

## EMANCIPATION OF A WOMAN IN SUNETRA GUPTA'S MEMORIES OF RAIN

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### Abstract

This paper endeavours to analyse how the protagonist in the novel *Memories of Rain* takes her final decision and emancipates herself in the patriarchal dominated society, and it also highlights the struggles faced by the character and her inner feelings. Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* (1992) portrays the story which takes place in a single weekend, relatively it narrates the flashback of a marriage between an Indian girl and an English moor. The novel is tremendously complimented for its lengthy prose style.

**Index Terms:** Feminism, Marginalization, Betrayal, Memory, Rebirth.

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### INTRODUCTION

Sunetra Gupta is one of the versatile woman diasporic writer of the twentieth century. Gupta belongs to Rushdie and post-Rushdie generation of Indian English writers. She was born in Calcutta and spent her childhood in Ethiopia and Zambia. Sunetra is a well-known novelist, Essayist, Translator and a short story writer. Sunetra Gupta is the author of five novels. She has been honoured with a number of awards namely Sahitya Academy award, Southern Arts Literature Prize, DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. In 2009 she was declared as the winner of the Royal Society Rosalind Franklin award for her experiments and scientific achievements. She is the adept translator of the poems of Rabindranath Tagore. In the UK magazine *Independent on Sunday*, Sunetra Gupta has been described as "Prodigious talent". Critics in the west compare Gupta to the eminent writer Virginia Woolf because like Woolf Gupta's concern is on the female protagonist, limited textual language and experiments. Her first novel *Memories of Rain* (1992) has won the Sahitya Academy award.

### Feminism

Feminism is one of the most interesting areas in the field of literature. Many academic writers have deliberately discussed their perspectives with the theory feminism. A Feminist Dictionary (1985) defines feminism as "A movement recognition of the world upon a basis of sex- equality in all human relations". Feminism may be examined as a social movement. Women are always marginalized and so feminism considers woman as the most oppressed group, and it defends women's rights by portraying them as individuals and human beings.

Feminism began during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century whereas the modern feminism was sowed into the soil of literature during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Feminist writers namely Mary Wollstonecraft, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Marquis de Condorcet sowed the seed for feminism and given their views and objectives for feminism by criticizing a few practices followed in the society. Feminist writers divide the objectives of feminism into three major categories viz 1. To demonstrate the importance of women, 2. To reveal that historically women have been subordinate to men, 3. To bring about gender equality. The works of feminist writers like Judit Wright's *The Moving Woman* (1946), Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) focus on the struggles faced by women in their day-to-day lives. Barry (2017, p.124), states that:

'Feminist pointed out, for example, that in the nineteenth-century fiction very few women work for a living, unless they are driven to it by dire necessity. Instead, the focus of interest is on the heroine's choice of marriage partner, which will decide her ultimate social position and exclusively determine her happiness and fulfilment in life, or her lack of these.'

### The backdrop of the Novel

Sunetra Gupta's first novel *Memories of Rain* deals with the life of a young couple, Moni, a Bengali woman from Calcutta and Anthony, an English man from Oxford who hail from a western world and meet during the Calcutta rainstorm in 1978. Anthony comes to Bengal to do his research studies on the Bengali theatres. Moni's brother is the close friend of Anthony, so Anthony often comes to Moni's house and meets her. Taking this as an advantage he shows interest in Moni. Whenever Anthony comes to his house, her brother instructs her to give coffee to Anthony. Anthony is an intelligent artist but an immoral man. Moni is an undergraduate student of English at Oxford University. Moni is a very sensitive woman born and brought up in a traditional middle-class family. She is very much interested in Jane Austen and the songs of Tagore. Moni finds herself both repelled and attracted by her brother's friend. They both fall in love. Moni after completing her studies at Oxford struggles a lot to marry Anthony, an English moor. Her parents are not interested to send their daughter to abroad. Finally, her parents accepted for her marriage but they laid a condition that the marriage should take place according to the Indian culture. A fairy-tale come true but only to meet a sordid end. Her marriage becomes full of pain, disappointment, infidelity and non-communication. After marriage, she spent her life happily only for a few years until Anthony's mistress becomes part of a family. She practically becomes a member of the family. After her arrival, Moni experiences prejudice and betrayal. Her unfaithful husband treats Moni as a third person. Anthony tells Moni that he was captivated by her beauty and virginal purity. Moni's emotions go vain. Facing all these miseries and melancholy, at the end she makes a confidential plan on her daughter's sixth birthday. She takes her child and returns to Calcutta. This major action of the novel takes place within a single week.

### Analysis of the Novel

Sunetra Gupta an acclaimed writer portrayed the life of young couple Moni and Anthony. Moni hails from a conventional family in Calcutta and Anthony is from London. This incident and orient get attracted to each other and marry facing so many struggles. They settle in London. Their marriage lasts for only a

few years. Moni secretly plans to return to her home with her six years old daughter and decides to leave her infidel husband. Tharoor (1992) a famous novelist in Indian English Writing in the magazine *Washington Post* in the title "Out of India: A Thirst for Past" comments on *Memories of Rain*

'*Memories of Rain* marks the triumphant debut of a gifted and compelling voice. In long rolling sentences that pile clause upon clause, emotion upon emotion, keenly observed detail upon poignantly imagined whimsy, Sunetra Gupta weaves a story as intricate and rich, yet as light and warm, as a jamewar shawl.'

Moni can be compared to the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande Saru and Jaya. Saru in *The Dark Holds no Terror* loves Mano and marries him, her parents are not happy with her marriage. Her marriage is not a happy marriage she faces lots of physical and psychological turmoil's and returns back to her parents after giving birth to two children. Whereas Jaya marries Mohan and gets separated from him after few years of their marriage. Similar to Jaya, Moni observes silence all through her life. Moni does the same. Even when Anna becomes part of the family, she doesn't speak a word against her or Anthony. Her silence breaks the husband-wife relationship of Moni and Anthony similar to the silence of Jaya in '*That Long Silence*'. Jaya asserts with Kamat a character in the novel and says that "A women can never be angry. She can only be neurotic hysterical, frustrated." (147) Both their sufferings are socio-physic in nature. Moni is also juxtaposed with the character Dopdi in Maheswata Devi's play '*Draupadi*'. She stands brave in front of everyone as a woman with strong will power. Moni stood against Anthony who betrayed her. She took an independent resolution without anyone's support. She dominated male power. In the article 'Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* as A Symbol of Subaltern Defiance' Hoque (2019) states "Dopdi Subverts the physicality of her body from powerless into powerful Resistance". Dopdi permits the reader to outlook her identity. Moni's decision makes everyone realize her bold and courageous attitude. Women should be heroic and fearless like these great personas.

### Marginalization

Men treat women as marginalized and subaltern both at home as well as in the society. A woman should always be next to men. In *Memories of Rain*, the protagonist Moni has to obey whatever her brother orders her. "Make us some tea, Moni, there's a good girl," he demands. "make it yourself" she says, suppressing a wild excitement." (28). Anthony habitually visits Moni's house. One day when he comes with her brother to their house due to heavy rain Moni's brother gives him an umbrella taking this as an advantage, Anthony comes the next day to see Moni in the pretext of returning the umbrella. Whenever Anthony comes Moni's brother order her to make tea in a wild and suppressed manner. Even at home men treat women as inferior to man. Moni encounters lots of sufferings. To get rid of the suppressed life Moni goes out and studies at Oxford. In the early days of her stay abroad, Moni sees Anthony and she is attracted by him and falls in love with the him. When Moni asks her parents consent to marry him, they deny to get their daughter married to an English man. Finally, her father agrees to their marriage with many conditions, he demands that her marriage should take place in a perfect Bengali style. Her father in grief states that "And now, she will go back to them, bring to them a new grief, that of a daughter returned, a daughter rejected, a daughter spurned" (32). Moni's father says all these to her and makes her understand the circumstances. Moni rejects everything and overcomes all the subjection, goes to London and starts her new life with Anthony. Moni overcomes all the subjection by her parents and comes out from her cage. S. P. Swain comments on her struggle for salvation "The feminist struggle for liberation is looked upon within the framework of the freedom crisis..." (129)

### Betrayal

Moni feels contented in her life with Anthony only for few years until Anna arrives and becomes a part of the family. Anthony has an affair with Anna an English Woman. When she comes and stays in their house, Moni faced lots of humiliation. Anthony's affection and kindness towards Moni totally vanishes and gets turned into disloyalty and hatred. Anna often visits Moni's

house before she permanently becomes a member of the family. Moni says that "She remembers the first time Anna came to see the child, she lay helpless numb against the pillows, while he held the baby up to her..." (49).

Virginia Woolf in her novel *To the Lighthouse* rightly comments on marriage and states "Marriage today is not considered many times a happy thing. Men always consider woman as plaything" (111). Apt to the statement. Anthony treats Moni as a plaything and he stays with her only to fulfil his desire. She has been betrayed and left alone; with her child as the only salvation.

### Memory

Moni recaptures her bitter memories and her hardest day with Anthony. The interaction between past and present memories makes her undergo depression. "Tears well up in her eyes, she has always wished to be able to address someone with her song, she has thought, always, that it might be some young artist..." (57). During her stay in London, when Anthony abandons her and stays with Anna, Moni relates her sufferings through the song. But Moni takes all these distress in a productive way and motivates herself to move forward in her life. In the article, "Evaluating Memory and Identity in M. G Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*" Sophia Livingston. et.al comment that

Memory, Ji-Bai would say, is this old sack here, this poor dear that nobody has any use for anymore. Stroking the sagging brown shape with affection, she would drag it closer, to sit at her like a favourite child. It would plunge her hand through the gaping hole of a mouth, and she would rummage inside. Now you feel this thing here, you fondle that one, and you bring out this naughty little nut and everything else in it rearranges itself. Out would come from the dusty depths some knick-knack of yesteryear: a bead necklace shorn off its polish; a rolled-up torn photograph; a cowrie shell; a brass incense holder; a Swahili cap so softened by age that it folded neatly into a small square; a broken rosary tied up crudely to save the remaining beads; a bloodstained muslin shirt; a little book. (8-9)

### Rebirth

Moni's strong will-power enables her to overcome all her sufferings and she moves to Calcutta. Moni recalls that she has never taken any decision and this is her first major decision. Moni comes back to Calcutta with her daughter on her sixth birthday. Moni recalls how she foolishly imagined that Anthony has come across seven seas to rescue her. But now after ten years she realizes that like a colonizer he had come to colonize her. He married her, took her to London and treated her like a slave. Banerjee (2009) in her article, "Revision, Rerouting and Return: Reversing the Technology of Diaspora in Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain*" comments that, at the early stage, we observe Moni's reminiscences seem mostly negative, but as the novel progresses, we see a steady shift in Moni's recollection. Moni recaptures everything including Anthony's crooked nature. Moni doesn't communicate and shares neither her sufferings nor her decision with Anthony. She remains aloof and returns back to Calcutta with her daughter on her sixth birthday. Moni like a phoenix regenerates herself and obtains new life by arising from her sufferings.

### CONCLUSION

B. G. Bowers statement about emancipation in *Death and Life* "In the end, it was the secrets that held hostage and fuelled my depression, but, once released, emancipation- from fear, shame, guilt and judgement- was finally possible." are apt to the protagonist Moni. She marries Anthony and settles with him in London. She trusts him a lot but their marriage meets a sordid end. She undergoes many internal conflicts. Moni teaches that woman should emancipate, empower and teach man that woman is not a slave, and has all supreme power to overcome struggles. She lays path for all women in the patriarchal dominated society and shows that the destiny of women is not in suffering in the hands of men but in empowering herself. She emancipates herself by going back to her home and overcomes all her struggles. In the beginning of the novel, Anthony portrayed himself as a loyal husband and Moni considered him as a prince who has travelled many seas to rescue her but as the novel proceeds it is clear that he has worn a mask and disguised

himself as a devoted husband. Anthony can be compared to the colonizer (Britisher) one who has come to colonize an Indian woman and treated her as a slave. Throughout the novel it is clear that the patriarchal dogma is completely deep-rooted in his mind. Moni suffers a lot due to the infidelity of her husband, but her independent decision to return to home makes emancipates her. Moni does not want to be under Anthony's control and it is clear that Moni has born new. She does not want to be the same woman, her secrete decision makes her live a liberated life. Moni's return to her maternal home on her daughter's birthday symbolizes her rebirth .

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