emotional expression is blocked by repression, silence itself becomes the primary medium of relational communication.

Again she was alone with her in-laws. Again they lived with her without speaking to her, already acting as if she were not there. (p. 122)

This passage reveals how the repressive relational culture of Subhash's family of origin extends into and reproduces itself within his own household. Freud (1923) argued in his account of the superego's formation that the psychological

structures internalized in early family life do not remain confined to the individual's internal world but are reproduced in the relational patterns the individual subsequently creates the family becomes, in Freudian terms, the first and most formative site of ego and superego development, and its organizing dynamics are carried forward into every subsequent relational context.

Freud (1915) distinguished suppression from repression on precisely this ground: suppression involves the conscious ego's active decision to withhold known material from expression, which means that the suppressing individual is always aware of the gap between what they know and what they communicate a gap that repression, by contrast, does not produce, because the repressing individual genuinely does not know what they are concealing. Billig (1999) argued that this deliberate concealment produces a relational double-bind: the suppressing individual withholds authentic expression in order to protect the relationship, yet the very act of withholding progressively erodes the intimacy they are attempting to preserve a paradox that Freud (1926) had already identified at the structural level when he noted that suppression, unlike repression, keeps the suppressing individual perpetually conscious of their own inauthenticity, generating a guilt that compounds the psychological cost of the defense and accelerates the relational deterioration it was designed to prevent.

3. Suppression and Its Effect on Subhash's Relationship with Gauri

If repression damages Subhash's relationship with Gauri through unconscious emotional withdrawal, suppression operates through a structurally

different and in certain respects more damaging mechanism: the deliberate, conscious withholding of authentic communication. Unlike repression, which excludes material from consciousness before it can be acknowledged, suppression involves a fully aware subject who recognizes what they are concealing and makes a calculated decision to go on concealing it. In Subhash's relationship with Gauri, this suppression manifests in two specific and interconnected forms: the suppression of his emotional vulnerability in response to her intellectual ambition, and the suppression of fundamental relational truths that he recognizes but refuses to voice. As Vaillant (1992) argued, suppression in intimate relationships does not neutralize the withheld material but allows it to accumulate as unspoken pressure, producing a progressive erosion of the relational intimacy it ostensibly seeks to protect. The following passage captures the first and most pervasive form of this suppression:

He understood, or thought he did. She had grown up with books instead of people. He did not begrudge her this. He told himself he did not mind." (p. 103)

Freud (1915) identified as the mechanism of suppression: the ego does not exclude the material automatically, as in repression, but actively works to prevent it from generating behavioral or communicative expression. The relational consequence is that Gauri never receives Subhash's authentic emotional response to her withdrawal. He suppresses the hurt, presents a surface of understanding, and the suppression widens the relational gap it was designed to close. The second and more structurally damaging form of suppression in Subhash's relationship with Gauri concerns his conscious decision not to disclose his awareness of her ongoing

emotional inaccessibility. Subhash knows that Gauri has never fully arrived in the marriage emotionally or relationally, and he knows that this knowledge remains unspoken between them.

4. Suppression and Its Effect on Subhash's Relationship with Bela

Subhash's relationship with Bela is the most structurally compromised relationship in the novel precisely because it is built entirely on the suppression of a fundamental truth. From the moment of Bela's birth, her relationship with Subhash is defined by an asymmetry of knowledge that Subhash consciously creates and maintains: he knows she is not his biological daughter; she does not. Every act of paternal care is performed within this suppressed framework. The surface of the relationship, however, presents a picture of devoted fatherhood:

"One Saturday, Subhash took her shopping... He bought her a coat, a pair of boots. Thick socks, a woolen scarf, a cap and gloves." (p. 123)

The meticulous enumeration of purchased items coat, boots, socks, scarf, cap, gloves suggests an almost anxious thoroughness in the provision of material care that goes beyond ordinary parental attentiveness. Freud (1926) theorized this behavioral pattern within his account of the ego's secondary defensive operations: when suppression prevents the direct expression or resolution of a psychic conflict, the ego frequently generates substitute behaviors acts that discharge some portion of the accumulated tension without confronting its source. the ego's attempt to bind anxiety through action, producing behaviors that are structurally excessive relative to their apparent occasion precisely because they are carrying a psychic load that extends beyond what is visible on the surface. The excessive thoroughness of

Subhash's shopping the fact that he does not simply buy a coat but enumerates every possible protection against the cold is the behavioral signature of this dynamic: the suppressed guilt and the suppressed truth about Bela's parentage cannot be discharged through honest disclosure, and so they find partial outlet in the compulsive completeness of material provision. Building on Freud's account, Vaillant (1992) observed that sustained suppression in intimate relationships frequently generates precisely these substitute behaviors acts of care, provision, or protection that function as unconscious reparation for the withheld truth, allowing the suppressing individual to maintain a subjective sense of moral adequacy without ever confronting the source of their guilt. Subhash cannot give Bela her identity, so he gives her a coat, a pair of boots, thick socks, a woolen scarf, a cap and gloves the behavioral excess measuring, in inverse proportion, the depth of what is being withheld.

The relational anxiety produced by maintaining this suppression with Bela is captured with devastating precision in the following passage:

Each night, extracting himself from her, for a moment his heart stopped, wondering what she would say, the day she learned the truth about him." (p. 148)

The intimacy of the bedtime ritual the nightly act of "extracting himself from her" becomes the site of Subhash's most acute relational anxiety. Each moment of genuine closeness with Bela amplifies the suppression's cost, because it intensifies his awareness of the gap between the relationship as lived and the relationship as it would be if the truth were known. This is the relational paradox

that Freud (1915), whose framework Billig (1999) extended identified: the closer the relationship appears on the surface, the more psychologically costly the suppression becomes, because the asymmetry of knowledge must be maintained against an ever-increasing pressure of genuine intimacy.

"He'd felt that she would have understood. But out of loyalty to Bela he'd said nothing." (Lahiri, 2013, p. 251)

The final passage in the dataset reveals the ultimate form of relational suppression: the rationalization of concealment as care. Subhash knows that Bela would have understood he believes disclosure was survivable yet he continues to suppress the truth "out of loyalty." This rationalization represents the most sophisticated and most destructive form of suppression's relational effect: it transforms the withholding of truth into an act of love, making the suppression not only psychologically sustainable but morally self-justifying. As Freud (1915) proposed that suppression, as a consciously motivated defense, leaves the suppressed material available to consciousness but prevents it from achieving expression or discharge. Vaillant (1992) noted that this is the characteristic limitation of suppression as a defense mechanism: it preserves the appearance of mature, responsible engagement with reality while systematically preventing the authentic relational engagement that genuine maturity requires. The relationship with Bela is maintained in the form of devoted fatherhood, while its substance truth, identity, authentic knowledge of one another has been suppressed out of existence.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This chapter contains the conclusions of the thesis research which contains a description of the results of the analysis of the problems of study with data from the novel *The Lowland* and contains the researcher's suggestions for future research.

A. Conclusion

This study finds that both repression and suppression operate as significant defense mechanisms in the character of Subhash in *The Lowland*. Repression manifests through the unconscious exclusion of painful emotions and desires, particularly the repression of sadness, hatred toward Udayan, and desire toward Gauri. These emotions are not consciously recognized by Subhash but continue to influence his psychological condition, resulting in identity confusion, feelings of inferiority, emotional insecurity, and persistent inner conflict. In contrast, suppression appears as a conscious and deliberate strategy through which Subhash intentionally withholds or avoids distressing emotions and truths, especially his sadness and the truth regarding Bela's biological parentage.

The study also finds that repression and suppression significantly influence Subhash's behavior and his relationships with other characters. Repression shapes his relationship with Udayan by reinforcing dependence, unresolved rivalry, and fear of asserting himself, while in his relationship with Gauri it contributes to emotional distance and the inability to establish genuine intimacy. Suppression, on the other hand, leads Subhash to consciously avoid emotional confrontation and

maintain silence, particularly in his marriage with Gauri and in his role as Bela's father. His deliberate concealment of Bela's true identity creates a relationship built on secrecy, producing ongoing psychological tension despite his sincere care and devotion. Overall, the findings demonstrate that repression and suppression function as protective mechanisms but also generate long-term emotional consequences that affect both Subhash's inner life and his interpersonal relationships throughout the novel.

B. Suggestion

This study is limited to the analysis of repression and suppression as defense mechanisms experienced by the main character, Subhash, in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to explore the novel from different psychological perspectives or to investigate other defense mechanisms, such as displacement, denial, projection, or sublimation, in order to provide a broader understanding of the characters' psychological development. It is also expected that this research will contribute to the development of psychoanalytic literary criticism by demonstrating that repression and suppression are not merely theoretical concepts but meaningful analytical tools for understanding how hidden emotions, unresolved conflicts, and deliberate concealment shape both individual behavior and interpersonal relationships in literary works.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



Siti Sundari was born in Tuban on December 1, 2004. She graduated from KMI ASSALAM in 2022. During her studies at KMI, she actively participated as the Chair of LJA (Literacy Journalism of ASSALAM) and a Rover Scout Leader. She began her higher education in 2022 in the English Literature Department of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and completed it in 2026. During her studies, she joined the English Literature Students Association as a member of the linguistics and literature in 2023. And she is the member of the research and strategy division of the Faculty of Humanities Student Executive Board in 2025.