

Unveiling the Traumas of Intercultural Marriage in Sunetra Gupta's 'Memories of Rain'

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Abstract:

Traumas of Marriage in Sunetra Gupta's Memories of Rain is a research paper exploring the reality of short lived intercultural marriages. Often it is the woman who becomes the victim. The conditions of alienation, despair, and the depression accompany her wherever she goes. The character Moni is an example of how women go through traumatic experience after the marriage, away from their homeland. Physically she is in London but, emotionally and psychologically she remains in Calcutta unable to reside in two countries. She experiences prejudice and betrayal from her husband Antony. Kate Millet says, because of the social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are completely different. Gender has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper term for sex are "male" and "female, the corresponding terms for gender are "masculine" and "feminine." Moni is a victim of hegemonic masculinity. The infidelity of her English husband Antony is unbearable for her. She realizes that he has cheated her but she refuses to be unhappy and disappointed. She walks out of his life with dignity. She makes a wise choice to leave him with her child, as an empowered woman free from any type of ill feelings. Memory creates a healing space for Moni where nostalgia for her dear Calcutta and compassion towards humanity becomes possible.

Key Words: Marriage, patriarchy, diaspora, betrayal, racial discrimination, memories, resistance, gender roles, stream of consciousness, trauma, subaltern, male domination, identity crises, emancipation, service.

Introduction:

'Oh East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.' So said Kipling the Romantic poet, who placed the gate of the Orient at the frontier of India ... (27 Sep.1992). According to Susha Guppy intercultural marriages between people of different faiths, races, ethnicities, and geographic regions have become common. Still, such marriages have complications and such couples see high divorce rates, so the relationships need special focus. *When the Twain met: 'Memories of Rain'* by Sunetra Gupta. Book Review, Orion, 1992. independent.co.uk/voices/book-review-when-the-twain-met-memories-of-rain-sunetra-gupta-orion-1399-1554201.html. Happy marriages between Indians and Europeans often took place. But in today's multi-racial Britain, mixed marriages are quite often a disaster. Most of the marriages end in divorce. Sunetra Gupta's dazzling novel, '*Memories of Rain,*' is a reflection on the East West divide through the marriage of a beautiful Bengali girl Moni with Antony an Englishman. Antony had entered Moni's life during a torrential rain storm and flood when her brother had brought him into

their home ... he had gazed upon the rain-swollen curve of her lips, ... oh, if he could only draw his lips through the velvet valley of her hair, his experience of the tropics would be complete ... (124). She is happy that her literary dreamscape becomes her real home and after her marriage to Antony, she accepts it with awed reverence.

Kate Millet speaks about the concept of romantic love as a means of emotional manipulation which the male is free to exploit (37). *Theory of Sexual Politics*. Doubleday, Granada, 1968. Second wave feminism began by arguing that romance is a cultural tool of male power which conceals a false eroticism. Shulamith Firestone claims that romance identifies women as love objects, henceforth contributes to our devaluation. Juliet Mitchell argues that psychoanalytically, eros and the death drive are intertwined in romantic love which represents the triumph of death over life. Humm, Maggir. *The dictionary of Feminist theory*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003. For Antony the name Moni implies a sexual object than a blossoming woman. The image of Moni is an image designed and fashioned by him to suit his needs. Anthony is the colonizer, seeing in Moni what is lacking in himself. He loved her physical appearance and not the real woman with all her beautiful qualities. His needs arise from his fear of the other, Moni. The male Antony is the human norm, the subject and referent is the female Moni. She is "other" or alien for him. Antony's attitude towards Moni is shaped by the patriarchal assumption that women's biological differences set her apart. Good Reads review narrates: "Ten years later, their love has gently receded like the flood water. For a while all goes well, but gradually 'the intoxication of their tropical lust wears off', and his passion for her turns into mere affection. goodreads.com/book/show/278358.Memories_of_Rain.

In his patriarchal style, he had come to equate the woman and the city, both neutral commodities, to be controlled, explored, and possessed as a "tender tropical memory" (161). According to Kamla Bhasin, under patriarchy, masculinity is to femininity what upper castes are to lower castes in a cast system. One rules, the other is ruled, one is superior, the other is inferior. *Exploring Masculinity*. Woman unlimited, New Delhi, 2004. Hegemonic masculinity controls and demands submission. Antony is in command and he controls. He justifies his male superiority and domination and sees Moni as an object under his possession and he as the subject. This attitude of Antony would not contribute towards a successful married life. The quality of equality that should exist in marriage is absent and she feels like a subaltern and inferior to the situation created by Anthony. Veena Majumdar rightly mentions that "Man and Woman are the two wheels of the cart. If a cart is to run well its wheels must be equal (70). Saikia, Jyoti Prasad. *Gender Themes and issues*. Concept, New Delhi, 2017.

Through a series of flashbacks and reflections Moni reveals the contrast between her native India and her adopted country. She faces the conflict arising from the cultural clash of European individualism and Indian communitarianism. She has to construct herself and invent herself without a model in the new

place. She is a displaced person and dislocated in her new ambient. She is emotionally attached to Antony and at the same time live with the nostalgia for her native place. According to Bijay Kumar Das, she is a non-resident native of her home land and resident alien in her current place of living. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*. Atlantic, New Delhi, 2014. Moni has a simple definition of diaspora: “wrestling to reconcile her existence within the city of Calcutta with her life in London” (197). Fahmida Rahman says, caught in the clash of two cultures, their marriage becomes mired in the pain of infidelity and non-communication. She encounters prejudices, sexism, and betrayal by her husband who had been captivated once, by her beauty, and virginal purity. His disrespect for her shocks her. *A mother with “tired blistered nipples”*: Sunetra Gupta’s *Calcutta in Memories of Rain and Other Novels*. scribd.com/document/300280323/09-chapter-3pdf. Throughout, Moni expresses her anguished passion and dark thoughts by singing the poems of Tagore, India’s poetic Mahatma, in Bengali, a language Antony never understands. Her songs mourn their lost love and the loveless life they lived. This research paper follows the argument of Gupta, that the geographical displacement becomes metonymic of her emotional and moral sufferings. She addresses the issue of diasporas who are transplanted. Their relationship is all too common in marriages without any geographical boundaries.

The England to which she comes as the wife of Antony does not match the England of her literary imagination. There is a wide gulf between the knowledge she acquired in her literary classes and what she is experiencing, the reality and imagination are two different things. In the alien country, she adapts, internalizes the form, taste, and the habits of her husband. It was inimical for her to mobilize through different stages of her life encountering the two cultures of natal and the adopted country. Moni’s new found life is made adverse by her husband Antony besides the cultural difficulties she encounters. She is unable to express herself in accurate English or to translate the songs of Tagore she intones, into English for Antony. There is a loss of emotional connect between them which is signified through language. Her silence was her way of resistance just like the African women who resisted the colonizers through their limbo dance (85). amazon.in/Contemporary-Postcolonial-Theory-Padmini-Mongia/dp/0340652888.

In London she finds a temporary job in a library, and she takes up an administrative job. Though she goes to work, her pay is lesser than that of Antony. She makes payments with his credit card because her salary is limited. Among the employed women’s average wage, says Kate Millet, represent only half of the average income enjoyed by men (40). Women’s independence in economic life, is viewed with distrust, and prescriptive agencies of all kinds such as religion, psychology, advertisement, etc. continuously admonish, or even inveigh against the employment of middle class women, particularly mothers (41). *Theory of Sexual Politics*. Doubleday, Granada, 1968. Loneliness accompanies her and she becomes an insider outsider in her own home. He allowed her to visit her native place only once after ten years although he was aware of the nostalgia she had for her dear Calcutta. He has seen her keeping

the Indian time on her watch and sensed her attachment to her roots like any other diasporas. Although she is courageous enough to face all the diasporic situations, she cannot bear his manner of kindness and indifference.

Flashback of an endless stream of moods, memories, feelings, and thoughts highlight more changes in the couple's relationship and Anthony's ongoing affair with Anna, a tall attractive English blonde, who is more 'attuned to him intellectually'. He had longed for success, more than the love of a woman (83). Anthony's first love was success, creativity, and analytical power (83). Moni is reluctant to speak directly to her promiscuous husband about her pain. She remembers Anthony's love and respect for her innocence and simplicity. She recalls his possessiveness, for he had never allowed her to watch 'trashy commercial films, and gradually his passion for her turns into mere affection. After a few inconsequential affairs, he falls in love with Anna betraying their marital life. Anna finally seems to him intellectually adequate to gauge his thirst. He justifies his adultery with her saying that though he is passionate about Anna, at the same time he has a tender feeling towards her. He betrays her with his infidelity and denies her the respect and love she deserves.

"It was Anna who had lead him back into the world to which he belonged, taught him to breath richly, again, of life ... he had found his way, through her, into the circles to which he had always aspired..." (83). The novel depicts the thoughts and emotions of Moni three days prior to the sixth birthday of their daughter. Moni has decided to return to India, taking her daughter with her, on the day of the girl's birthday party, preparing a fitting surprise for Anthony. Flashbacks highlight the changes in the couple's relationship and Anthony's ongoing affair with Anna. Moni is intelligent but she is ignored by Anthony with the emergence of Anna in his life and betrays her. His comment on her brother's communist ideology, and Moni as intellectually inadequate and his rejection of Calcutta, pierces through her heart. His complain about her stifling his intellectual life and creativity shocks her. She finds it very difficult to tolerate his discrimination.

Moni contemplates killing the child in order to avenge his pain and gives her wedding Sari to Anna for wearing at her child's birthday party knowing well that she is going to take the child back home with her. She hopes Anna would suffer the child's absence and the 'cruel threads of the garment lent to her' (189). By lending her sari, Moni tolerates the triangular relationship in good grace, but gradually she retreats 'into the tender sorrow of her silence', becomes 'mute with sour despair', and develops 'an abrasive misery in her eyes'. goodreads.com/book/show/278358.Memories_of_Rain. The last three days of Moni in London, exposes the dimmed relationship with Anthony, the memories obscured by more recent events, and the silence, and resentment accumulated for the past ten years. When Anthony returns home after his first night with Anna, the woman who would become his mistress, he "spilled heavy, sweet tears upon the field of hair that stretched across his pillow... while the lingering scent of

Anna's ivory flesh preyed upon sleep, ...he wouldn't be tired of the memory of her eyes..." (84). Caught between regret and passion, Anthony stays with Moni. Hoping that Anthony's anguish over her impending departure won't be diluted by relief, Moni remembers her bout with bronchitis during her first British winter. She remained in bed, knowing that "if she should die now, he will clench in his crazed palms, the forest of clothes that she would wear no more, bruise his lips upon the rough gold thread, drown his misery in the wail of tearing silk..." (179). Now, years after Anthony's first betrayal, his continuing affection is a punishing reminder that his desire for her has been muted. Mehta, Nina. *Cast Adrift in the flood: Memories of Rain by Sunetra Gupta*. Weidenfeld, 1992. articles.latimes.com/1992-05-10/books/bk-2643_1_sunetra-gupta.

Grieved by her English husband's infidelity, she rebels for the first time going against the patriarchal tradition and she wonders if she could be more dignified by telling him, after the birthday party, that she is leaving him forever... (94). Moni proves that she is an enduring, yielding, and a self-respecting individual. Her husband's betrayal has provoked her to take the drastic step of leaving him. He neglects her sexual and psychological needs. She feels abandoned and humiliated by his affair. Moni remembers Antony's determination to get married to her in her parent's home at Calcutta. Now she is in a situation about to leave him and London forever. Moni's refusal to accept the infidel Antony is the refusal of the contemporary women to patriarchal domination, a domination that persists from time immemorial, a domination that has been engrained in the psyche of women.

Ursula Tidd rightly quotes Simone de Beauvoir's point of view in this regard. 'Sexual oppression continues because, according to Beauvoir, gender roles are learned from the very earliest age and reinforced perpetually.' books.google.co.in/books/about/Simone_de_Beauvoir.html?id=LIMK13XntKQC&redir_esc=y Moni's reaction is a reassertion of her desperate attempt for preservation of a self that is intrigued by the male oriented designs. Antony denies Moni the freedom to choose or design her own future. She stands at the periphery as long as the dominant Antony continues his superiority over her. Status is more important in patriarchy than other issues. Their purpose is to construct and maintain power over women and also to keep them out of power. Moni's departure from London is her departure from oppression. Her refusal to continue the marriage is a powerful elucidation of departure from an obedience to what Beauvoir calls, 'gender roles.' Women are used as agents to perpetuate patriarchy and to create social conventions and social conventions perpetuate the various roles played by women as mother, daughter, sister, and wife.

Sunetra Gupta's technique of stream of consciousness narrative weaves together memories and images, providing not just the history of a fragile (145) love but of a woman's psychology and soul. In London, Moni experiences trauma when Antony begins to stray and even when his mistress becomes practically a member of the household. She could not imagine losing her husband to another woman. A trauma is

often that which is suppressed within an individual's consciousness, difficult to handle, if not impossible to depict (136). Edwards, Justin D. *Postcolonial literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008. The trauma that Moni faces cannot be spoken. If she speaks out she can be freed from it with its healing effect. But it does not happen for her as Antony is preoccupied with Anna.

Spivak proposes a theory of subalternity in her essay. She vindicated the limitations of the subalterns asking "Can the Subaltern Speak? (283). articles.latimes.com/1992-05-10/books/bk-2643_1_sunetra-gupta. The subaltern Moni can speak but Antony has no time and patience to listen to her. His immature mind doesn't realize that women are the supporters and co-partners of the family to be treated on equal terms. Antony sees Moni as a person of inferior rank, no match to his intellect, creativity, and status. She becomes a subaltern, a slave to his whims and fancies. Antony is the masculine dominator and Moni is the oppressed female subject. Such attitude of Antony would never contribute towards a sustainable marriage. This binary opposition led to the creation of racial discrimination between the white Antony and the subaltern Moni. Antony enjoyed supremacy. Western world has an upper hand over the third world. Her situation is pathetic, even though she had voice she could not express her feelings to Antony. Moni believes that his divided heart will endanger their painful, eternal love. Moni's sensibility is formed by the Bengali poetry, of anguished passion, darkness, and death. kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/sunetra-gupta/memories-of-rain/

When Moni learnt about Antony's infidelity she recalls that she had never made any major decisions. All that she had done since marriage was arranging for a baby sitter and going out to buy birthday presents. Proper mobility is expected for women empowerment. But in order to control women's sexuality, production and reproduction, men controls women's mobility. The traditions, customs and various sanctions of human society are stumbling blocks and they are gender specific, because men are not subjected to the same constraints. Saikia, Jyoti Prasad. *Gender Themes and issues*. Concept, New Delhi, 2017. Moni thinks of her aunt who had, 'escaped the tortures of a cruel marriage' including harassment for dowry. Antony's attitude towards Moni reflects his arrogant husbandly domination by not encouraging her to make important decisions. Men do not give economic freedom to their wives. The attitude of the conqueror Antony has turned her into a docile, voiceless, dutiful wife, a marginalized subaltern woman. Their relationship is based on self and other, center and periphery binaries. The unfavorable conditions and prejudiced attitudes of Antony is challenging her. He needs a change of perspective to cultivate a positive attitude towards Moni going beyond the exterior and looking at her with an unconditional love. This requires moving from a certain skepticism about the present to a positive view of what works well. Living this change requires abandoning his superior attitude.

Moni finds solace in darkness and personifies darkness as her lover. 'She commits adultery with darkness' because her husband's unfaithfulness had left her with no other companion. He had filled Moni's and her daughter's future with darkness (30). Moni decides that she would not deprive herself of

any happiness. Instead she accepts the fact that her husband had cheated her and walks out of his life with absolute dignity (176). Sunetra Gupta has given a wonderful description of Moni's mind when she is going through the pain of leaving her husband and clearly states the turmoil and confusion in a woman's mind. Moni talks about emancipating herself from the humiliating conditions and at the same time thinks of separating a father his daughter as a punishment he deserves. She remembers that Anthony considered marriage, a refuge from obsession and purification of love. She regrets his deviation from these pious emotions for satisfying his lusty passion (141).

Sunetra Gupta calls a groom in an arranged marriage, 'some unknown customer of a woman's body' (44) which is indeed true and painful. Moni contemplates on aspects of her marriage to Antony and she also delves on how her life would have been in an arranged marriage. Moni is an educated and liberated woman. She does appreciate her marital life. The sadness of his infidelity should not cripple her, she no longer feels attraction for him, this he is painfully aware of, she has his trust, his respect, affectionate devotion (44). Moni is a woman who acknowledges her husband's presence in her life but at the same time rejects his infidelity and refuses to surrender. She knows that if Anthony had not married her she would have never recovered from his love. She would have surrendered herself to some 'prearranged match' out of loneliness says, Nina Mehta in her review of *Cast Adrift in the flood: Memories of Rain*. articles.latimes.com/1992-05-10/books/bk-2643_1_sunetra-gupta

This paper fully agrees with the criticism of Sunetra Gupta that the institution of marriage confines a woman's creative abilities and limits her performance only to the household duties. She has no freedom to make decisions, for relaxation, socialization, or to be economically independent. For everything she has to depend on her husband. Moni is grateful to Antony for bringing her to London but she cannot accept his infidelity. Therefore with great difficulty, she decides to leave London, leave Antony, and everything associated with him and their marriage. Moni's departure from London is an assertion of Gupta's attack on the selfish attitude of men towards women. She compares the traditional and the progressive cultures and finds that when it comes to satisfying selfish desires both assume the same dimension or have the same exploitative governance. Moni is portrayed as a sensitive and self-respecting woman. Her Bengali upbringing does not interfere with her decision of leaving her English husband. Daringly she leaves with her daughter, breaking the patriarchal norms. She holds on to her memory. She thinks that when she returns she can work for charity, and commit the rest of her life to the poor, diseased, and hungry (108). A resurrected, empowered, and determined Moni with nostalgic feeling, wants to renew her sacred intimacy with Calcutta, her own home land which she wanted to escape from. Now, She searches for her past, her identity, home, and her roots. The decisions to leave Antony is the solution which transforms Moni's fragmented self into a sense of completeness.

Conclusion:

Moni's decision to leave England with her child is an attempt to achieve freedom from her crucible of sufferings, both psychological, and emotional caused by her unfaithful husband. It is a form of resistance and she refuses to become a slave to Antony's prejudices, sexism, and betrayal. He failed to understand her inner sufferings caused by the displacement, rootlessness, and nostalgia for her dear Calcutta. This pained her much and her way of resistance was humming the songs of Tagore which Antony could not understand. Besides, he would not have the patience to listen to her as his mind was engaged with the memory of Anna. Courageously Moni resists the patriarchal domination of Antony. She decides that her happiness does not depend on him anymore. It was also a clear sign of the failure of Antony to appreciate, accept, and uphold the rights of Moni. His selfish and destructive character would not acknowledge the freedom and rights of his own wife. In the company of a dominant husband who is patriarchal in his attitude Moni had to be submissive. She could not assert herself as she was depended on him completely for her survival as an alien. Moni's return is not a defeat but one of self respect. She leaves Antony with a romantic longing for her love. Sunetra Gupta writes about the sad ending of their marriage with remarkable compassion. Diasporic women like Moni, dedicate themselves to sublime activities in order to rebuild themselves and the society at large.

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