

Chapter Seven

Summation

From the beginnings of literature, poets and writers have based their narratives on crossing borders, on wandering, on exile, on encounters beyond the familiar. The stranger is an archetype in epic poetry, in novels. The tension between alienation and assimilation has always been a basic theme.

— Jhumpa Lahiri

Indian Literature in English refers to the body of work by Indian creative writers who write in English and their mother tongues could be any one of the numerous languages in India. The contribution of the earlier writers is remarkable to the fictional world and their works not only inspire the new generation to enter into the literary arena but also mirror the societal norms of India of their period. Literature depends upon the writers with their exploration of various dimensions of the relationship between man and society. Every age has its own compulsions, tensions, aspirations and logic which characterize the works of the particular age.

The progress of English writing since Independence has taken a new dimension. The post-colonial fictional writings often provide a revisit to history and pursue to explore new ideas. The writers of fiction frequently strive to examine the nature of reality that existed during the colonial period. These writers in a broader sense concentrate their views on the political and social happenings of the country. While discussing the post-colonial writings, Nandita Sharma enumerates, “Postcolonial literature (or Post-colonial literature, sometimes called New English literature(s)), is a body of literary writings that reacts to the discourse of colonization” (60).

The global migration of Indians is the result of economic liberalization which helps both the domestic and diaspora writers to get name and fame. Their writings are

very useful in promoting the interest and understanding of Indian culture among the English-speaking countries. In the present scenario, Indian English fiction has become more complex and thematically richer as a result of writers settled abroad. Moreover some of the writers divide their time between India and abroad and have contributed much to English Literature. Such writers provide an inside view of the problems faced by the displaced people in their adopted country. The contribution of Indian women writers in English is large and their creations helped in the formation of new theories like feminist theory.

The thesis entitled “Cross-Cultural Consciousness in Select Novels of Manju Kapur, Meera Syal and Sunetra Gupta” examines various problems which arise due to the interference of native and alien culture. It analyses the important aspects of culture in every man’s life and the role of culture in the psychological behaviour of diverse characters.

The novels selected for the study depict the new Indian woman as a person who briefly rebels by abandoning the identity constructed for her by society but who returns to it after a failed attempt at forging a new identity for herself. The Indian women writers like the new Indian women, are dissatisfied with their status and identity in the present world but are unable to find satisfactory solutions to their problems. They, therefore, ultimately settle back into the identities assigned to them with a renewed awareness of their situation.

The introductory chapter gives a brief account of the Indian writers in English from the pre-independent India to the modern Indian writers. A short study has been made to record the entry of the Indian women writers in English into the world literature.

This chapter also traces the beginning of diaspora writings and the writings which are produced by the Indian writers settled in other foreign countries. Then the chapter moves on to introduce the writers chosen for the study with special references to their works.

The second chapter titled “The Images of New Women in Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman*” highlights the rapid changes discovered in the image of women and their embracing of new images in both their personal and public life. In her writings Kapur emphasises the issues in the context of patriarchy, marriage, family bond and man-woman relationship. It is also worth to note that Kapur believes in the equality of men and women and also thinks that there is a man in every woman and a woman in every man.

In a culture where women’s individuality is shadowed but considered, their role in a marital affair is central with all kinds of subjugation and anguish. It is interesting to see the sudden emergence of a new group of women writers with their revolutionary ideas with which they try to destroy the clutches framed against the female community. They have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity.

The underlying theme in Kapur’s novels is human relationship especially the relationship between mother and daughter and between husband and wife. In all the relationships women occupy the essential role and consequently the narration shifts through her feminine consciousness.

Kapur, the noted novelist in her maiden venture portrays three generations of women. Kasturi, the first generation woman exemplifies the society which prevents women entering school and thrusts marriage upon them not bothering about their willingness. The second generation Virmati who tries to bloom as a ‘new woman’ undergoes too many sufferings but tackles things with all her knowledge and intelligence. Ida, Virmati’s daughter whose name means ‘a blank slate’ is courageous

enough to write her own destiny. Kapur's real talent lies in the way she portrays each protagonist with their peculiar characteristics.

Kapur's description of the women characters in a complex society with its varied cultural values is explained by Honey Sethi and Seema Dhilon as:

Taking into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the women's question, despite basic harmony needs to be tackled in relation to the socio-cultural situation. The impact of patriarchy on the Indian Society varies from the one in the west. Manju Kapur has her own concerns, priorities as well as her own ways of dealing with the predicament of her women protagonists. The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the tradition and traditional values of family and society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. (55)

The novels of Kapur investigate the chaos that the women encounter while caught between tradition and modernity. The conflict for autonomy and separate identity remains an incomplete struggle. It also reflects the life women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society. Her novels also focus on the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values and the women's question in a socio-cultural situation.

Kapur's *A Married Woman* is an alluring love story that is set at a time of political and religious disorder and it is told with sympathy and intellect. Kapur through Astha represents the aspiring Indian women community with their individuality. She also spreads the message that women should be self-confident, self-reliant and rational. Having faith in the inner strength of womanhood Kapur hopes that a meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense.

Astha, the heroine in *A Married Woman* wishes to break the boundaries and proceeds on the path of full human status which has become a threat to Hemant, her husband and to his male superiority. However she finds herself trapped between the demands of the modern developing society and the restraints of the ancient prejudices. But still she proceeds forward to set out a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship.

Kapur has her own concerns, priorities as well as her own ways of dealing with the predicament of her women protagonists. Her female characters are not silent sufferers but upholders of the tradition and the traditional values of family and society. She is no longer presented to be a passive character. In presenting the inner subtlety of a woman's mind, Kapur displays a mature understanding of the female psyche. In a nutshell she manages to blend the personal with the external life.

Although the cultural ethos has given the female gender a sense of security, it has also burdened them with more responsibilities. For so many years women were given subaltern status but it is not the case with the new women because the western influence and education help the modern women to select their roads irrespective of all sorts of barriers. The Indian English fictions in the recent years portray their women with their new images. Kapur, the contemporary Indian women writer exemplifies in *Difficult Daughters* and *A Married Woman* the struggles and the sufferings of her heroines to demolish the age-old, oppressive customs forced on them in order to be emancipated.

The third chapter "Diasporic Consciousness in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*" examines diasporic pressures undergone by Syal's characters in her first and second novel respectively *Anita and Me* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*. *Anita and Me* presents the experience of the first and the second generation immigrants in the foreign land. The novel also discovers aspects like cultural shock,

alienation, assimilation, longing for the ancestral home and the different attitudes between the first and the second generation migrants.

The first person narration of *Anita and Me* helps the protagonist Meena to recount the novel in her own point of view. This narrative technique facilitates a lot in bringing out the psyche of Meena who assumes that her identity is somewhere in her home land and understands that searching for identity in a host land is futile. Meena, who has never visited her home of origin, has started to imagine her land through the information she gathers from her elders and longs to visit the mystic land.

The encounter of the Eastern and the Western ways of life generates hybrid characteristics amongst the Indian migrants especially among the second generation settlers. This is well brought out through their food habits, attires and their communal ceremonies. Meena, is an extremist in establishing herself as a pure Britain and so she selects Anita Rutter, a native of Britain to attain her British identity. Poornima and Unnikrishnan inscribe Meena's longing for Anita's friendship as:

Meena craves for her identity as a pure British. So, she selects Anita Rutter as her guide and mentor in the host land. She finds Anita to be a disruptive girl in her village. She admires Anita for being so and feels proud to be in her gang. She expects Anita to spend more time with her than she does with the other girls. (2)

As a result of diaspora there is an intermingling of the past and the present. Each generation of immigrants has their own predicaments. Meena struggles to live in her new world but her parents try to inculcate the customs and the traditions of their origin land. As an independent girl Meena neither participates wholeheartedly in the cultural services organised by her parents and their extended family members nor copies the behavioural practises of her white friends.

Daljit, Meena's mother is an embodiment of Indian culture. She remains "a simple Punjabi girl suffering from cultural shock, marooned and misplaced in Wolverhampton" (*AM* 9). She has the habit of wearing Punjabi outfits and jewels during the evening parties in their home where most of their Indian friends take part with the same Indian attire. Though she is against the culture of the host land, Daljit never fails to move along with the western culture. Meena being a second generation character and born in Britain has her own views and regards for her homeland and her way of observing the homeland is not as much intimate as that of others. She has been introduced to her relatives by her father through their photos. Syal's handling of flashback scenes that took place in India brings the country of origin alive to the mind of the young Meena who has been ignorant of them. Samanta while discussing the feelings of second generation immigrants towards their host land and home land, remarks as:

The second generation of characters begins to interact with the English society in their own ways. However, for those characters, there is no home country. For them, the concept of home is a nonentity as they have no place to call their own. India to them is just the land of their ancestors and as such they never feel the same nostalgic feeling for India as that of their parents. (108)

Meena never longs for visiting her native land until the arrival of her maternal grandmother, whereas her parents experience nostalgia for they left behind them the land of cultural heritage.

Syal as a second generation diasporic writer of Indian origin has skilfully knitted in *Anita and Me* the lives and plights of both the first and the second generation immigrants. Syal who is different from her fellow writers is preoccupied with the feelings and perceptions of adolescent girls and young adults. The women characters in

Syal's fictional world tackle the problem of balancing the cultures of the homeland and the host land.

Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* traces the different perspectives of the Asian-British women. Syal, a South Asian deals with the mystery of the South Asian British women who have made Britain their home but longing for another home in India which is so mythological than actual. Syal's characters are the reflection of herself in the matter related with their feelings towards their actual home in India. Syal has taken efforts to show the cultural shock faced by her prime characters and their realization which helps them adopt their own culture. The confrontation that these three female protagonists experience in their personal and public sphere is meticulously drawn by the novelist throughout the novel.

Syal has presented the three intimate friends who differ from one another in valuing their culture. *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* contains themes such as love, friendship and betrayal. The three friends who are in a different position in their life journey are truly affected by both the western culture and the Indian culture. The host culture though seems to provide comfort in the initial stages of their life takes a sudden twist while moving towards the important aspects of their calibre.

Chila, Tania and Sunita view life in a different angle, but each one of them is conscious of their true origin and they are truly influenced by their real culture and tradition with the help of their parents and the other members of their community. This kind of sensibility often upsets them in all their tasks and decisions. Each one of them is rebellious in their own way. They undergo numerous bitter experiences while trying to prove their identity.

Syal has described Chila, the youngest among the three, as a tender woman who is strictly adherent to her cultural values and not much influenced by the western

tradition. Unlike her friends she waits for a handsome bridegroom chosen by her parents and enjoys the intricacies of marriage ceremony. The author gets the glimpse of Chila's mind and presents it as:

Bloody hell, he was fit and he was hers. She wanted to celebrate. But instead she was mummified in red and gold Emporium, pierced, powdered and plumped up so that her body would only walk the walk of everyone's mothers on all their weddings, meekly, shyly, reluctantly towards matrimony. Chila titled her head with difficulty and took in a deep gulp of air before she began the next perambulation, glad of the momentary rest while Deeps adjusted his headdress. (*LHH* 14)

As an ardent follower of her parental culture which believes in the loyalty in the relationship between the husband and the wife, Chila can't tolerate her husband's relationship with another woman. She is even ready to throw away her friendship when she comes to know that the offender is none other than her friend Tania. But Chila forgives her when Tania helps in bringing her child back from Deepak's hand. Though born and raised in Britain, Chila longs to visit India, a country which she has never visited but which is introduced by her parents through their sharing of experiences. Chila is fed up with the modern culture and her conscience drives her to find her actual self in the land from where her forefathers hail.

As a law student, Sunita is an activist in her college days and fights for women empowerment. Irrespective of her modern thoughts and actions, she is stubborn in marrying a man from her native soil. She thinks of dedicating her entire life looking after her husband and children. Owing to too much of familial burden, Sunita dislikes her husband's inattentive attitude towards their family and children. She laments, "If a

couple can't co-ordinate the mundane tasks of daily life, there's little hope of them managing the bigger, more nebulous issues" (*LHH* 207).

Sunita decides to renew her life by spending her time happily with her friends. When she is attracted towards another man, she is controlled by her moral consciousness that, "I am married" (*LHH* 123). She is aware of her role as a wife and mother which her culture clearly teaches and Sunita realizes her importance of her presence in the family and enters wholeheartedly to resume her obligation. The novelist skilfully narrates Sunita's state as: "She wanted to share all of this with Akash" (*LHH* 227).

Tania is typical among the other two characters who is completely disgusted over her origin culture. She always deviates herself from all kinds of rituals and ceremonies practised by her community people. She distances herself from her family and wishes to live life according to her own wish and will. She wants to be an individual woman and wants to enjoy her loneliness with the company of an English man. Tania has no faith in marriage arranged by her parents as she longs to excel in her career as a media person.

Tania starts to believe that only a man of her same origin can give comfort and happiness. But she fails to recognize that she is against the loyalty of Chila which she has on her. When she is pricked by conscience, she realizes her faulty behaviour, she says "I saw Chila looking at me and I knew. The purity of her, every inhibition scorched away, bleached bone clean. I knew nothing could stop her asking me now" (*LHH* 325). Tania frankly confesses to her friend and expresses her feeling thus, "I ached all over, I wanted desperately to pee, I wanted her forgiveness but I could not lie, not this time" (*LHH* 325). When a situation comes, Tania reunites herself with her family members and greatly mourns for the loss of her father and addresses herself as an "ungrateful daughter" (*LHH* 315).

It is clear from Syal's description of her three protagonists that each character believes that they have been filled with a set of values that form the framework of their lives. Their friendship, religious ceremonies or any gathering of their community give them a sense of belonging. A close examination of Syal's protagonists both in *Anita and Me* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* reveals that in spite of being the second generation immigrants, they try to have a close contact with their traditional norms. The female characters including Meena, Chila, Tania and Sunita at first show a desire to adopt the Western ideas, but constant troubles and turmoil, both from the internal and external agencies ultimately bring them back to the shelter of traditional culture and norms.

The fourth chapter entitled "The Sense of Longing and Belonging in Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* and *A Sin of Color*", analyses the sense of longing and belonging of characters in Gupta's first and fourth novels.

Memories of Rain revolves around Moni, the prime character of this novel and the entire narration takes place in a single week. But it is quite interesting to note that within a week period of time the novelist has unfolded the events that has taken place some ten years before. With the usage of the flash back technique the writer takes the readers to the past and brings them back to the present. It is worth to say that *Memories of Rain* can be regarded as a dramatic monologue where the speaker of this novel describes the pathetic plight of Moni alone.

Gupta has taken a bold effort to make the East and the West to meet but finally arrives at a point that it is rather difficult for the East and the West to unite with each other. Moni's abundant love for England and its literature draw her towards Anthony, an English man who is here in Calcutta to study Bengali theatre. She feels elated when she finds herself standing in the place of Shakespeare and Milton. Moni is grateful to

Anthony because he has taken her to the place of her imagination. She relishes each moment of her time in London.

Like the characters of Syal, Gupta's Moni though rejoices in her fantasy world is slowly engulfed by the thought of returning to her native land Calcutta. She enters into the land of her text with full hope and happiness but is disappointed by both the English man and the English culture.

Memories of Rain, a dense, luminous, stunning novel set in Calcutta and London, illustrates the marriage between Moni, a young lady from Calcutta, and, Anthony, an English man who makes Moni's dream come true. But again he is the reason for her silent sufferings. Anthony has entered Moni's life at the height of a rain storm and flood and that memory of rain still lingers in her thoughts and feelings. Moni is highly disappointed with Anthony's extra marital affair and plans secretly to leave him and his country.

Moni's emotions reveal that her heart is not here in the adopted country; instead it is in India. The stream of conscious narrative provides not just the history of a delicate love but a woman's psychology. Another important aspect of the novel is Tagore's songs which add beauty to the novel. Through Tagore's songs the narrator has described the protagonist's cheerful as well as gloomy temper. Gupta's portrayal of Moni offers an insight into her reluctance to leave and at the same time her feelings which urge her to get comfort from her own culture.

Memories of Rain is a tribute to the Bengali culture and it is Gupta's looking back at a city to which she belonged. The novel is an expression of the author's longing for and her sense of belonging to her country.

Gupta's *A Sin of Color* is a complex love story which ends with a sorrowful note. This is a novel about the three generations of a family whose story unfolds in Oxford and

a house called Mandalay in Calcutta. The first generation characters like Indranath, the patriarch of the Calcutta house and his wife Neerupama spend the entirety of their life in the original family space, whereas the second generation usually goes to and fro, constantly transgressing the space of origins, trying to reconstruct it overseas and dramatically moves back to it. The second generation is represented by Debendranath, Indranath's younger son who falls hopelessly in love with Reba, his brother's wife.

In order to escape from his passion Debendranath flees to England to achieve his intention of becoming a professor. Gupta has aptly captured the emotive state of Debendranath who struggles hard to remove the memory of Reba from his mind. She writes, "And here he was now, far, far away, tutoring himself to cherish without agony what little he had of her, she who could never be his and from whom he had really never had any indication that she might have wanted to exchange her life for one with him at its center" (SC 25).

The great house Mandalay in Calcutta plays a vital role in the life of all the characters in *A Sin of Color*. Debendranath, one of the main protagonists spends his happiest days of his life in that great mansion. He temporarily disappears himself from there and marries Jenifer, an English woman and finally staged a drama of his own death. The narrator of this story remarks while Debendranath hires a punt to have a small ride on the river Cherwell as, "He stretched back and closed his eyes and let in the same shadows, and found them suddenly too heavy for his wide-meshed thoughts; memories fell through him like pieces of tarnished cutlery. He opened his eyes and realized that he was too full of holes to return to this world" (SC 45).

Niharika, Reba's daughter, representing the third generation in *A Sin of Color*, is brilliant and a scholarly young woman who in order to uncover the mystery behind his uncle's life goes to Oxford. It is clear from Niharika's character that *A Sin of Color* is a

semi-autobiographical novel of Gupta. Niharika resembles the author in many ways starting from writing and doing research.

A Sin of Color is a novel of rare beauty which narrates a mesmerizing tale of mystery and unrequited love. Debendranath's love for Reba drives him to England and his haunting memory of her becomes the reason for his disappearance from his family in India, friends in England and his devoted wife. The novel is divided into seven chapters which are titled after various colour names. The very title of the novel indicates sins that the characters commit. Debendranath performs the sin of having fallen in love with his brother's wife, moves to a foreign country unable to get rid of his love stages a drama of his own death. He seeks refuge in his house in Calcutta, the almost deserted house, where his niece Niharika is the only resident. She summarizes his absence thus: "You were able to reinvent yourself entirely" (SC 171).

Niharika, who is crushed by her conscience returns to India to her ancestral house in Calcutta. Maswood Akhter writes about Niharika's condition as "Niharika later returns to her house in Calcutta in order to write a book on the disappearance of her enigmatic uncle Debendranath. Writing provides a partial release from the unbearable pain of her love for Daniel Faradey who has left her for Australia" (28). Finally she exiles herself with the person whom she loves. Both the characters have chosen exilement as a punishment for their sins.

Gupta, again in *A Sin of Color* adopts flash back technique to give the essence of the novel. Her language is something classic and her unconventionally long and elegant sentences delight her readers. Gupta in both her first and fourth novel tries to examine the human heart, human love and the mistakes one commits regardless of self-control. Gupta has earned popularity with her usage of stream of consciousness technique, sentence construction and clever employment of words. Both the novels are written with

expertise and Gupta's characters are all distressed to find a new place of belongingness besides longing for their home in their mother soil.

The fifth chapter of this thesis titled, "Converging Divergence" encompasses the various similarities and dissimilarities found in the select novels of Kapur, Syal and Gupta. The main characters of these writers undergo sufferings due to cultural clash and cultural consciousness. Kapur's female characters experience the disparity between tradition and modernity. Syal's characters living in their in-betweens realize the importance of their home culture and proudly identify themselves with the same. Gupta's protagonists regret their folly for having chosen the wrong choices and at the end seek refuge in their home and home land.

The sixth chapter titled "Creative Techniques" highlights the diverse techniques adopted by Kapur, Syal and Gupta. All these three writers are unique in exercising techniques of their choices. Kapur is clever enough in handling of her new women; Syal excels in dealing with the diasporic perspectives whereas Gupta distinguishes herself from the usual form of writing and marks a new style in the art of writing.

The final chapter "Summation" is a brief account of all the chapters of this thesis. There is ample scope for further research on the writings of Kapur, Syal and Gupta. A study on Kapur and Syal can be undertaken by future scholars to analyse themes such as feminism, mother-daughter relationship, man-woman relationship and identity crisis. Both their novels can be studied from various psychological and sociological perspectives. Further research can be done on Syal and Gupta based on diasporic similarities. Syal's novel *Anita and Me* gives scope for the researchers to do research on bildungsroman elements hidden in the novel. Further research can be done on comparing Kapur with Jane Austen in the subject of love and marriage. Such studies will enhance the transcultural vision.