

Feminism Perspective in the Novel A SIN OF COLOR

Sunetra Gupta

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Abstract - Literary works is one amongst the cultural merchandise created to notice and communicate the phenomena happened in the society. From a piece of many literary writings, the reader can re-find variety of events, social development, culture, and politics happened in a society over the period of time. The importance of gender justice and equality, known as feminism, is one amongst the existing phenomena in Indian Diasporic literary works. This paper aims to find out socio-cultural background of Sunetra Gupta and gender perspective in her novel *A SIN OF COLOR* supported a review of diasporic literature. Sunetra Gupta in her fiction shows how a diasporic individual is in an irresolute position and cannot place oneself below an inimitably elite meaning of self. The hyphenated closeness between two characterizing selves highlights the personality emergency making it a natural traditional for diasporic life. Most significantly, the self is seen in both as local and outsider under the conditions. These things clearly conflicting positions do cause sentiment uneasiness in diasporic life. However, the condition can be continued through self-moulding. An investigation of a range of works of Sunetra Gupta, indicates not just how the vagrant Indians are progressively being acknowledged by the West yet additionally how this diasporic Indian adapts to such a moving plane of acknowledgment through the never-ending procedure of production of identities. This novel is concerning three generations of a family whose story unfolds in Oxford and a house called Mandalay in Calcutta.

Key words: gender perspective, self-consciously, colorless, feminism.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the present novel, the story told that the three generations chapters titled *Amethyst, Indigo, Azure, Jade, Saffron, Ochre and Crimson*. However, the color motifs remain undeveloped as they fail to weave themselves into the texture of the narrative. Despite the mysterious and theoretical crises of the journey of the family, *A Sin of Color* remains a colorless novel written self-consciously and with little naturalness. Neither Oxford nor Calcutta comes alive as separate locations.

Sunetra Gupta belongs to the age of "Indian English" writers whose members are essentially multi-ethnic in their cultural and linguistic affinity though they are often read and promoted mainly as "Indian" writers in the West. Sunetra Gupta born in Calcutta in 1965 and spend her childhood in Africa. She is a Professor of Theoretical Epidemiology at the University of Oxford and is the author of five novels. "*Memories of Rain*", her first fiction work, has been awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 1996. She has written four novels: *Memories of Rain*, *The Glassblower's Breath*, *Moonlight into Marzipan*, and *A Sin*

of Color. She has been recognized as a "prodigious talent" by the Independent on Sunday and her work has been pronounced as "brilliant" by *The Times* and many prestigious Journals, Newspapers and critical sources. Most of Sunetra Gupta's protagonists belong to Bengali families, they possess the stereotypical upbringing, but they are highly educated and their education gives them an ability to make decisions without surrendering their self-respect. They display their survival instinct in the worst situations without getting frustrated or emotionally stranded.

II. THREE GENERATIONS OF THE STORY

Sunetra Gupta's novel, *A Sin of Color* is a book, written in consciously literary English that sets out to tell the story of three generations with their roots in a house called Mandalay in Calcutta. It begins with an impossible and purely platonic love between a young man called Debendranath Roy and his sister-in-law Reba. Bought from the British officer by a wealthy Bengali family, it is to Mandalay that Indranath Roy brings his smart and

innocent bride. Mandalay who is Indranath's eldest son brings his brilliant wife, the beautiful, collected and successful woman with whom the younger brother, Debendranath Roy, falls in love. Fleeing from the house, his family and his apparently futile love, Debendranath moves to Oxford and marries an English woman, whom he largely neglects. Later Debendranath allegedly drowned. It is left to his niece, Niharika, another of those smart, successful women who stock Gupta's narratives and share many similarities with the author, to provide the finishing touches. It turns out that Debendranath fled back to India where he lived incognito. His blindness drives him back to the family and to his writer-niece Niharika, who is almost the only family member living in Mandalay, now in ruins and abandoned by the next generation.

III. THEMATIC CHARACTERS

Sunetra Gupta's novels share many stylistic, narrative and thematic characteristics: a adroitness with literary language, a profusion of canonical references (ranging from Euripedes to Tagore) a tendency headed in versions of the stream-of consciousness technique, a concentration on brilliant protagonists spanning the worlds of science and literature, and thin plots resolved by or revolving around significant events such as deaths, disappearances, drowning, suicides etc...

In the Indian literature Gupta occupies two dominant trends in contemporary Indian English fiction—that of magic realism of Salman Rushdie and Vikram Chandra and that of "domestic realism" of Vikram Seth and Anita Desai. At the first sight, Gupta seems to belong to the first group, as she usually writes about individuals defined by their family relationships in a superficial realistic manner. But much of Gupta's compositions are also sustained by the suggestive, non-metaphorical language of magic realism in extracts like this one: "From North Bengal, Indranath Roy had journeyed into the foothills of the Himalayas, to seek out the Japanese Cedars, with which they would line their new maker of wardrobes—one of these they later had in their bedroom, and whenever she opened it, the room would fill with the fragrance of his shapeless desire to know and possess her". Gupta is not the only Indian English writer to use the language of magic realism in a narrative that is not really magic realist. Arundhati Roy has already done it in a more complex level in the work *The God of Small Things*.

A Sin of Color is about the choices made by its two main protagonists, Debendranath Roy and his niece Niharika during two different time periods, when both are in their late youth. The book oscillates between Calcutta, rural Bengal, Oxford and the US, with most of the action taken place in Calcutta and Oxford. Both are the victims of unreciprocated love; this colors their lives profoundly, eventually leading them to their sins. Debendranath Roy with Reba married to his brother, famous, an artiste,

musician and actress and Niharika with Daniel Faraday, married, friend of Morgan and the last man to have seen Debendranath alive. The different sections of the book are named after different colors, starting with amethyst and progressing through indigo, azure, jade, saffron, ochre and ending with crimson.

Multiple sins of color, all revolving around the ones in which forms the basis of the book; Debendranath's retirement from this world, his ultimate freedom from the clutches of relationships and demands that are imposed upon the most of us by the very fact that we live in the society that we do, a retirement that starts when he is assumed drowned in the waters of a river in Oxford. The sin of wanting true freedom, away from all bindings, social or otherwise; the ability to do what you want, when you want, the way you want to. The sin of sanyas or abandonment as it can be stated in the Indian context. The book keeps jumping back and forth according to the time, sketching the lives and times of three generations of the Roy family and the house of Mandalay.

There are a lot of imitations, yet it does not affect the book's intent. So, though we know of Debendranath's love for Reba in the first ten pages or so and of Niharika and Daniel midway through the book, each repeated paragraph throughout the book reveals a new vignette, a new facet that further enhances our understanding of the relationships and keeps our interest alive. Almost like a Lego building block, to be built a little at a time, slowly and suspense fully. Sunetra Gupta's use of words is brilliant. The words would play with each other, falling and tumbling, in long, uneven sentences, describing people, events and thoughts with the same liveliness as a film scene capturing the delicate nuances between the protagonists using gestures and mood-lighting with a minimum of action.

The solemnity of their exchange is trace with the truthfulness of lovemaking, the desperate need to lay bare the soul before divesting the body of its wrappings, the need to delight in common goals and to rake out the differences of opinion before entering into a concourse where nothing of that sort is likely to matter, the need to establish faith and hope before progressing to love. Each character also evolves over a time, a paint stroke at a time, such that even near the end of the book, there is still some new aspect that we delightfully discover. So Reba at the beginning of the book is a beautiful woman who tinted her rooms nicely, baked excellent cakes, played exceptionally well on the esraj, and could scorn a person's indelicacy of manner with the faintest tilt of her eyebrows. Towards the end of a formidable silence seemed to descend upon the forests of pine and cedar as she walked in stately silence through them with her daughter, and when the seashore she burst into song, the waves would foam in awe at her feet. She was still as aloof to strangers, but now she seemed to be more distracted than dismissive.

Debendranath was a consciously crafted character because neither his love for Reba makes him despicable nor his feigned suicide or abandoning Jennifer exposes him to hate. The text strategically reveals intricacies of man's attitudes towards the very idea of love tinged with the vagaries of his psychic conditions, his waywardness. Carried away by his predominant moods he simply oscillates between his self-defined notions of love absolutely unmindful of the disorders and devastations he brings in women's lives.

The women, on the contrary, infused with the cultural transformations or indoctrinations with traditional inscriptions; invariably surrender to the male supremacy. Debendranath Roy loves a woman who is already married so he cannot express his love for her. But he gets married to Jennifer who passionately loves him. Debendranath abandons Jennifer as he is unable to forget Reba and his feelings are so powerful that when he returns after twenty years he has the same yearning.

Despite his irresponsible behaviour towards Jennifer, she loves Debendranath with honesty and humility. After being informed about his arrival from the dead, Jennifer travels to India to look after him. Jennifer remembers Reba's unkind and hostile treatment when young, yet she does not possess any bitterness towards her. She genuinely cares for Reba's children and showers motherly love and affection upon them. She is criticized for her 'Englishness and delicateness.'

IV. FEMINISTIC CONCEPT

The novel is a love story, but has fine textures of feminism. Sunetra Gupta has presented women of three generations from the same family. She depicts their lives and ambitions. Neerupama Roy, the mother of Debendranath Roy who had the aspiration to take formal education but was deprived on the domestic account and later to keep pace due to failed child-births. She had to succumb to tradition and accept the maternal responsibilities. She, however, shows exemplary courage and steadfastness in meeting the pressures of the gender roles ruthlessly imposed upon her.

The woman of the next generation is Reba, who is married into the Roy family. She belongs to a family with refined musical taste and talent; she possesses conspicuous aesthetic sagacity towards life. When Debendranath meets Reba's father on a regular basis for scholarly discussions, he realises how Reba must have longed to get back to her maternal home. Reba makes many changes in the Mandalay and as a result her mother-in-law too starts imitating her. But unfortunately she goes mad and Debendranath considers Reba responsible for his mother's madness. It is only after his frequent visits to the house, Debendranath realises the magnanimity of things she did which he considered as trivial.

We, then notice a change in his feelings towards her. His realization however, cannot undo the harm he had done. His attempt at justifying his own male-weaknesses, in terms of immaturity and raw youth cannot expiate the wrong done to a woman in weaker moments. Sunetra Gupta has colored this section 'indigo', which communicates everything that is deep like the deep blue sea. It highlights the depth of Reba's loneliness and at the same time the depth of Debendranath's feelings for Reba. Reba treats Jennifer with dislike and without any affection.

But these things do not bother Debendranath as he immerses himself in Reba's loneliness. Reba, on the other hand seeks consolation to survive through what Sunetra Gupta, with remarkable economy of words, renders as 'morbid dedication to art.' Reba has been presented throughout the novel from Debendranath Roy's perspective. Her loneliness is felt and expressed by him. He calls Reba a woman who wields command and respect from everybody and appreciates her for that.

Debendranath's feelings for Reba underscores the highly restrained tone of a woman's aesthetic perceptions and intellectual yearnings that often go un-noticed and forever remain disappointed. The third generation woman is Niharika, Reba's creative and artistic granddaughter of the Roy family. She possesses independent spirit and has her own perception of looking at people and situations. Her relationship is stronger with Jennifer than with her own mother Reba. The first section is colored amethyst, which is a blend of red and blue. This hints at the aggressiveness of red, i.e. Neerupama's desire to study and the 'coolness' of blue color signifying her acceptance of familial responsibilities.

Sunetra Gupta concocts a dense richness out of her ingredients. For as well as the contemporary tale of science, with its tangy blend of Bengali and British cultures, there are undercurrents of myth, fairytale, good old-fashioned alchemy and a meaty role for the devil himself. The section 'Azure' describes Niharika. It describes her growth from an innocent girl into a twenty-three year old woman. She expresses her awe at the respectful treatment given to her mother by her co-actors and every other person who was acquainted with her. Niharika's feelings as a growing girl are that of every growing up girl who just wishes to find 'true love.' Or else, as commonly believed that woman always needs to be guarded, she needed a man not to act as, in the words of D.H. Lawrence 'a balancing star'. Not a man who could just love thoroughly well and yet grant her absolute freedom.

V. CONCLUSION

Gupta dexterously delineates the pent up emotions, stealthy feelings of a growing up girl in oriental context:

“She came to reconcile herself with the notion that it was only unrequited love that held any prolonged charm for her that she preferred to adore from a distance, as she did some of her college professors, one or two of her mother’s actor friends, all much older than her, and utterly unaware of the condition of her feelings. She had never had a relationship with a man when she came to Oxford at the age of twenty-three. She had even submitted, albeit reluctantly, to her father’s search for an appropriate mate to accompany her, or better still guard her and shelter her...” (93)

These lines summarises the entire course of life for an Indian girl, who despite her education and talent she has to submit to the will of her father. Sunetra Gupta does not advise women to suffer humiliation and surrender their self-respect. Neerupama Roy fits into this mould by surrendering herself to family and tradition, Reba silently rebels by diverting her attention to music and drama and Niharika fulfills the desire by disappearing with her lover.

Reba’s feelings about love and motherhood are substantial from the viewpoint of a woman’s life Reba’s advice to her daughter is the very basic need for a woman to survive. In the Indian context a woman is unable to love the man she marries and marry the man she loves, and therefore she fulfils her desire by showering her love on her children. The hollow that love creates in her life is fulfilled by bearing children that brings a sense of completeness to her existence.

The section ‘jade’, a color that represents the lack of interest or pleasure in anything talks about Daniel Faraday’s departure from Niharika’s life. And this accounts for her lack of interest or pleasure in her routine activities. She, however, befriends Morgan, a friend of Daniel and establishes a friendly rapport with him. Niharika tries to understand a woman’s life by contemplating on Reba’s life, Jennifer’s life Daniel’s wife Alison’s life.

The life of Jennifer is projected as a life that was created only for abuse. She loves Debendranath Roy but does not get love in return neither does she bear children. Throughout her life she is cheated upon by her husband. Yet, she takes him back to London after his return and vows to care for him. The section ‘saffron’ is dedicated to the reunion of the family and Jennifer and her husband Debendranath Roy. The final section ‘crimson’ the color of love unites the lovers Niharika and Daniel. Niharika, too, like her uncle disappears but she disappears with her lover. Sunetra Gupta has created suspense with the open-ended novel. However, the novel beautifully elucidates a woman’s mind in different stages of life, situations and cultures.

All in all, this is a brilliant book, soulful and written with expertise. It flows slowly, but it is never boring. I strongly recommend this to anyone who is interested in good writing and good storytelling, but does not feel attracted to the exotic side of many Indian writers.

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