

Research Article

**A Study on the Diasporic Aspect in the Novel Memories of Rain by Sunetra Gupta**

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**Abstract**

Diaspora has gathered momentum in the recent past of literature. It is an immense topic that highlights literary works composed by authors outside their country. Migration has resulted in the sense of acculturation and estrangement. Diaspora speaks about a sense of loss of inheritance, identity crisis, displacement. It also speaks about fragmentation and unification of culture. Sunetra Gupta, in her novel Memories of Rain, expresses the plight of an Indian woman, Moni, married to an English man, Anthony, for having settled in a foreign land. Gupta has depicted Moni as a woman who is hesitant to leave her husband because she is emotionally dependent on him. The readers can find her inability to share her sorrows with her husband. The culture where she was brought up doesn't encourage her to walk out of the wedlock or hurt her husband. The sense of estrangement and loss of inheritance is explained in the paper through the protagonist Moni's vivid experience on foreign soil.

**Keywords:** *Sense of acculturation, sense of estrangement, loss of inheritance, fragmentation, unification, dislocation.*

**Introduction**

Diaspora is a trending topic in today's world of literature. It talks about the literary works of authors residing outside their native countries. Diaspora Literature shares the expatriates' experiences and encounters in a foreign habitat. The literary works of these writers give a clear picture of people who reside in a new habitat carrying memories of their homeland. Diaspora means dispersing people in groups from one place to another due to migration, exile, refugee, indentured labour, soldier, convicts, preachers etc. This migration causes displacement resulting in acculturation and alienation. Immigrants or expatriates feel a loss of their origin or inheritance. They feel completely uprooted and belong nowhere. However, they adapt and assimilate themselves to the new habitat and create a new identity.

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Indian Diaspora is one of the largest and widespread throughout the world. The Indian diaspora Writing brings out the cultural differences in the homeland and host land. The nostalgic writers who carry memories of their homeland give a vivid description of the geographic features, the festivals, and the people's social life. The Indian Diaspora writing also throws light on the suffering of the Indian community in the host land, like racism and other hostilities. However, the foremost distinguishing feature of diaspora writing is the quest for identity, amalgamation and fragmentation of cultures. The bicultural interference in the lifestyle of the immigrants helps in the emergence of a new culture which generates new hybridity. *Vijay Mishra writes about "the hybrid experience of diaspora people for whom an engineered return to a purist condition is a contradiction in terms" (Mishra 421)*. The Indian Diaspora Writers also speak about the immigrants move out to distant territories and settle down for various reasons. These settlers find themselves insecure in the foreign land and feel rootlessness in their homeland. The immigrant settlers cannot feel uncertain over the loss of inheritance in foreign soil, leading to estrangement. This paper is projected to substantiate the elements of Diaspora in Sunetra Gupta's novel *Memories of Rain*.

Sunetra Gupta is a Bengali by origin who got settled in London. She is an epidemiologist at the University of Oxford. She has taken on research on various infectious diseases like Influenza, Covid-19, etc. Gupta wrote her first works of fiction in Bengali. She was a translator of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. *Memories of Rain* is her first book. The novel narrates the story of an Indian woman. Moni fell in love with an English man, Anthony and married him. The whole novel narrates Moni's intentions of abandoning Anthony and quitting her marital relationship with him as he has an affair with another woman. The entire duration of the novel's plot is about three days, wherein the first two days Moni spent considering her relationship. On the third day, which happens to be her daughter's sixth birthday, she returns to Calcutta, her homeland.

### **An Analysis**

The protagonist Moni is a young literature student who is carried away by the aesthetic beauty of England narrated through the poems and novels of Keats, Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy. Moni is fascinated by England and its culture. Furthermore, she is influenced by her brother, who always spoke the language and took her to English movies. The lass happened to meet Anthony, an Englishman, a friend of her brother. Anthony had come to India to research Bengali Theatre. Anthony is attracted to Moni's beauty, and hence he recites Keats's ode to melancholy just to impress her. He is overwhelmed by Moni's love for English culture and the land. Soon they get twirled in a sensitive relationship, eventually gets married and settles down in London.

*"Ode on Melancholy" - "No, no! go not to Lethe, neither twist wolf's bane, tight room Memories of Rain ted..." (Memories of Rain 17)*

Moni being a student of English is fascinated by the novels of Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy. When she saw Anthony, like any other girl, she was curious to know about him. Moni and Anthony were representatives of their respective cultures, and that probably attracted each

other. Moni believed that Anthony had come to rescue her from the dirty poverty that struck India. Moni was convinced that England was an enchanted land that soothed the cultural and spiritual space more than the physical space. But she is wrecked to know the reality about England after her marriage to Anthony. Even before studying the situation and adapting herself to England, her husband develops an affair with an English woman named Anna, who eventually becomes the fourth member of the house. *Critical points of big and significant difference constitute what we are, or rather – since history has intervened – what we have become. (Hall 112).*

Moni is physically displaced, but she is also culturally displaced, followed by unhappiness in marriage. She isn't in a position to tolerate her husband's infidelity. She is in complete dismay and depressed. Throughout her sorrows, she finds Rabindra sangeet soothing. She understands that Anthony is not the man of her dreams, nor he had come to rescue her. He had just been attracted to her dusky beauty, all gone after the passions were unleashed in the bed. She has been dislocated from her native country to her country of dreams, She thought she would receive spiritual enhancement, but it became a nightmare. She couldn't adjust to the culture because she was an Indian by heart, and the Indian culture in which she was nurtured put her in agony whenever she tried to compromise or assimilate to the new culture. She didn't find any amazing livelihood as she read in her books. The physical dislocation added to her grief:

*Prasenjit Gupta's collection Brown Man and Other Stories is described as arising from the writer's experience of being a grown man living in a predominantly white society for many years. This experience "often causes fundamental, tectonic shifts in character and outlook. His characters remain suspended between two continents, two cultures, two different lives. All too often, migration to the West results in the realization that one's existence in another culture is compromised in many ways, that one was much happier back home. But by the time this realization occurs, it is too late to return" (Prasenjit Gupta back cover).*

She is not able to identify the England she had read in her books. Therefore, she can't find where she belongs, and she feels estranged and lonely in the land. Since Anthony and Moni are representatives of their cultures, there were complete cultural differences. They didn't have anything in common to stick on or stay united. Their beliefs are different. There is a lack of understanding etc. this acts as an add on to feel alienated on the foreign soil. She doesn't find any care and solace neither in her husband or the new habitat.

Moni is a sensitive lass who contemplates marriage as sacred. She, like every Indian woman, considers it holy. She is shattered to know about Anthony's unfaithfulness. She is hurt to know that he has shared his bed with many women in England even before marriage. This is the juncture where their intercultural marriage lost its charm. India is a land of rigid cultural systems of which marriage is contemplated as the most important event in a woman's life in particular. The culture has taught the women to believe that their entire life is on the mercy of their spouse. They had to physically, economically and emotionally be dependent on their husbands and their extended family. To be in wedlock is considered as a social status. A woman

who walks off the institution of marriage is considered a disgrace to India's entire clan and cultural system. A woman confronting divorce or striving to lead a life of her own gives secondary status in society. It is different in liberated England; quitting a marriage and getting involved in another relationship with compatibility is common. Marriage is a very important tradition of our culture. Many cultural norms and customs are built and based on them. So there is no question of rupture in the relationship. Since it is a social stigma, it becomes every spouse's duty to be in the marriage. Life can turn out to be miserable, wrecked anything, yet it has to be lived. The Indian culture is completely different from the culture of the West. Therefore it is very difficult for the Indian to settle in a foreign nation.

Moni willingly accepted the life of living in exile. She was eager to lead the life of her dreams. She was ready to uproot herself and dislocate to England not just physically but psychologically too. She wants to liberate herself from the rigid culture that has fettered her. She felt Anthony had come to her rescue to liberate her. But her happiness is short-lived as Anthony turns unfaithful. His affair with Anna made Moni dejected and indifferent towards him.

*Why should she not be happy? The sadness of his infidelity should not cripple her; she no longer feels attraction for him, this he is painfully aware of .... She has a job, ... she has a life, she has a daughter, what more could life have offered her, there, behind decayed shutters, from where he had rescued her, a more faithful marriage perhaps .... (Memories of Rain 44).*

Even though she wanted to walk out of the wedlock, she did think of the modern appliances she used in England. Though she found a job in a library and solace in books, she couldn't hold her husband's infidelity towards her. She could take it as a part of the modern English culture. The England she heard of, learned about in books and literature is way too different from what she is experiencing.

Moni could not make herself fit into the diasporic culture. she was lost in pain and agony over her husband's deceit. Diaspora had made her realize the peripheral status that she has obtained in a foreign land. The unpleasant moments experienced in the host land made Moni feel alienated. Anthony and his people consider England as "*Demi paradise*" and India to be "*a bizarre and wonderful land*" where people "*still burn their wives, bury alive their female children*" (*Memories of Rain 6*). Hence the colonial psychology of their ancestors is inferred. Moni had also described how the city remained indifferent and reserved when she longed to embrace England. "*The city had remained stately and aloof*" (*Memories of Rain 80-81*).

Even Anthony contemplates that Moni belonged to a different world. She is "*his tropical dream*." "*the beauty that must die*" (*Memories of Rain 82*), a reminiscence that is unforgettable but cannot be survived with in real life. Anthony contemplates that Moni could not survive in the host land because she could not assimilate to the new culture. The England to which she entered as the spouse of Anthony doesn't coordinate with the England of her what she has learnt in her artistic, creative mind. She understands that there is a wide gulf between what she heard of and what she is encountering. The England of her dreams is just the imagination and description of the authors she read on. In reality, England was different. The mentality of the

people was very different. The truth and imagination are two unique things. In a foreign country, she assimilates and imitates the structure, taste and propensities of her husband. It was hostile for her to activate through various phases of her life, experiencing the two societies of natal and the embraced country. Moni's newly discovered life is tormented by her significant other, Antony, other than the social challenges she experiences. She is incapable of putting herself out there in precise English or deciphering the melodies of Tagore she articulates into English for Antony. There is a deficiency of enthusiastic interface between them, which is meant through language.

Moni turns out to be a survivor of cultural bias and supremacy as discrimination infers baseless and outrageous treatment and passes on a message to its victims that they are not acknowledged as equivalent in the society they wish to live in. Subsequently, racial discrimination and social dominance produce a profound feeling of alienation and isolation among Asian immigrants. Ashok Chaskar remarks that the western culture dictates and discriminates against the eastern culture owing to the colour origin and nationality. The Asian immigrants are not treated as equals and humiliated, and they are given secondary status in western society. This invokes conflict and unrest in society. The Immigrants are ill-treated and discriminated against in their host land, creating a sense of separation and alienation in a foreign land. Chaskar also says that the supremacy of the West culture over the East results in social friction. Therefore the Asian immigrants are struggling to create their own identity in the host land. Cross-cultural understanding can bring the occidental and oriental people together.

Moni is alienated from the family most of the evenings. She is alone at home. She is away from her native land, and she has nobody to share her feelings. She feels lonely and sad as she feels there is nobody to hear her or understanding her emotions. This leads her to anxiety because she has not only migrated to a new land but also migrated to a new culture that she cannot adapt to due to the cold attitude of the people. The new culture is completely different from her native culture. She is lost in her thoughts as what she earned by leaving her family, an indifferent husband, a rude mother in law. She found solace in nothing but reading books sitting on the verandah.

*If you did not give me love  
Why paint the dawn sky with such a song? Why thread garlands of stars.  
Why make a field of flowers my bed  
Why does the south wind whisper secrets in my ear?  
If you did not give poetry to my soul  
Why does the sky stare like that upon my face  
And why do sudden fits of madness grip my heart?  
I set sail upon seas whose shores I know not (Memories of Rain 97).*

Moni goes through internal turmoil in a foreign land. She longs for a baby boy when she understands she is pregnant because she feels that her relationship with Anthony would become stronger; she believes that a boy baby would be a synthesis of her and Anthony while a daughter is just an extension of herself daughter never be his. She also admits that she had made

countless trips to France and other parts of England because of Anthony. She has moulded herself into a transnational citizen who is all because of Anthony. When she thinks of leaving the country, she imagines that she would miss the technology and the electronic equipment along with her gadgets as she eats her toast, the food, the fresh bread, the undiluted milk, which are gifted and promised in England and that in Calcutta her, a daughter might never enjoy such pure food. She thinks in Calcutta, and her child would likely meet with the sliced fruits laid bare to the pavement flies. It shows that she suffers from internal conflict in the land of her adopted country:

*On the first night that he returned with the smell of another woman deep within him. At the same time, she slept, he had wept at the foot of their bed, his knees bruised from the hard wooden floor of Anna's childhood room, he had crept in beside her and spilt heavy, sweet tears upon the field of hair that stretched across his pillow (Memories of Rain 84).*

Even though Anthony feels remorseful for Moni, he is completely separated from Moni. In the cultural clash between the Oriental and Occidental culture, Anthony's infidelity is accepted in his culture, while Moni contemplates it as taboo.

*The relation between Orientalist and Orient was essentially hermeneutical: standing before a distant, barely intelligible civilization of cultural monument, the orientalist scholar reduced the obscurity by translating, sympathetically portraying, inwardly grasping the hard-to-reach object... The cultural, temporal and geographical distance was expressed in metaphors of depth, secrecy and sexual promise: phrases like "the veils of an Eastern bride" or "the inscrutable Orient" passed into common language. (Said 222).*

Moni doesn't have a place wholeheartedly with London. She thinks about Calcutta, her home, which she had left for Anthony, a perpetual home frozen in reality that would now be able to be visited distinctly in memories "...she is seized by an overwhelming desire to return to that world, although she knows it is there for her no longer..." (*Memories of Rain* 15).

In India, once a woman is married, she is no longer a member of her family. She belongs to her husband's family. The paternal lineage loses all rights to her, and she can only visit her family as a guest. So marriage reduces a woman's status at home from a daughter to an outsider (guest). Her brother also mentions it "*no back to Bengal*" (*Memories of Rain* 178). The house of their husbands is their actual house. In this manner, during the range of ten years, she visited Calcutta just a single time for about a month; her family also isolated her for deluded them and accepting a foreigner and a foreign marriage. During her visit to Calcutta, her paternal house, she wasn't asked to sing any song at all. However, her family knew her love for singing. She has been rejected completely.

Moni's uncle wasn't happy with her decision of marrying an Englishman. In India, neither a boy nor a girl chooses her life partner, and love is considered taboo.

*...in the darkness, he had listened for the heartbeats of their child while the lingering scent of Anna's ivory flesh preyed upon sleep. In his pain, he had reasoned that even if he had left her behind to the smoky Calcutta winters, he would have felt, even more sharply, that he was betraying their love... (Memories of Rain 84).*

But Moni's family was fascinated to lead a life like a colonist. Indeed they were happy that their daughter was marrying an Englishman. Even though Moni's mother cries, she doesn't protest. Her uncle blames Moni's parents for giving her freedom. Moni's family were imitating the West. Moni's uncle often challenged the modern attitude of hers and her brother's. India is a rigid country where culture is dominant. Western culture influenced Moni and her brother. They enjoyed freedom and liberty, which provoked them into making friendships with western people. Their behaviour wasn't favourable for the growth of moral and traditional views of their family.

When Anthony visits Moni's house and her brother for the first time, Moni's mother doesn't object to her loitering around the house wearing her nightdress. As Moni's mother believes that a white man is too distant to be a danger, there is no requirement for being modest. Memories of Rain embeds Tagore's tunes in the protagonist's consciousness and her invocation at every significant stage of her life, particularly when she feels uprooted or culturally displaced.

The issue of being dislodged from one's own culture and winding up in a new setting has been developing among various people in such a circumstance where the people's personality turns into an unthinkable errand for the vast majority of them. For all immigrants, exceptional sentimentality is an inescapable result of their social relocation. Now and then, such removal and distance make them consider getting back to their country to fulfil the requests of their lives. This is how people's interaction of progress begins by switching diaspora to dismiss the space of host land.

The diasporic cognizance can be elucidated through the different attributes of the diaspora. The upsetting encounters of the foreigners in the host country and the sensation of distance grant them to recall their warm encounters about their country. They experience the profound feeling of rootlessness and minimization in the place that is known for its appropriation. Gupta has effectively introduced these sentiments in the novel. For the most part, the local diasporic area encounters the aches of abuse, dispossession, and uprooting from their received land. Transients languish mentally over being uprooted, socially disjointed and distanced from their country. This is because of a steady exertion to set up character.

While considering relocation and its related issues, it should be noticed that once migrants leave their native countries, they begin encountering social dislocation; the result of their conscious decision is dispossession and disengagement. They need to adapt to different sorts of encounters. In Memories of Rain, Moni feels hindered and caught in the sterile refinement of London away from her country. Her topographical uprooting gets metonymic with her piercing and moral misery:

*She sits with her hands thick in photographs, boxes of photographs that she must leave behind, or should she fill these empty suitcases with these papery memories, what are they worth to her now, for these are memories that have been banished from the warm corners of their home... (Memories of Rain 122).*

This shows Moni's all-out dislodging. This is the way she has been seized. She is the mistreated one in case of their conjugal disagreement. Their little girl is defrauded on these occasions because of the social conflict between the Indian worker and her better half Anthony. This unfaithfulness has destroyed her life and their girl's future.

Diasporic literature speaks about the immigrant's experience and their constant thought and memories of their homeland. They don't miss any opportunity to go nostalgic about their native country. Similarly, Moni, after moving to London, is always lost in memories of Calcutta. Her motherland constantly appears in her imagination, and this prompts her to back to her homeland. The love for her motherland she realizes and returns to her culture and her city. Moni is found isolated and estranged in the sophisticated and urban life of London. The more she tried to make her identity, the more she was reminded of her culture of origin. The humiliation of the occidental culture pushes her to live in nostalgia. The feeling of alienation in the West and longing for ownership instigates her to return to her homeland.

The feeling of loss of having a place generally joins the feeling of identity and home country. The country or homeland gives a feeling of character and affirmation as an individual from the same ethnic gathering. It frequently gives the sensation of security and acknowledgement as a person of an ethnic community. This sense is seen in the current novel from the accompanying lines:

*Later that night, her brother came up with her onto the roof terrace, where a crisp, clear layer of night lay above the smoky lights of the city, and looking out onto the sea of night smoke, their impenitent city, he reminded her, this is what you are giving up, this is what you will be leaving, forever, and she raised her eyes to the hard, cold stars above, and with a voice, dark as the inside of a bird's nest... (Memories of Rain 22).*

The characters in the novel go through assorted diasporic encounters, which uncover their anguish, and they move to unfamiliar grounds for various reasons and goals. Moni is dislodged from Calcutta to London because of her marriage with an English spouse Anthony. She encounters Anthony, just as his family, who inconvenience her, and she decides to get back to her mom land. Her excruciating encounters are the agent of the diasporic networks, moving from local land to the received land, especially individuals of East relocating to West. The sensations of distance, wistfulness, uprooting, separateness, alienation, mistreatment, twofold minimization and energy to get back are focal in the diasporic setups.

Moni had a fancy fondness towards the English land and the people and the language. She was connected with the land even before she met Anthony, an English literature student at college.

She was in love with Heathcliff, a character in one of the English novels, even before she fell in love with Anthony.

*"...she had loved Heathcliff before she loved any man, and she had let a sweet weakness grow within her..."(Memories of Rain 177).*

As discussed earlier, Moni is already in love with the England she had learnt from her books, but she is exposed to an England quite different through her husband, Anthony. So imagination and reality were two different things to follow. And so Moni stood confused as not knowing which one to accept. This created a huge rift between the husband and wife because Moni felt that the literary lessons of England deceived her and that colonial education gave a different picture of England. In reality, the nation was hostile towards the feeling of Moni. It didn't bother to help her. It remained cold when she tried to adopt their culture. Anthony never bothered to help her, nor he ever wanted to know what happened to her in the host land. She felt estranged, isolated unable to cope up in the newfound land as well as her family. This gap becomes the foundation for the two to drift away psychologically from each other. This indifferent nature of Anthony instigates him to indulge in an affair with Anna. Anthony did not acknowledge the pain of Moni.

The submissive attitude of Moni keeps her silently suffer in pain, and her love is passive. Therefore, Anthony takes her for granted and deliberately hurt Moni for her submissiveness. She feels that he doesn't respect her feeling and denies her self-respect. She couldn't compromise her self-respect anymore, so she decided to flee to Calcutta, her home town. She wanted to convey her sorrow and understands that being silent over it is got to fetch nothing. Hence she decides to react by abandoning her marriage with the 'foreigner' Anthony.

Her choice to get back to her country makes her more mindful. However, the return isn't a characteristic of any disappointment, self-respect preservation, and her heartfelt longing for Calcutta. Her cautious position of returning to India causes antagonism that appears to fix the curse in her affection. Moni slowly starts to understand that she can't accomplish importance and uniqueness in life only by satisfying her sexual cravings. Consequently, she moves from dread of her female body as the wellspring of her personality to want for something a lot more prominent in worth and a character that isn't reliant upon the female body. This is something that both England and Anthony are unfit to give her. Subsequently, she intends to get back to her country. Hence, there is a conflict between her passion and the value of character within her. Moni decides to get back to her roots.

Moni becomes acquainted with the real distinction between London and Calcutta. Her memories of her native land are changed. Despite the band dimness of Calcutta, she shows immovability in choosing her roots or origin. At the underlying phase of the novel, Anthony feminizes Calcutta with Moni. Similarly, toward the novel's finish, Moni thinks about Calcutta to her disposed lover to whom she should return some way or another. She anticipates starting her new life as a benevolent trust worker in her old neighbourhood Calcutta. London is the liminal space where she experiences a great deal of male-centric force and the pressing factors

of diasporic retention. The diasporic space, which Moni procures in London, turns into a piece of the change and re-teaching for her as she goes between feminized Calcutta of her previous existence and the non-existent re-detailed Calcutta to which she should return. As she feels:

*And among the dusky streets of London, she feels reproach, and she had wanted to make this her home. Instead, the city had remained stately and aloof, the dispassionate streets look upon her now, silent, ignoring the secret they share, and yet, ten years ago, every alleyway in Ballygunge had trembled with the heaviness of her departure, weeping puddles upon the cracked pavements, they had turned away, indignant, betrayed, she will go back to them, the narrow pitted streets, cloaked in a haze of car fumes, the dung smoke of a thousand clay ovens (*Memories of Rain* 80-81).*

### **Conclusion**

Anthony's infidelity invokes Moni to abandon him and leave him to her home country along with their child. This is because Moni's roots are strong. She couldn't tolerate her husband's ruthless attitude towards her and his indifference towards her mental agony over the helplessness of her adaptability in the foreign land. Anthony did not support her morally nor emotionally when she needed him the most. She counted on him as an immigrant to a new culture and new land and new life, hoping that he would support her and help her assimilate the new culture. Instead, he made her feel double isolated, and her identity as an immigrant as a wife came into question. Moni can't discard her reminiscence and desires. Her origin is solid, and she can't migrate herself to England. In the novel, Moni prevails about satisfying the productive possibilities of diaspora by reconsidering her character inside the space of diaspora. Even though she flops in framing her subjectivity in the socially dislodged place, London, she realizes that to shape a character, she needs to get back to her country. Anyway, it is to be perceived that the spot of her visit isn't old Calcutta; she had left beforehand yet another and resuscitated Calcutta, a third space eminently is different from the two spaces she possesses in the novel, the Calcutta of her youth days, and London, where she goes through the period of re-schooling. In London, she learns the impropriety of the double restrictions that controlled her life. By remaining away in an outsider land, she creates a connection with her country. Ultimately, she comes to realize that she can't remain in a socially dislodged spot to frame a diasporic personality for herself. Her re-schooling inside the space of diaspora is total. Her re-visitation of India proposes that she isn't leaving England for India. However, she is leaving her orientalist spouse to accomplish the space of postcolonial India. This is how Moni reaches the period of compromise of getting back to the country in this novel.

*"...she nods slowly, and watching the suitcases move sadly away upon the conveyor belt, branded and sealed, trussed with yellow tape that protests their innocence, she is filled with an indescribable loneliness, a bitter sense of failure, she is returning home,..." (*Memories of Rain* 173).*

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