
Her Wings are Broken: Moni in Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain*

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Abstract:

Indian diaspora writing in English gracefully presents modern trends deviating from conventional themes. The title of the proposed paper 'Her Wings are Broken' tries to investigate the complexities of a man-woman relationship. It is a modest attempt to express the agony, despair, and suffering of the female protagonist. By offering an intense focus on the cultural infatuation in Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain*, it endeavoured to examine how the fascination of the protagonist leaves her in a deserted condition. The protagonist Moni, a young lady of Bengal, and her memories which include vibrant dreams of London life become voiceless. Her innocence under the dominance of a cunning colonizer takes her to the threshold moments but those are short-lived. The common point in the novel is continental love which ends up in a tragic way. It is the prime theme in her fiction that emphasizes universal connectivity. But in Gupta's fiction the fascinated continental lovers are unsuccessful in attaining a successful universal family. It particularly makes the readers think over the new identity of the people of diaspora. The novel plays an imperative role in interrogating the identity of the protagonist through cultural displacement. This paper attempts to analyze the other side of fascination. It is the traumatic testimony of an Indian woman and her marathon struggle on a foreign land.

Keywords: fascination, trauma, colonizer, voiceless, continental love, diaspora

Introduction:

Sunetra Gupta places love in the centre of her fiction. Love is one of the universal themes in literature. It becomes a solid foundation of many of the stories in literature. Love can be a good movement that inspires people to sacrifice their lives for others' sake and sometimes it is a toxic force that throws people into madness or violence. Love is a universally unique emotion which has no limits, no discrimination of race, culture, region, religion and also geographical boundaries. Gupta explores the relationship between men and women in the plots of her fiction. In her narratives, the theme of love is recurrent and dominant. The love and marriage between the characters in her fiction connect beyond geographical boundaries, cultures, and races. The fascination towards the western land is a common point in Gupta's fiction. The men and women from the desperate ends of the world fall in love

in various circumstances. They subsequently get married but the marriages remain unsuccessful. Gupta rightly depicts love and marriage which do not last for a long time, and consequently end tragically. According to Gupta, there are certain reasons which break the foundation of love and marriage. Male dominance, infidelity and overwhelming fascination are the important factors for unstable marriages and breaking up the relationships.

The entire plot of *Memories of Rain* is surrounded by Moni's love and her fascination for Anthony who comes from London. Monideepa, the protagonist, an Indian woman, and her fascination towards English and England from her literary texts, encourages her to grow her feelings towards Anthony. His attitude, temperament and lifestyle are not conducive for her to lead a successful marital life. The marital discord sprouts between the infidelity of Anthony and the self-respect of Moni. The physical dissatisfaction, emotional longing and fascination generate a gap which leads to unstable love and marriage.

Moni, the protagonist, a sensitive woman, has lived a stereotypical happy life with friends and family in Calcutta. She is emotionally fascinated towards the Western land, so her parents have taken care of her wishes in a proper manner. Her family showed extreme love and care so that Moni lived with dreams and could not face any bitter realities in her life in Calcutta before her love with Anthony.

The novel is the best exploration of how Indian women suffer in their marital life if their counterparts are unfaithful and hegemonic. It is Moni's subjugation by patriarchy where man always feels as dominant and consequently woman turns out to be a subordinate. It is more in the case of intercultural love and marriage. Moni is oppressed by the ignorance and loss of identity as a female predicament. She is the victim of her fascination, which brings loneliness and detachment to her marital life. As a simple, sensitive and smart girl from Calcutta, she remains a frustrated, isolated, and disturbed mother.

Moni is a native of Calcutta, extremely happy about her success in love with Anthony and also tries to convince her parents to marry him though her marriage is against her family's wish. She rebels but convinces her parents. Her parents forcibly agree to perform a Hindu wedding. After her marriage, she flies with vibrant wings to London, her lyrical dreamland with many dreams. Her matrimonial life with Anthony has not lasted for a long time. The disloyalty of her husband and loneliness in the non-native land are added to her mental agony. Moni understands his infidelity, and unfaithfulness towards a bride who travelled many miles only because of her trust in him. Her infidel husband is the representative of the male-dominated society. He never considers her tireless efforts to mould her family in London.

Memories of Rain moves forwards and backwards in time and place. It also explores the reality of short-lived intercontinental love and marriage. The sufferings

from despair and depression accompany the protagonist in her journey. Moni reminds herself of the behaviour of Anthony as a lover and his determination to marry her in Calcutta.

He asked, will you marry me, please, you must marry me, she shook her head, I won't go away, he said, almost gaily, and the city had stared balefully, penitently, through the murky windows of the taxi, the dim evening lights had blinked fearfully, and when the tired darkness edged in to soothe her, she had flinched, snatched herself away from shadowy fingers. (Gupta 111)

They expect a fruitful love and marriage. They marry and move to London, but Moni, in London, becomes a silent spectator, when she faces disappointment. Anthony begins to stray away from Moni. "His eyes had strayed to the caressing hazel glances of an American college girl they met at a party, the bitter night that followed, the first intangible deceit, the first violation of those sacred vows"(Gupta 49). Even his mistress, Anna becomes a practical member of her household. "The poetry of half triangle they form, he, Anna, and she, in the evenings she must spend alone while he and Anna make violent love in her studio flat" (Gupta 18). She doesn't bear to share her husband's love with another woman. Moni is a common Bengali woman with a bit of fascination towards her life, who loses her identity while dedicating her life to her husband. She expected eternal love from him but it turned into painful oppression. Her state of mind is always disturbed as she gets no empathy and care but gets inferior treatment at home in London. Anthony ignores her in a miserable condition intentionally with the help of Anna. She knows that she has to escape from the humiliation in search of her honour with never-surrendered self-respect.

But the purity of that emotion had been, in some sense, regressive, it had muted his creativity, she must respect that, he had loved her with a force that had drowned his powers of analysis, and the last years had been a struggle to regain that sublime balance between emotion and intellect, and yet he had felt nothing so painful as the passing of his passion, he had hoped, in the damp darkness of a tropical winter, that he might be able to live on love alone. (Gupta 141)

Moni is a representative of all those who are fascinated by faraway foreign lands and cultures but are consequently ill-treated by their life partners. She is a well-mannered and cultured girl with a sound educational background. Her sense of individuality never allows her to accept her unfaithful husband. In her well-desired life with Anthony, the unbearable behaviour breaks Moni's heart into pieces. As a result, she remains alone. She plans to quit secretly, take her daughter and return to India. She can be considered as an individual with self-respect. He ignores her emotions and she does not consider her desires. Therefore she is alienated, humiliated and rejected by his behaviour.

Memories of Rain is a personal adventure of a woman who flies joyfully with multicoloured wings and is bruised under male domination and betrayal. It is an expression of continental obsession, longing and loneliness. She gets married to Anthony and leaves her own self, her family and the nation behind. She loses her identity for the sake of his love. She is in a difficult condition with her thoughts. She realizes that her fascination with falling in love with an Englishman is a grave sin. Anthony's male superiority attempts to balance Moni and the city as neutral objects and they can be ruled, explored, controlled, and remain as "a tender tropical memory" (Gupta 161).

The very first time Moni sets her eyes upon him she gets disgusted and fascinated. He had waded through knee-deep waters in the floods of 1978. His arrival from the West represents his forefathers who invaded and ruled India for two centuries. There are floods of emotions in Moni, with her great fascination desired for his love. In Calcutta, he used to respect her and give importance to her opinions. He likes her innocence and simplicity. One can understand Moni's true love from the Indian feministic point of view.

After learning about his infidelity, she remembers his appreciation for her songs with a heavy heart, she visited India only once in ten years after her marriage with her bruised wings. She also remembers her fear of being isolated by a foreigner but she wants to sacrifice herself for his faithful love in return. It is her husband's unfaithfulness which brings sheer darkness into her life. "She battled with darkness, darkness had had become an indifferent enemy" (Gupta 30). He fills Moni's and her six-year-old daughter's lives with darkness.

Once she stooped to conquer his love but the same love made her stand in an isolated state. She determines not to surrender. She understands the bitter truth of her husband who had exploited her and silently walked out of her life with absolute dignity. Vijaysree quotes, "Anthony's fascination for the wild exotic flower of the east fades as fast as Moni's illusion about the wonderland of the West evaporates" (Vijaysree 134). He moves into another white woman's love in London. Moni's grief and the way she has been deceived are examples of the tempest and quieter struggle in a woman's psyche.

Gupta, in her writings, criticizes and shows no positivity of the concept of marriage. She points out that marriage is an obstacle for women's creative abilities. It also hinders her performance only to the household duties. "A bee is trapped between the two panes in the window, how did it ever get there, the woman beside her reading a magazine article called "Getting Rid of Rodney"- why were all the nicest girls mad, married, or murderesses" (Gupta 146). Moni, having great determination and struggle decides to quit London. She abandons Anthony and everything connected with him and their matrimony.

Memories of Rain is remarkably not a new fashioned tale. But it is about the struggle between fascination and faith. It is the story of a newly married young migrant woman, who has grown up in a middle-class Bengali family. Gupta presents a Bengali woman's life in London and her metamorphosis from a middle-class Bengali girl to a dismissive woman with a great sensitivity to how Moni lived a decade of her life accepting her fate. After her fascinating marriage with Anthony, she got a daughter and also a constricted life in London. She breaks free to make choices of her own.

Gupta explores Moni in a variety of settings looking out of the domestic walls. Her intense pain, inseparable attachment to the city, and her husband's disloyalty make her look back to her comfort zone. The gradual proclamation of subjectivity in a woman emerges from the trauma from false love. Moni breaks her diseased bond of matrimony and leaves London with her child. Her defensive response to leaving London causes a great difference that manages herself from the curse of her despair in love. The true nature of her husband is revealed and consequently, she is determined to face the trauma of her oppression. Moni, the symbol of individuality leaves her husband and her fascination forever. They were born in different continents. She is an innocent Indian woman, and Anthony, a cunning British colonizer fall in love. The cultural hegemony and racial differences cause the failure of Moni and Anthony's love.

Memories of Rain is presented in both the points of view of Moni and Anthony. This can be witnessed through their passionate loving days. These emotional exchanges lead to their daughter's sixth birthday, the day on which Moni plans to quit London. It also shows her inability to discuss with Anthony directly about her agony. Shashi Tharoor says her willingness to return as "the inability to reside emotionally as well as physically in two lands" (Tharoor 57). She is also a victim of the emotional dependence inflicted upon her by her husband.

The abundant use of the flashback technique reflects the divided identity that Moni feels in Calcutta and London. There are certain conflicts which reflect greater opposition such as the middle-class Bengali life in Calcutta and her romanticized memories of her native land. Her colonized education in English and her fascination towards her dreamland London, also the true experiences she gets in England. The imposed identities by her family and Anthony on Moni distract her desires for identity. Anthony as a cunning lover in India turns out to be an infidel husband in London. These promote Moni's inability to organize her individuality and also force her to return to Calcutta.

Moni is hopeful in her successful love and marital life but when they once move to the West Anthony's true nature is revealed. He begins to share his love with Anna. Moni could not tolerate the divided love for Anthony. She became his least priority and he ignored her on many occasions. His determined love for Moni vanishes when he changes his geographical Space.

Now she has the only power which enables her to retain her individuality that is her homeland. This power she gets from her re-imagination of Calcutta. Her willing migration changes her desire for homecoming. This also presents her anxiety about her identity. Moni's return is one way to get rid of her anxiety. She is strengthened by the hospitality of the host land to re-evaluate her self-respect. Her return to India is not to recover from her isolated life in the colonizers' land but it is a new beginning to lead her wounded life. When Moni is in London her memories of Calcutta are densely shattered. Her splintered recollections of the past and the overturned present conditions contradict her psyche. She realizes the tragic flaw of her fascination and understands the consequences of running after her fancies. In the initial days, Moni is overwhelmed by the relief of getting away from the drudgery of Calcutta's life. But she could not feel the attachment to the city which is more complicated than the imagination. Moni's nostalgia for Calcutta generates a temporal division between her past in Calcutta and her self-imposed imaginary present in London. She is dismantled between two geographical spaces.

Conclusion

Gupta draws a thin thread to differentiate London and Calcutta in the consciousness of Moni. Her Calcutta memories are revised. She is keen to return. At first, Anthony feminizes the geographical space in Calcutta, attracted by Moni, he never plans to leave Calcutta without her. But in the end, Moni personifies Calcutta as her rejected lover with whom she has to reconcile, and then she wants to dedicate her life to the charity of unwanted children. She passionately follows her. The disastrous consequences make her voiceless in the foreign land. She was born in an orthodox family and brought up traditionally. She could not adjust to the uncanny behaviour of her husband. It is the truly aggressive dominance of males which broke the dreamy wings of Moni.

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