

BOOK REVIEW

A wrong choice and its aftermath

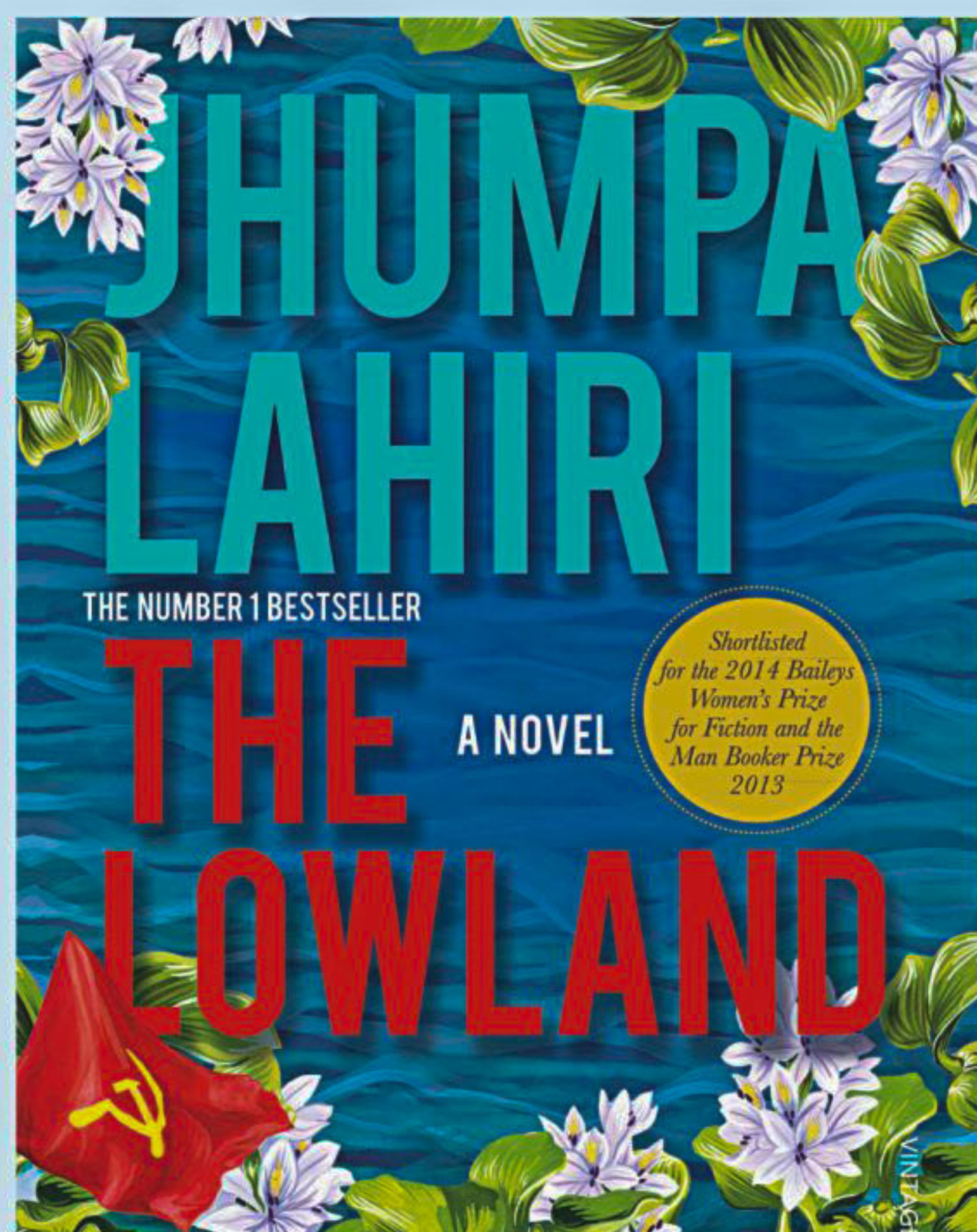
SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

I picked up this book on a whim. Maybe it was the easy-to-hold feel of it. Or maybe it was the golden sticker adorning the names of the prizes it has amassed that floated on the water hyacinth covered pond. Whatever the reason, it sure didn't disappointed me.

It is Calcutta in the 1960s. Subhash and Udayan -- two brothers, fifteen months apart -- have separate traits as opposed to the fact that they are often seen glued together. They play in the nearby ponds of their home. They fix radios and speak in code language. They play cricket together, taking the lowland as a shortcut to the field. The whole neighbourhood knows how inseparable they are. It is only after the development of their individualities and the passion of their own beliefs that things start to tumble.

Subhash, being the guardian figure between the two, can't convince Udayan to see the holes in the ideology he believes in. Being arrogant and impulsive, Udayan doesn't pay heed to Subhash's words. He is completely pulled in to the Naxalite movement. He believes that only a violent revolution can positively impact the lives of the poor and eliminate the roots of injustice against them.

Subhash leaves for the States after graduation to study oceanography while Udayan stays back with his parents. According to him, he is fighting for the right thing and not betraying his roots for the "American dream" like his brother. Subhash's picture of their homeland is violent, which keeps prodding him even



far away from its reach. After receiving a letter from his parents and getting to know of Udayan's death, he visits Calcutta and finds Udayan's widowed wife staying with his parents. Udayan was killed by the police for his passionate involvement with the movement, in

the very lowland that they used to take as a shortcut in childhood. Subhash's visit adds a completely new tone to this novel and lessens the chapters about politics and the movement, sometimes settling into a whole new environment in Rhode Island and sometimes into a revolt-free Calcutta.

Jhumpa Lahiri describes the environment where her characters are in as an attempt to make the reader exist, and she succeeds. Her use of language is simple. It is the loudness of that simplicity that unwinds the story smoothly like a carpet that flaunts time, countries, unrests, generations, revelations, and the burned remains of broken ties. Everything is connected to one another. The history visits when necessary. Calcutta hovers over Rhode Island. It's a shadow that never fades into the background. Despite Udayan's death, she has successfully managed to hold his presence. I felt like a part of him existed in the corners of every scene especially in his wife's presence, as though she was a remnant of Udayan. So there wasn't any sort of emptiness that stemmed from the absence of one crucial character. It's the best thing about time traveling in novels -- even though some characters die, they revisit.

During the progression, there is this urge to know what happens next. There is this need to time travel. There is also this anticipation to know how the broken scaffoldings reassemble. She leaves the readers hanging and throws them off just when the time is right. This novel has the charm to sediment one's reaction, which takes time to dissolve completely.

Types of bibliophiles

MASHIYAT IQBAL

Books make good friends. They're a fulfilling concoction that can, for some, be just as effective as any headache tablets. You'll find them there on your grey days, in times of need when stress leaves the mind walking in circles, and especially when you need a good company to sit back and relax with. Bookworms have their own ways of making room for books in busy schedules, cramming in time to pick up their to-read lists even in moments of utter chaos. Here are some of the archetypes of avid readers that we've all encountered in one way or another:

The Overinvested: These are the fans who are in a committed relationship with their books. If you're their friend, you will have to survive through their incessant talking, crying and ranting about every book they had ever read till date. God forbid if any contrasting opinions are pointed out to them though, they are always ready to debate until the skin burns off their tongues.

The Aesthete: They are the artists at heart. They like to picture themselves in their minds holding a book with an attractive cover, in a homely café, in the middle of a downpour. You'll often find their faces plastered to the pages of new



books, sniffing and daydreaming away. They have their own handpicked moods for reading and tend to be picky with aesthetical backgrounds whenever they do feel like sitting down with a book.

The Hobbyist: Bookshelves are their top priority. They are self-proclaimed

serial readers who like to collect books in abundance. They spend their time making space for new books and trying to balance their budget with sudden book shopping sprees. But they spend most of their time getting lost in the paper jungle that is their collection.

The Globetrotter: They equate traveling with reading. Long journeys are always welcomed with open arms. They make themselves at home under a blanket and aim for breaking their previous record of finishing books while traveling. For them, the highlight of their mini world tours is the long road trips or cruises that merely help to elevate their reading experience.

The Critic: These readers have their own hierarchy, categorising people according to their book preferences. They generally have a superior notion based on their choice of books and are likely to severely judge others on their reading taste. You will see them typing away negative reviews in their free time on contemporary releases more than you'll see them rave about a recent read. They run most of the local book clubs with an air of luxury and consider it their sacred duty to impart knowledge about the standard of books.

Different people approach the habit of reading in different ways. Some like to stick to a specific genre, some are allergic to spoilers while some tend to only go for books with high rated reviews. No matter which one you are, having a book by your side, in any shape or form, will always work as well as laughter to brighten up the day.