



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

**“Home Culture” to “Host Culture”: Isolation and Identity Issues in
Memories of Rain by Sunetra Gupta**

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Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

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Abstract

Literature is the clearest record of the human spirit with an artistic expression. It is a universal observation on the dilemmas of human existence. In rapidly changing times the term 'Diaspora' has become a term to explore multiple fields including literature, cultural and sociological studies. Diasporic literature is one of the literary canons that depict the traumas experienced during cultural transplantation. Diasporic literature include issues regarding cross-cultural encounter and formation of identity, hence identity issues can be analysed from a diasporic point of view. Displacement, dislocation, either self-imposed or forced, violates the existence of a person. Cultural dislocation has tremendous impact on the psyche of the immigrant as his sensibility keeps shifting between the two differing socio-cultural environments - first is "home culture" and another is "host culture". Culture locates man in time; it links man with his lineage and heritage from which he picks up various primordial traits such as mother tongue, faith, customs and rituals, characteristics of social ethos. Moni in *Memories of Rain*, written by Sunetra Gupta highlights the diasporic issues. Moni's husband Anthony is having an affair with another woman. Moni, due to her husband's infidelity and cultural dislocation, is pushed to recreate India of her mind. In the novel Moni's double consciousness is portrayed: one of India that is her past and one of England which is her present. Her attitude represents a resistance to absorption in the alien culture. In the process of assimilation diasporic subject gives up their individual identity that is formed by native culture and milieu. Moni however rejects the process of "melting pot". Hence, it becomes an interesting study to analyze how culture and communication plays a vital role in the human life.

Keywords: Globalization, Diaspora, Home culture, Host culture, Exile, Alienation.

In contemporary world, globalization and multiculturalism have become a challenge not only to individuals or to their respective culture but to nations also as world has been compressed in to "a global village" and maintaining original and distinctive identity has become a difficult task. At present, the trend of a single culture or monoculture has been left behind. Due to globalization national boundaries are merging day by day. In ancient times migration was done with motifs of war, expanding Kingdom, trade, or pilgrimage. In modern times better economical status and matrimonial alliances are two major reasons for migration. Whatever the reason may be but uprooting and transplantation to a new locale places has become a socio-cultural issue of the age. the "transplanted subject" is constantly struggling between shifting images of the self, between a 'Yesterday' which is always alive within and 'today' in another country and culture which is



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host country. Arjun Appadurai analysis impact of globalization on culture with two categories: cultural unification and cultural diversification. He Uses the term "cultural homogenization" (102) for the cultural unification where absorption of cultures have created a hybrid or multicultural identity. While he uses the term "cultural heterogenisation" for the diversified factors where one is not ready to absorb other culture. In this circumstance "self" becomes conscious of dichotomy between "we" and "other". Change in a cultural landscape creates serious identity questions as person's identity is constructed through his/her respective culture. Person's culture plays dominant role into constructing his identity. On the alien land one's identity changes through various hard phases like assimilation, negotiation. Regarding the psychological impact of migrant experience, Viney Kirpal avers:

Although expatriation is quite common in recent times, its impact on the individual remain as complex as ever. Expatriation is not only a physical or geographical journey out of one's land to another where the migrant believes he will find greater satisfaction, but it means rather, a serving of the immigrant's spiritual. In recent times the term 'Diaspora' has become an umbrella term as it explores multiple fields like ethnic, literary cultural sociological studies and symbiotic ties with his mother country. (Kirpal, 45)

The modern and postmodern literatures have explored the issues of cultural conflicts. Diasporic literature is one of the literary canons that depict the traumas experienced during cultural transplantation. Diasporic literature includes issue regarding cross-cultural encounter and formation of identity, hence identity issues can be analysed by diasporic point of view. Diasporic character is often divided into home identity and host identity which causes identity fragmentation. Constant floating on past and psychological absence in the present creates double consciousness and fractured memory. For the diasporic subject, memory becomes the core concern. Through the memory of homeland past is recreated and cords of homeland culture, society and native language play a major role in it. "A troubled relationship" with host country transcends into aloofness, alienation and hybridity. All discussed points make it clear that a diasporic text should portray crossing of borders, a movement from familiar to alien culture, resistance to assimilation or mute adaptive strategies. Experience of alienation, racial discrimination, exile and dislocation are the main concerns of such text.

Mammaries of Rain is written by Sunetra Gupta which also won the Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 2004. The narrative of the novel is constantly shuffled from past to present and vice versa. Moni comes to live in England after marrying an Englishman, Anthony. But rejecting her diasporic space she decides to



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return to her native after ten years. Moni's character is similar to the character of Ashima in *The Namsake*. Ashima also, like Moni accompanies her husband to the new world but both cannot isolate their ethno-communal consciousness. Life at England becomes a perpetual wait and constant burden for Moni. Bidisha Banerjee in her article rightly observes, "The diasporic space of London becomes the site for this re-education. In this space, she comes to recognize the incompatibility of the binary oppositions that govern her life; she also comes to revise her memory of her former home, Calcutta." (03) This helps the expatriate to strike a balance between the past and the present. Moni's perception is constantly colored by reminder of the motherland and thus she is afflicted with a feeling of cultural alienation. Clifford avers that diasporic women are:

"Caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts and futures; they connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways. The lived experiences of diasporic women involve painful difficulty in meditating discrepant worlds". (Clifford, 314.)

The "lived experiences" of Moni seems to be woven with her sub-conscious at the extent that even at England memories of India keeps haunting her. After her arrival in London, she leaves the Indian time in her wrist watch with that her psychological existence acclimatize to imagine activities going on at her home at India:

...From time to time she had looked at her watch whose hands still marked the time of a world she had left behind, it was six in the morning in Calcutta, her father would be stretching his limbs in preparation for his journey to the market, her mother wiping the night sweat from her brow with a stall sari, is boiling the water for his morning tea.... (MR ,104.)

Moni's alienation at England is visible through her nostalgia. Moni continues to cling to the Indian way of life. The victims, as Safran posits, continue to relate personally or vicariously to the homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (Safran ,85.) Since there is no Indian community existing in England, Moni stays cooped in her house. She even can't form a little ghetto to share the Indian food, culture and ethnicity. In such circumstances, for Moni, the memories of her past play a dominant role both as invaluable possession and belongings to new place. Moni treasures and retains her Indianness in her living style. She cooks sweets in an Indian way and still wears cotton sari: "... he has buried his hungry breath in tl-he sun-warmed folds of



her cotton sari...." (MR, 52.) In the words of Das, Moni can be analysed as one of those victims who are:

Neither capable to cast off their inherited cultural legacy nor are they able to encapsulate themselves in a socio-cultural environment... They take refuge in their native culture as an anti-dote or a moral/ spiritual resource to checkmate their "decentred Consciousness. (Das 132)

Moni's character in the novel is an emblem to the severing of one's cultural assimilation and nostalgic chords due to multiculturalism and cultural dislocations in the era of globalization. In the process of assimilation and recreation of a new personality demanded by the new culture, the immigrant often becomes alien to his native culture as it happens with Tara. (A character in Bharti Mukhrjee's *Tiger's Daughter*). Throughout the novel, "Tara's mind is constantly at conflict with the two personality's one of an Indian and the other of an American". (Barat 53) But unlike Moni, Tara fails to reaccept India as she makes constant comparison between the native and the host country. Moni's predicament is different than that of Tara's. Moni fails to response the adopted culture hence the process of re-rooting cannot take place. Being an India, she fails to stand for India Anthony and his friends believe India as, "... a bizarre and wonderful land (where)... They still burn their wives, bury alive their female children? (06)" Instead of defending the socio-cultural tradition of India, Moni accepts the accusations mutely. Moni wonders: "... now, among Anthony, friends, silent, smiling, absorbing their life, their determination, their warmth. Would she have become like them, had she been arrested in her development, remained the passive, attentive child, by crossing the seas to an unfamiliar country, where, despite her half-finished honors degree in English, she could not find the right words, the right expressions, to voice her opinions, to participate but in the most banal of conversations...." (13-14)

Moni's knowledge of English language does not help to get acquainted and participate in English culture. The "Language of the Lords" always remained alien to her hence she lacks the right expressions and confidence to give opinions. This is one of the reason behind her mute acceptance of the accusations thrust upon her native. For Moni "their world" never becomes "her world". Even though she enjoys the luxury and superior quality of living in contradiction to that of she had at her Calcutta house. For instance she makes a brief comparison between luxurious bathroom at England and shabby one at India with: "the Turkish toilet, the cracked mirror, the shelf cluttered with bottles of coconut oil, toothpaste tubes, rusty razor blades, ... and now as she luxuriate in the lavender scented heat of her bath, she would wonder how she had ever been used to it either" (7-8) A sudden drastic change in social convention, landscape or people creates adjustment issues to the new comer's identity. The question of negotiation with the adapted territory and socio-cultural



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convention culminates the fragmentation of identity. Moni's mental travelling into past and her physical existence into present involves split identity. As Bhaktin denotes:

An act of our actual experiencing is like a tow faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never repeatable uniqueness of actual lived and experienced life...." (Bhaktin, 2)

For Moni, "actual lived and experienced life" becomes real place that can never be repeated. At England she becomes a ghetto dweller who craves to associate herself with Bengali Culture and once lived life. Moni confesses that during ten years at London she has done nothing: "since she came to this land, has she ventured to take her destiny into her own hands, not a single decision, in these ten years, she has never made any arrangements other than for dinner parties, other than getting a baby sitter, other than buying birthday presents, these ten years" (MR,23.) Stereotyping of Moni's role at England indicates that what she wanted to leave behind in the name of daily drudgery of Indian life has followed her to England also at more or less extent. She questions her own disposition that either she is meek by nature or her mental development has been arrested! Amidst the emotional upheaval and dislocation, Moni is pushed forward towards isolation and loneliness. Matrimonial alliance is the cause of Moni's expatriation. But Anthony never follows the sacred vows of marriage and neglecting Moni's existence involves passionately in a relationship with Anna. Being a woman she feels helpless and entrapped in a strange world. Even at London she is a victim of patriarchy. Even though knowing about the passionate affair between Anna and her husband, she couldn't dare to ask him about his infidelity. Sole reason behind such miserable silence is patriarchy. Moni, as a victim of patriarchal culture fails to raise voice against Anthony's infidelity. Away from her 'native soil' a feeling of negligence creeps in Moni, due to Anthony being a Philander, Moni's mind is constantly crowded with memories of Calcutta, her family, activities of her brother and friends. At the beginning of the novel, her memories for Calcutta were negative. For her it was a "bizareland" from where Anthony rescued her, but as the novel progresses, Moni realizes that Calcutta cannot be separated from her individual identity. Her homeland is the focal point of her individual identity. In such circumstances she is filled with nostalgia. Kaleidoscopic images of her native helps her to retain herself. Sheik in his article observes:



Nostalgia, by it's very often produces a romanticized perspective of her homeland. Indulgence in this illusion evokes a pseudo comfort and security which sustain the individual away from home. (189)

Moni's pseudo comfort arising from recreating her past makes her to neglect Anthony at some extent. Moni's self realization becomes acute with longing for her land. "She is seized by an overwhelming desire to return to that world, although she knows it is there for her no longer..."(15) She remembers vacation spent with her cousins at village home. She thinks of her aunt who chooses alien life rather than sufferings of marriage. Unconsciously, she decides to follow the footsteps of her aunt by taking a job at some remote area. Materialistic culture of western world, where marital cords are less important than physical lust, compels Moni to return to the spiritual world of Calcutta. As Banerjee remarks: "... she moves from as apprehension of her female body as the source of her identity, to craving something much greater a sense of worth and identity that is not dependent upon the female body.... This is something that both England and, Anthony are unable to provide for her...." (06). Her initial attraction for London subsides with her realization that the land of Dickens, Hardy, Virginia Woolf has nothing to offer her. Her romantisation and attraction towards London had started during her convent education. Yet cultural confrontation cultivates into a culture shock. Anthony's silent rejection of Moni echoes in her realization that this land is alien to her and will remain so forever:

And among the dusky streets of London, she feels reproach, she had wanted to make this her home, and instead the city had remained stately and aloof, the dispassionate streets look upon her now, silent, ignoring the secret they share.... (MR, 81.)

In contradiction to London, She recalls her departure from Calcutta- the city that nourished her with its soil. Moni regrets her decision of leaving Calcutta: "She will give her life to the city that she left behind so many years ago, before it's wooing of her was complete; she had crept away, before she might have shared the deathly pain of dying desire with its forlorn streets...." (M R, 109.) Moni feels conflict regarding her return to Calcutta. She wonders after a long time span of ten years, will the city reaccept her! It is often observed that longer stays at host country or adapted country makes difficult the returning of the expatriate. Moni doubts her return to Calcutta: "...She had been too proud then, to share her pain with the city, would the city



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allow her now to tend its sores, the city, whose tired blistered nipples she had paused aside with disdainful lips...." (MR ,112.) During her mental process she realized, however she cannot separate herself from the past of her city. She imagines herself as a daughter returning to home. Coincidentally Moni's returning happens to be with the festival of Durga Puja. She thinks: "... This year she will return with the Gods, a daughter comes home, this year she will stand captive to the wild, laughing eyes of the demon...." (MR ,174.)



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