Chapter-III

Trauma of Dislocation: Women in Sunetra Gupta’s Fiction
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Sunetra Gupta is another woman writer belonging to first generation diasporic women writers settled in England. Born in Calcutta in 1965 to a talented and socially privileged couple Dhruba Gupta and Minati, Sunetra had a great exposure to both art and science. Due to her father's challenging career of teaching in different countries she has spent most of her childhood in Ethiopia, Zambia, Liberia, England and America. During her teens the family returned to Calcutta and under the guidance and inspiration of her father Sunetra has absorbed Indian culture and Bengali culture especially Tagore's works. Later she moved to USA and graduated from Princeton University in Biology and completed PhD from London University in 1992. Presently she is working as a professor of Theoretical epidemiology at Oxford University. Married to an Englishman she now lives in Oxford with her husband and two daughters.

Sunetra's early fiction writing is in Bengali and she is an accomplished translator of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. She has published five English novels till date, a few short stories and number of scientific articles. As an accomplished novelist she has won several literary awards of high reputation and nominated to a few. She is a recipient of Sahitya Academy Award for her Memories of Rain in 1997, Southern Arts Literature Award in 2000, Orange Prize Longlist Award 2000, and shortlisted for Crossword Prize in 1999. The present
study is based on the early novels namely *Memories of Rain* (1992), *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993), *Moonlight into Marzipan* (1995) and *A Sin of Colour* (1999). Her last novel *So Good in Black* is published in 2009 after a gap of ten years. Apart from the above novels she has published a short story collection *Strangers and Ghosts* and some essays & lectures. Her scientific work is also acknowledged in the field and won her scientific awards and noted one among them is the Royal Society Rosalind Franklin Award in 2009. As she herself acknowledges and even her fiction reveals it greatly, on Gupta’s creative writing and scientific career there is a tremendous influence of her father and also the cultural influence of Bengal especially Calcutta.

Most of Gupta’s writing is on migrant and diasporic sensibility and for this her background of multiple migrations to various and diverse cultural sites is responsible. Though her later migration is for independent educational purpose earlier migrations have made a definite mark on her sensibility. As she had come in to contact with different cultures, civilization and languages her experiences of adjustments and accommodations have been more chaotic and traumatic which marks her fiction. Similarly her last migration and settlement in England, a country which is more rigid towards its immigrants in terms of race, caste, class and ethnic differences, has also left marks on her diasporic life which is seen in her fiction. These strained situations of migration and the tensions of adjustment finally move a person towards clinging to one’s ethnic identity firmly. The memory of the ancestral land, its recreation in fiction to create a reroute to homeland is a common diasporic theme, which is characteristic of Sunetra Gupta’s fiction. Hence she
writes about the fissured identities, trauma of dislocation and memories of nation and a gradual move is also seen in the personalized experiences of men and women in the highly globalised postmodern world which is transient, unstable and ever moving. Commenting on her works Sushiela Nasta writes in *Home Truths: Fiction of South Asian Diaspora in Britain thus:*

A number of critics have voiced difficulties in placing the imaginative world of Gupta’s fiction. For, her work is not only radical in its experimentations with narrative form and voice, but also resists easy categorization, whether in terms of gender, race or cultural location. In its refusal to either sit easily within the ‘migrant camp’ of contemporary postcolonial literature or unproblematically within the dominant models of a western modernity, it calls attention to the shifting cultural axes of its own genesis (238).

In the light of the above quotation one can see that Gupta’s fiction has a complex structure with interwoven themes with a focus on gender. Whether it is personalized experiences or migrant experiences they are delineated through the portrayals of women. No wonder Gupta is compared to modernist writers like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce. The *Kirkus* reviews place her next to Virginia Woolf for her complex and technical style of writing. For this acclamation in the west Sunetra Gupta has made her country proud and her works need proper acknowledgment. The present chapter therefore examines Gupta’s fiction to provide a gendered reading of a postcolonial, postmodern, diasporic Indian English
woman writer. The chapter discusses the themes of dislocation and trauma caused by it, the clashes of east and west in forming identity of women in diaspora, man-woman relationships in the marriage bond and expressions of sensual elements like body and sexuality, side by side the techniques of narration and stylistic aspects of fiction that marks her works.

I

Dislocation and the trauma caused by displacement; a desire to find home in an alien country and remembrance of the home left behind; a desire to return which is impossible, hence to create an imaginary homeland out of memory; these are the characteristic features of diasporic writing. In recreating imaginary home, memory plays an important role. In the light of this proposition Sunetra Gupta’s fiction fits into the category of diasporic theory. All her five novels are set against the backdrop of diaspora. They spatially span three major continents namely Europe, America and Asia; the three major countries England, America and India with their three major cities London, New York and Calcutta respectively. Gupta’s history of multiple migrations through the imagination and memory lane play an important role in creating the thematic patterns of her fiction, since dislocation and re-routing to homeland are her major themes. This aspect of diaspora is naturally linked to the issue of identity of a migrant. As the theory of diaspora posits, when the cultural identity of the ethnic and original culture of a migrant comes in clash with the diasporic identity, people tend to stick to their ethnic identity than the adopted one, as their ethnic identity gives them a sense of belonging and security in a foreign location. This concept is clearly visible in Gupta’s women characters
who refuse to assimilate with the culture of the migrated land. Though there are male protagonists in her fiction women are at the focal point and they take precedence over men. The major women characters belong to West Bengal, especially Calcutta. They belong to upper and middle class society and are high caste Hindu women. They are also educated and socially privileged women, or aspirants of education and refinement. Similarly women as minor characters belong to different cultures but they are also women of exile. Thus Gupta’s women represent gendered experiences of diaspora. One can also see the reflection of Gupta the writer in their delineation to certain extent as they are the recreations of memory. Her diasporic characters are nostalgic and live in the memory of their past which oscillates between their past and present. Hence Gupta uses stream of consciousness technique as her narrative mode in her two major novels, *The Glassblower’s Breath* and *Memories of Rain*. Thus “making memory the subject of her fiction” Gupta creates the “multiple layers of a diasporic subjectivity” (Nasta 213) of her women characters and deals with the issues of their identity and selfhood.

In *Memories of Rain*, memory plays an important role in the construction of Moni’s identity and selfhood. As the title of the novel appropriately suggests the narration of the whole novel swings back and forth through the memory lane of Moni, the protagonist who goes through the events of her life in her mind. The complete action of the novel takes place during one week’s time. Moni is born in Calcutta’s middle class Hindu Brahmin family and her roots are firm in her Indian cultural upbringing. Besides being educated middle class family it clings to the
colonial legacy and is anglophile in nature. Her brother submits himself to the influence of his colonial masters and often teases his sister for her puritanical habits of the Brahmin caste, when she refuses to eat anything in the company of his artist friends:

Gayatri, swinging her legs from the stage, asks her to eat something, but she shakes her head, she suspects that the meat is beef, she knows that they all eat beef, and that the food has been brought from the Muslim restaurant down the road. Her brother teases her about her conservative Brahmanic habits, and embarrassed, she retires to a corner of the vast hall ... and yet she feels detached, she is part of another world (MOR15).

Her love of English literature as a college student influences her romantic vision of England and as the author puts it “she loved Heathchiff before she loved any man” (177). When she meets Anthony she falls in love with him as he hails from Shakespeare’s England. Her anglophile father agrees to solemnize the marriage with only one condition that it should be a proper Bengali wedding and she marries Anthony with purely Brahmin rituals. When she goes to England after her marriage her basic habits of dress, demeanor and language do not change. She remains a sari clad, shy, gentle, half graduate, Indian middle class woman with her cultural traits. Initially after her arrival at London when she visits her Indian relative, an aunt, settled in England, who suggests her to wear western clothes and offers some of her own which is a common practice of many migrated women. But
Moni refuses to accept the clothes and continues in her own style. Her affiliation to her identity and the culture of her mother country is very much seen in her devotion to Tagore’s songs which she remembers and sings at each and every situation of her life. Right from the beginning of her meeting with Anthony she tries to translate them into English for him in her half-English, but is never successful. She accepts this fact that her language of English is inadequate. Initially his interest in her is due to her sweet voice in which she sings Tagore’s songs and later when he is in love with another woman, Anna, her songs reflect only an alien language communicating a silent pain and he loses interest in it. But for Moni it is a part of her identity embedded in the memory of the characteristic rain of Calcutta and Tagore’s songs. So it is her inadequacy of language that makes her unable to express her true feelings to Anthony when she decides to leave him:

The dry words would stick in her throat, her demand of the language would fail her, how did one say, without melodrama, in this language that she had worshipped as a girl, how did one measure one’s words (95).

When Anthony’s friends visit them and conversations begin, she becomes a mute spectator and like a middle class Hindu woman goes inside the room but conducts the acts of hospitality properly in typical Indian style. Though she marries Anthony for her attraction of England and its romantic vision, when she confronts the reality her dreams shatter, especially when Anthony falls in love with Anna. She learns that he has not been faithful to her and has run multiple affairs
even before their marriage, the habit that continues after. This reality is hard to digest for her mild puritanical sensibility because he turns to Anna with an excuse that his growth is stunted and her company is needed to fulfill his intellectual need. Moni realizes that his attraction towards her, “the wild exotic flower of east” is faded with the time, whereas she, Moni, as a typical Hindu woman is still sticking to the duties of a wedded wife, who dreams to age and wither and sit by the side of his grave till the end, and be buried beside him:

> It should have been enough to shift the last embers of such passion between her numb fingers, and wait to die at his side, to be buried deep in a foreign soil by his grave, so that the dust of their bones might mingle and fertilize the same bed of grass (177).

Once Moni is disappointed in love she begins to remember her mother country and the memories of the city of her birth, Calcutta. Its filthy roads, the incessant rain and the common drudgery of life around which she has grown up, make her nostalgic. Memories of rain and the city of Calcutta provide the metaphor for Moni’s existence and identity and offer solace to her torn existence fraught with pain of dislocation. The incessant rain of Calcutta though often brings destruction and damage is a part of existence of its people as the following passage shows:

> A land where the rain poured from the skies not to purify the earth, but to spite it, to churn the parched
fields in to festering wounds, rinse the choked city sewers on to the streets, sprinkle the pillows with the nausea of mold, and yet the poet had pleaded with the deep green shadows of the rain clouds not to abandon him (6-7).

The image of rain and its destructive motif reappears in the novel again and again at crucial junctures to recur the idea of Moni’s identity being built upon the memories of rain and Calcutta. As Debjani Ganguly makes an apt observation, “...a torrent of rain images floods the text with evocation of desire, passion, anxiety, deprivation, doom and other myriad emotions”(318). Gupta here uses memory as an instrument to associate Moni’s life with her mother country.

Similarly the city of Calcutta gives Moni a part of her cultural identity which she finds:

Herself severed from the set of collective cultural codes that she took for granted in Calcutta-Tagore songs, the ubiquitous fish curry cooked in mustard oil, the Pujas, the Ganges. In England, she finds these codes ripped apart; they just do not fit. And she is left with the agonizing task of constructing her very own personal patterns with the shards, the traces, the removals of a shattered cultural frame of reference,
that had made sense of her identity in Calcutta”

(Ganguly 314-315).

When Moni decides to return to Calcutta it gives her an agency and individuality to act on her own and gain her selfhood which she was unable to develop earlier in her illusions of being rescued by Anthony who married her and saved her from the painful drudgery of middleclass life. The end of the novel witnesses Moni’s regaining her cultural identity by returning to Calcutta symbolically on Durgapuja day. According to the belief of the people of Calcutta it is the day when the goddess returns to her father’s home as per the Hindu mythology. Moni’s acceptance of her life here, by dedicating herself to the needs of its people, is an act of recognition of her identity by gaining her selfhood. Bidisha Banerjee observes this phenomenon in the following apt terms:

Her (Moni’s) identity is tied up inextricably with Calcutta, her originary home: once her selfhood has been fractured by the experience of diaspora, she must return to Calcutta and embrace her childhood companion and lover darkness. In order to be healed, she must return to Calcutta and resolve her relationship with this city, the consummation of her relationship with darkness simplifies Moni’s return to India and acceptance of the part of her identity that it is tied to her home land and cannot be rejected in favor of a life lived elsewhere (MOR 11).
The evocative images of rain and the city of Calcutta are completely constructed out of memory by Gupta on whom the city and its rain have made an unforgettable impact about which she writes in her essay on Calcutta thus:

The terrible beauty of the rains never failed to resonate within us ... we waited and hoped for the rains, drank in the delicious perfume that rose from the famished earth as the first drops sacked in to it with an excitement akin to lust. Indeed I believe my expectations of romantic love in my youth, at least were largely conditioned by my experience of monsoon, or perhaps more by its poetic treatment not only in the hands of Kalidasa and Tagore but also some of our lesser known writers. ... life death, and love – all seemed to be united by the rhythm of rain, and the perfect translocation of it into song ... it was that Tagore ... his songs of rain that evoke for me most completely the essence of Bengal (Gupta).

Thus Moni’s return to Calcutta is marked with her gain of individual self and the recognition of her identity. Commenting on her position Bidisha Banerjee opines that Moni’s situation and her identity crisis is due to the binary set of oppositions in which she has her true home in her mother country India i.e. her city Calcutta and her diasporic home in London. Her subjectivity has undergone two influences. First, in her native home she comes under her brother’s influence in the
beginning and later in her diasporic home she is influenced by her husband Anthony. The second set of binary influences is seen between the man Anthony as a lover in her native home and as a husband in her diasporic home. These binaries influence her to such an extent that she is unable to form her own diasporic identity. But through the medium of her memories her decision to go back to Calcutta is as a result of the interpretation of her own ambivalent position which Bhabha describes in his *The Location of Culture*:

> The intervention of the third space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference and ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representative in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code ... the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the western nation (206).

Moni’s ambivalence is seen in her duality to leave England and go back to Calcutta. She is aware that England is a home of material comforts which she is now used to. She will miss her neat tidy kitchen with its mechanical appliances; the pure uncontaminated food items like milk, grains, fruits, meat; the house with modern comforts especially her beautiful bathroom compared to her semi dark, damp bathroom of Calcutta. As against this material wealth her natal home Calcutta offers her a spiritual wealth and mental peace in spite of its old dingy houses, filthy roads with sewage splattered, and people with poverty and misery. It is here that she can identify herself as an individual soul and will feel at home.
Here her existence will have a meaning in serving others and being wanted. Since Moni’s cultural interpretation takes place in her psyche, in her third space, this helps her to form her own identity out of this ambivalent situation so:

Moni’s return to Calcutta.... is one way of avoiding this anxiety. Moni also uses the space of diaspora to radically re-evaluate her own identity so that her return is not about recuperating an ossified past, but rather about a new beginning (Banerjee 3).

Esha the protagonist in Moonlight into Marzipan also sticks to her ethnic identity in her diasporic condition. Esha accompanies her husband Promothesh to London, as he gets an offer to undertake a scientific project on the discovery he has made in India. His invention is to turn the gold into grass which means it will solve the food problems of the third world countries, which wins him a sponsorship by a philanthropist Sir Percival Wilde. For Esha this migration is of a temporary nature and at the end of five years there is a hope of return, which she expresses to Yuri Sen:

We shall most definitely return after five years, said Esha. We come not in search of creature comforts, as many have done before us, we come not in search of a better life but only to fulfill a mission, which when it is complete, will release us to return (151).
But even her temporary dislocation also brings her the trauma as she very soon learns that her husband has fallen into the attraction of his young Russian scribe Alexandra Vorobyova, who is appointed by Percival to write his autobiography. Before her marriage Esha happens to be a gifted young genius and a scholar in Mathematics engaged in research like Promothesh. But after her marriage with him she turns into a typical Indian wife and scarifies her work to boost his and help carry out the burden of the family to make him successful. On arrival in London her dreams are shattered as Promothesh’s scanty experiments do not yield any result. Besides, his infidelity makes Esha lose heart like Moni in Memories of Rain. Esha goes on remaining silent about these affairs and does not make efforts of assimilation, with the people around her but simply lives on the hope of return. The cultural habits of her dressing, food and social manners too remain unchanged and she feels proud and satisfied to be recognized by the people of England as an Indian Bengali woman. When she first meets Yuri Sen, also a Bengali, in the Party of Percival she un-knowingly asks him in Bengali that she feels that she has met him before this party to which he replies in Bengali, and this makes her ecstatic.

She goes on taking out photographs around with her camera which becomes her ally in pain and keeps sending them to her mother in India, a means of survival and time pass for her. Like a true Indian house wife she goes on adhering herself to her gender role and does not complain to anybody. But when she understands that her husband is not interested in the work of his research and whiling away his time upon a fruitless love of another woman her patience snaps. She is unable to
tolerate this trauma of dislocation combined with her personal tragedy. She finally resolves to end her life. Esha's alienation thus is highlighted in the crisis of her identity, as Esha does not show any signs of assimilation into the migrated land but succumbs to the trauma caused by dislocation, and the highly promised land of dreams turns into a grave for her. As in *Memories of Rain* Moni's character is constructed through the memory lane of Moni, here too, the character of Esha is constructed in the memory of Promothesh who narrates the events in the novel.

The identity of the unnamed Indian protagonist 'You' in *The Glassblower's Breath* is not only ambivalent but transforms into western cultural identity as the novel progresses. Though born in Calcutta due to her multiple migrations the protagonist is unable to settle into any particular identity of her own. She is beautiful, intelligent and belongs to the affluent high class of Calcutta. Using the stream of consciousness technique the novelist constructs and shapes her character out of memory of her lovers. Her migration to England with her father in her tender age robs off the stability and security of home and family in her nurturing, especially her separation from her sister as she is a motherless child. This creates a sense of loss, loneliness and alienation in her which shapes her subjectivity in a strange and bizarre manner. Later, whenever she tries to cling to people like her father, and Avishek her cousin in her childhood; or even to her sister in her teens; and friends like sparrow in youth for the sense of security, they are severed from her or deliberately cut off. When she goes to New York for her college education her subjectivity begins to change. Her Bengali self of the past begins to give way to her migrant self, as a sort of rebellion against the wounds of childhood that she
suffered in her psyche. This is specifically against her father who mercilessly cuts off her ties with Avishek, her tender love of childhood. This transformation of a concrete self changing in to an ambivalent, multiple subjectivity of the self of migrancy is described by Nasta thus:

For although the protagonist’s links to her Indian past—what she calls ‘a half-hearted courtship with nostalgia’ (p35)—are regressively severed as the novel proceeds, the collective cultural codes of her childhood are transcribed into the adult agency and authority of her migrant voice, we know that this process of transcultural permeation has been going on for a long time, for she used as a child, to write stories in two languages, English and Bengali, keeping both in the same exercise book (61).

Thus the protagonist of The Glassblower’s Breath becomes a representative of fissured identity of bizarre migrant world.

The identity of women in their native land on the other hand is depicted intact in Gupta’s novels. Though they are also creations of memory they are more real, in spite of the sense of loss and tragedy that mark their characters. Reba in *A Sin of Colour* is a typical upper class Bengali woman who perfectly carries out her gender roles of a good daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and mother. Born in an upper middle class house hold with an educated background she has a cultural
affiliation to arts and music. When she becomes the daughter-in-law of high aristocrat Indernath Roy she tries to preserve this identity at all costs. When her brother-in-law decides to marry an English woman her reaction is sharp to show her affiliation to her class, caste and social upbringing. She teasingly remarks: “If you marry an English girl, surely she will at least be a noble woman, perhaps even a Countess” (ASOC 53). Similarly her mother-in-law an uneducated woman, whose wishes of education remain unfulfilled due to the priority of marriage, remains a sulky woman but compromises with her lot and remains stuck to her roles. Niharika the daughter of Reba on the other hand goes to England for her higher education and in spite of falling in love with Daniel Faraday she remains a young Indian woman with her fidelity to her lover till the end. She becomes a combination of modernity with education, free thought and independent subjectivity combined with traditional values such as faithfulness towards single man and preservation of her chastity against another. Nevertheless these women are unhappy at heart for the lack of one element or the other. This element of unfulfillment, discontentment and sense of loss and longing is a mark of diasporic unhomeliness which the writer herself has experienced in her diasporic situation and this marks her characterization.

Thus the idea of identity in Gupta’s fiction not only speaks of the fractured identity of a diasporic subject but also stresses on the ambivalence, hybridity and multiplicity of the diasporic identity, a common experience of migrant self, experienced by the writer herself. The home and the nation constructed out of memory marks the characterization of Gupta’s fiction. There is no reflection of a
stable identity in her characters, which oscillates between their past and their present. Besides, these alienated, traumatized souls speak of the rupture experienced by dislocation and its trauma and they live a life suspended between memory and reality, the memory which is surreal like a dream.

II

As noted earlier in this chapter major focus in Gupta’s fiction is on the experiences of women. The major political issues related to gender like patriarchal subjugation, gender discrimination and injustice, and resistance by women are subtly and delicately dealt with in her fiction. Her women characters suffer the gender bias and discrimination inherent in the social system. Inspite of being conscious about these issues they remain helpless and week in resistance due to their class affiliations and social mores. They are not active militants to raise their voices against it. Even when they are wronged and aware of it, they do not resist it actively but show the passive resistance in the form of accommodation, withdrawal, and silent rejection of the situation. They accept their situation and either suffer silently or act to end up in their own tragedies by mitigating themselves surrendering to death, or turn up highly unruly. Only in the case of Moni in Memories of Rain the resistance ends up in the formation of selfhood and turns out to be constructive whereas other women characters are not fortunate enough to gain positive outcome out of their resistance. This section therefore aims to analyze the glimpses of these gender issues and resistance to patriarchy, which are again a part of construction of the memory of a diasporic woman writer and they reconstruct the nation and home.

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The infidelity of the husband to his wife becomes a cause of feminist resistance in *Memories of Rain* and *Moonlight into Marzipan*. The relation of Moni and Anthony in *Memories of Rain* is a kind of love hate relationship from the beginning. Moni is at once attracted to Anthony and also repulsive about his figure and appearance: “Even he, the first time she ever set eyes upon him, had disgusted and fascinated her”. The features that she observes, “The dark hairs plastered to his chalk white legs... his jeans revealing his alabaster calves ... his large, corpse-white muck rinded toes pushed against the bamboo table” (MOR 3), all create mixed feelings in her but still she is fascinated towards him because of the fact that he hails from Shakespear’s England. This motif of love hate relationship recurs throughout the novel as in the end Moni after leaving Anthony returns to Calcutta but still remembers him with nostalgic memories:

> A deep nostalgia had taken root in her, like her, she too had one day placed her painted hand in the trembling palm of one who longed deeply to drink of her existence, and in the years that had passed since, she had watched that desire fade into a beloved dream, would he remember her, as she would remember him (MOR 197).

However this love ends up in their marriage and as per the only wish of her father from this strange alliance, a proper Bengali wedding. But after her migration to England with her husband Moni’s attraction for the English shores and her husband fade away as Anthony’s passion for Moni, and his affair with native girl Anna begins. In the beginning she feels thankful to Anthony from saving her the
fate of an average middle class married woman in her country who lives a life of drudgery and boredom:

What would have been her fate, tainted by his merciless passion, would she have resisted marriage, surrendering finally to some unknown customer of her body, she would remain, a timid teacher of English in some girls school, mother of two, on a humid holiday afternoons she would dust her brass knickknacks her framed portrait of Tagore, teach her children how to sing, and on some unpleasant evenings, the children would peep from the bedroom door to see her standing in tears, as her husband firmly wheeled her drunken brother out of the door... he had saved her from such a sterile existence, from the disaster of a secure and meaningless life (MOR 44-45).

But then she realizes that his infidelity to her is a much deeper injustice than that of a common middle class living, and that he has treated her as only a means of his passion rather than as an individual soul and a true companion, equally having her own thoughts and desires like him. This consciousness of injustice makes Moni to ruminate silently. The author makes clear her mute rebellion in her act of breaking her favourite blue china bowl gifted by her husband in the following words: “The broken blue bowl is her first concrete recognition of approaching disaster, her first rebellion” (MOR 94). The stirring of this
consciousness is seen in Mori as it brings the awareness in her; she contemplates this with the lines of Tagore’s song, “And to day, ten years later, that some cold clarity floods her mind, the numbers of ten years melts suddenly away, a quantum leap in her consciousness (MOR 22).

Sometimes this disappointment and pain give way to the frustrated thoughts of death and suicide in her but finally she conquers these emotions and takes the decision to leave Anthony and go back to her mother country with her six year old daughter: “she telephones a travel agent, never before, since she came to this land, has she ventured to take her destiny into her own hands, not a single division in these ten years, she had never made any arrangements other than for dinner parties.... these ten years” (MOR 23). This is a moment of her gaining her individuality and selfhood, even though she knows that a married daughter returning to her natal home would create problems in her society for her parents, she has to face this all with determination and calmness of mind. This speaks about her resolve to get rid of an unfaithful marriage. Though her resistance is not overt, it is consciously motivated. Her resistance against her expected gender role of wifehood is uncommon in the Indian context, as women are expected to uphold the virtues of patience and tolerance even in the face of unfaithfulness of their spouses. Due to the inadequacy of her language she does not disclose her decision to her husband and cowardly withdraws in silence. This act of Moni still amounts to her passive resistance to his act of infidelity. Speaking about this female passive resistance Anuradha Roy opines that “even otherwise the overt expressions of resistance towards the male gender privileges and injustices done to women”
(110), as in the case of Anthony's unfaithfulness to his wedded wife, a passive resistance or a silent withdrawal is considered as a feminist resistance if the victim is conscious of such injustice to her. According to Roy:

A woman's struggle within the family can (thus) take many forms which a general political struggle does not allow for. They cover a wide range from withdrawal into a world of fantasy and psychotic alienation to accommodation and compromise to a total rejection of the repressive relationship... Indian women do not have to straitjacket themselves in western ideas of selfhood. The differing patterns of revolt against forces of repression create a vibrant sense of the real possibilities of a new way of life (110).

It is therefore clear in Moni's case that she is conscious of her husband's infidelity that has affected her life and her decision that she cannot continue her relationship with Anthony makes her resistances complete. Gupta delicately reveals the development of Moni from a shy, gentle, passive woman to a woman of resolute decision to carve her own life away from the painful marriage.

In case of Esha in *Moonlight into Marzipan* similar conscious resistance in the form of withdrawal is seen, but instead of turning into selfhood it turns into chaotic suicide. She also suffers from the infidelity of her husband Promothesh who falls in love with his scribe Alexandra and neglects Esha for he believes that
for his doom as a scientist Esha’s ambition is responsible. Realizing that her return to her native with success achieved in the mission is impossible, Esha finally throws herself on the railway track and ends her life. But before her death she telephones an unknown woman to tell her motive. This later makes the life of Promothesh tragic as he has to remember her painfully throughout his life since she reminds him of his guilt. Promothesh knows the fact that their marriage was a love marriage and Esha was an utterly devoted, dedicated and self-sacrificing wife:

She would remind me that I was her destiny, poor and unworthy as I was, she had locked her number struck soul with my impoverished genius, together we would save the world (MIM 5).

After her suffering from her three miscarriages, for the sake of her health Promothesh returns with her to her father’s house. There in a dingy garage he sets up a laboratory at her insistence which changes his destiny and it is with her efforts, he gets a sponsorship and goes to England where he is unable to produce any result but falls deeply in love with Alexandra. This highly adulterous relationship pushes Esha into gloom and despair. In an alien land she is already isolated. But then she becomes the victim of her husband’s injustice due to his infidelity to her. Besides Promothesh blames Esha for his unproductive efforts:

If I had not been caught in the cat’s cradle of a woman’s selfless ambition, if I had not become victim
to a woman’s grand desire to possess the universe, and
make me its lord (MIM 148).

Esha has grown up lonely from the beginning. Due to her rich industrial
class and wealthy family upbringing she is devoid of much company of children of
her own age. Her only brother remains away in England and her father and mother
frequently go abroad to visit their son. All these make her a lonely child. After
marrying Promothesh she remains lonely because of her upbringing and also for
her position in the family as a major earner, which makes her isolated from her in-
laws though they take advantage of her earning. This loneliness gets heightened
when she goes to England with Promothesh. These factors make Esha a dislocated
soul: “A poor forlorn bird, caught between two alien cultures” (44), and leads to
her traumatic end. But her acts and words belie her motive of rebelliousness
against her husband. On the night of her death she eats a tub of ice-cream, dresses
herself in rich attire of silk and decorates herself with jewelry purposely and hints
him with the words:

It is a western notion, is it not, she continued that
physical comforts can serve as antidote for pain that a
warm herbal bath can sooth all but deepest of anguish,
and even that for then there is the scented water to fill
your aching nostrils with the bliss of drowning (MIM
17).
Thus all her actions indicate that she is doing the act in revenge and it is her way of escape as well as rebellion from the pain of life. Thus she leaves a scar in the mind of Promothesh whose memory constructs her with guilt and pain of his own sense of failure. As C. Vijayasree comments about the gendered alienation with reference to the diasporic character of Dimple Das Gupta in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Wife* that “though a regressive and negative way of escape, it is a way of self assertion” (55) is true in the case of Esha.

The idea of patriarchal resistance is much more discernible in the portrayal of the unnamed protagonist of *The Glassblower’s Breath*. The protagonist “you” is exposed to the silent suffering of her sister and her confinement in marriage. She is also scarred by her father’s adulterous relationship with his German tutor during her stay in England in her childhood. During the period of her alienation from the family she attaches herself to her cousin Avishek. This is discouraged by her father as he dislikes his wife’s relatives and also that this kind of relationship is not approved in Indian society. These incidents create a seething anger and revolt in her mind towards her father and this takes the shape of protest by developing a frivolous attitude towards sex. Her later liaisons with different men are the acts of resistance to the common morality of both the family and the society. Thus the novel registers the revolt of a daughter in an uncommon fashion fraught with the tension of dislocation.

The strategy of accommodation and compromise as a form of passive resistance is seen in the characters of Reba and her mother-in-law in *A Sin of Color*. Reba’s mother-in-law is married in the young age to Inernath Roy who
sees her in her village and falls in love with her. She has dreams of education and independence through career especially a wish to serve the nation during the freedom struggle. This dream was foiled by the proposal of marriage. Her parents forcibly marry her against her wish. Indernath Roy however promises his young bride that he will help her to get educated. But due to the interference of her mother-in-law and later by her own pregnancy and motherhood her wish remains unfulfilled. This scar in her psyche that her marriage was responsible for her unfulfilled desire weighs heavily upon her mind and though she leads the life of a wealthy wife her full being does not participate in it. Her attitude remains passive with her husband throughout her life irrespective of his love and devotion to her, which he knows in his heart of hearts:

It hurt him deeply that his son would spend the rest of his life with a woman that he did not utterly adore, as he had adored his own wife, even though he had never been able to make her happy. Now she was gone, his only route to any kind of happiness was to believe that he had achieved something she would have desired (SOC 48).

She remains withdrawn in her duties of a mother and wife thereby resists her roles by remaining non-committal. Similar is the case of Reba who in her heart of hearts likes Debendranath which she never reveals either in her words or in behaviour. Being married to his brother she looks after the household but never gives her true self to anybody but the hint to Debendrnath only once. To forget all
her disappointment she engages in the activities of her own and setting herself apart she leads a life of isolation in which no one gets an access. But her words to her daughter subtly reveal her inner world where she has made her life accommodative as she very well knows that this is the price of a woman who has to keep up her gender roles in the society like a good daughter, good wife, good mother and daughter-in-law, when she says:

You cannot marry the man you love, she said, or indeed love the man you marry but do not squander the gift of bearing children, for there is no other like it (78).

The motive of feminist resistance and its repercussions in the female portrayals of Gupta, thus reveal the general feeling of frustrated subjectivities caught in the familial relationships and social circumstances. Injustice meted out to women in the institutions of marriage, love, parenthood and denial of individuality and the restrictions of class and social status are portrayed in her female characters. They are victimized due to the above reasons because of being born as women. Due to their class and social circumstances these women are weak and unable to stand up against this injustice because they are from educated, upper and middle class, upper caste society which does not expect them to rise against gender oppression. They meekly surrender to their situation in order to preserve the distinction of their class. This makes Gupta’s fictional women the victims of personal tragedy, and her fiction, the fiction of personal history of women rather
than the fiction of social reality in spite of the mute & passive resistance of its women.

III

Like most of the women writers of her generation Gupta also makes use of the free and extensive use of expressions related to female body and sexuality. It is also to be noted that such expressions of sexuality and its references are used for the assertion of individuality. Besides they are fused with diasporic identity and individual experiences in fiction except in The Glassblower’s Breath, where feminist resistance is shown to a greater extent by using body as a medium.

As already noted, women in Gupta’s fiction are generally highborn women with education and colonial influence compared to any common and less privileged middle and lower class women. They have more access to the individual freedom which gives them an opportunity to see the world with open eyes. Thus the protagonist “You” in The Glassblower’s Breath is bold and the whole narrative of the novel is built around her sexual liaisons with her different lovers. These men are Avishek the baker who is her cousin; Jonathan Sparrow the poet and mathematician who is her university friend and platonic lover; David her first adult love in the college; another Slavic friend Vladimir with whom she had sexual affairs; and the last one is David the butcher whom she picks up on the street on the day of the narrative. Besides all these men there is her Iranian husband Alexander who is a scientist engaged in the research on Immunological Origins of Aggression, who comes to learn about her lovers and for whom “adultery is a
matter of bad taste than a sin”. The whole novel is set in a span of single day and all her sexual exploits and the details of her life are running through the stream of consciousness technique and with a flashback technique which oscillates between past and present. At the end of the day when all the three present lovers collide in the house of Alexander he takes revenge upon them by murdering them in the house there by wishing to control the sexuality of his wife by confining her to her house permanently. As Debjani Ganguly points out the novel has a skeletal plot and:

Escapes (this) domestic space and revolves around graphic details of the protagonist’s numerous pre-marital and extra-marital relationships with men from diverse cultural and class backgrounds, and her tension fraught bond with her widower father, the latter was responsible for her cultural displacement, her estrangement from a cocooned existence in Calcutta (319).

According to Tabish Khair these relationships and the sensual affairs by the protagonist are:

Replete with echoes of the modernist big city experience, the second person protagonist – always referred to as ‘you’ – tries to satisfy the demands of individuality, family, and society. She fails, but in the
process provides a narrative of a brilliant young woman's capacity for experience and the desire of men and society to control and define her (2).

The day of the narrative brings out the past and present affairs and in their collision "all three parts of her life collide; the physical the emotional and the intellectual. The physical is represented by the butcher Daniel as well as David, her first love; the emotional by Avishek the Baker, and the intellectual by Jonathan Sparrow the candle stick maker" (Nasta 237). This collision is symbolic of the two texts or stories that she writes in her notebook in inverted way one in Bengali and another in English as her father suggests her. This also symbolically represents the collision of the two worlds that she inhabits, her native home and her diasporic space.

In order to narrate the dislocated sensibility, which is discernible in her protagonist’s rulelessness, Gupta uses these bold sexual exploits of her protagonist. As a young motherless child the protagonist migrates to England with her father and she becomes witness to his sexual affair with his German tutor Erika. In her shock she also learns the “rulelessness” of men who deviate from the common morality, as her father refuses to marry Erika and shows his daughter that sexuality has nothing to do with the values of marriage. In her alienation when she clings to Avishek, her adolescent love is discarded by her father as incestuous as per the Indian morality. Marriage or sexual relationship with mother’s sister’s son is taboo in Indian culture. Besides, he hates his wife’s relatives. This denial of love makes her rebellious towards her father as she has already learnt to discard the taboos. In
her later sexual exploit with Daniel she wonders that her first lesson of frivolity is learned by her father who rejected the plea of a woman to marry him. She remembers this with distinct clarity:

Why was she crying? you asked, reluctantly feigning innocence... I said I wouldn’t marry her, he replied after some hesitation, suddenly eager to elevate you into his adult world, and so in a rush came your initiation, unclothed in ritual, naked of sacrament... In one stroke, a new language was born between you and your father, in to which sex and death and all other taboos wove with ease... You had been unceremoniously cast into the heady and precarious state of rulelessness (TGB 102).

Therefore she feels that her liaisons are “some sort of delayed revenge for those restless nights in Birmingham” (TGB 67), that she is offering her precious body to a perfunctory in the street. Because it is another means to hurt her father who is class and status conscious. Her revenge upon her father is for the estrangement and alienation that he caused with Avishek as well, “surely it will be morally an interlude of soundless, sandful pleasure, a silent desire for revenge grown raw” (TGB100). Another reason is the pain caused by her sister’s death, who dies out of cancer in young age. Her unhappy marriage and her suffering in death have left another wound in her psyche. This shock of coming face to face with the ugliness of life and death makes her a wounded woman who cannot
resolve or come to terms with the misery of life. So her sexual experience with Daniel is a way of redeeming her painful memory of death erupted by the pain of existence:

A white calmness had begun to grow within you, a blind surge of blood blots out all memory, his smile splinters a wall of mirrors in the back of your skull, his smile, carving deep into your being, you are an old hunger, you dream, you are an old forgotten hunger, you are my first dream of death (TGB 147).

This encounter with death by living a moment with the commonest person, a street perfunctory is an act of her challenge to her father’s taste, of royalty and also an experience equal to the suffering of death which she wants to taste because it took her sister away from her who was her only ally. To delineate this bizarre and traumatic human nature of a dislocated soul Gupta uses several post modern techniques like metafiction, intertextuality and stream of consciousness technique. The tale of ‘Mother Goose’ nursery rhymes with their sexual innuendos are used along with the Persian poet Jelaluddin Rumi’s translation of the verse which speaks about the rulelessness of the glassblower’s breath which gives shapes to the glassware by blowing the molten glass which is like the shapeless subjectivities of the migrancy including the basic morals of life.

In Memories of Rain the expressions of body and sexuality are once again prominent. Moni’s relationship with Anthony begins with a physical passion and
attraction. The chaste and puritan Moni surrenders to him in a vacant flat of Amruta’s uncle and after this liaison Anthony promises to marry her. She believes that the femininity of a woman is associated with her sexuality, and marriage is a way of its fulfillment. This is seen in her visualizing her aunt and her English teacher who did not have a married life. Her aunt had walked out of her unhappy marriage and her English teacher had remained unmarried. Moni pictures these women as barren, lonely and their body equated with their sexuality in spite of her admiration for their academic and intellectual capacities. In the unfulfilled moment of passion they seem to be withered according to her as the following description of her aunt proves this:

Death had always lurked in the slow circles of her calcified breasts, flesh that might have remained plaint under a man’s touch had hardened and decayed, so she had felt, every time her aunt held her in glad embrace, her dry lips upon her forehead, in her breath, there was the desiccation of death, not the moist, voluptuous death that she had dreamt last night, but a death like hot salt, burning upon the tongue (MOR 98).

Even in the description of her teacher she uses the words charred, emaciated etc. When Anthony’s violent passion engulfs her, she feels that he has come as her saviour, who will save her from the drone of a middle class life of a house wife or a working woman with enormously boring situations which will make her a sorry female figure devoid of any passions and sensuality of life.
The image of darkness play an important role in the novel, where Gupta’s metaphoric language speaks about the liaison of Moni with darkness which acts as her lover, and she is said to “commit adultery with darkness” (MOR 30). Darkness is the true companion of her life which has seen her growing body, which she admires, in the semi dark bathroom of her middleclass house in Calcutta. It has become a silent observer of her adult grief and also her suffering. But Anthony’s adulterous relationships and his neglect towards her brings a realization of self within her. She acknowledges that physical love and passion is temporary and she has to gain her individuality through her body which is devoid of all erotic passions. As many instances suggest in the novel Moni is quite vulnerable to even a small intimate physical gesture and touch of Anthony. Breaking this attachment and attraction of the physical desires is nothing short of an achievement in Moni’s case. Therefore this control over her passions is an important step for Moni. It gives her courage to break her marriage and go back to the freedom of selfhood.

In her interesting article “Revisions, Re-routing and Return: Reversing the Teleology of Diaspora in Sunetra Gupta’s Memories of Rain” Bidisha Banerjee sees the postcolonial orientalist attitude in the relationship of Anthony and Moni and Gupta’s use of sexuality in postcolonial terms. She opines that Anthony in claiming Moni, claims the feminized India in the oriental perspective and like a colonial gaining the territory through female body i.e. Moni who is equated here with Calcutta. This is apparent from the following words:

It had become clear to him then that he could not leave this putrefying city without her, that it would not be
enough to cherish the beauty of their unconsummated passion, alongside his memories of this unashamed city, its gorged pavements, the tired faces of colonial building jostled by indifferent, insect-eyed multi-storied flats, the patient streets lacerated by the construction of an underground, the smell of hot mud after rain (MOR 38).

Banerjee also suggests that the imagery used for the description of Calcutta suggest the “rape fantasy on Anthony’s part” (7). Thus the relationship of Moni and Anthony in terms of bodily pleasures and sexuality is used by Gupta to bring out the cultural difference and as an instrument to make her protagonist to realize the strength in conquering the desires of the body which has yoked her to his will. Freedom from the desires of the body leads her to the freedom of mind and thus she realizes the importance of individuality and selfhood, and also the redemption from a faithless marriage bond.

Men’s physical passion for women and sensuality finds expression in Moonlight into Marzipan the third novel of Gupta. Man’s infidelity in marriage bond is almost a common theme in Gupta’s fiction. Like Anthony in Memories of Rain, Promothesh in Moonlight into Marzipan turns adulterous. His infidelity drives his wife Esha to suicide. When he receives this news his first reaction is a worry that his relationship with Alexandra may get affected rather than losing his wife to death. This obsession with Alexandra continues beyond limit even after she deserts him for another man. Similarly Debendranath Roy in A Sin of Colour
transgresses the cultural code of Indian morality regarding the familial relations by falling in love with his brother’s wife Reba. To escape this unholy desire for her he migrates to London with an excuse to pursue his higher education and marries Jennifer, an English woman, and does not remain faithful to her as well. His desire for Reba does not subside and he absconds leaving his wife grieving for him, whereas young Niharika his niece in the same novel tries to epitomize her love to Daniel Faraday by remaining unmarried. Her one time premarital sexual relationship with him makes her tied to him like a true faithful lover and ends in eloping with him finally. She does not consider this relationship as a taboo even though Daniel is already a married man. But as a mark of her true love to him, she agrees to remain unmarried and waiting patiently for his improbable return. Thus marriage linked with sexuality is seen very often associated with crashed values in Gupta’s fiction.

IV

True to the migrant sensibility, women in Gupta’s fiction are lonely islands and suffer from alienation syndrome. Their world is also disjointed and hostile. Most of her women protagonists are depicted as mute sufferers of their situations. Moni in Memories of Rain is a silent sufferer in her pain of dislocation and also in her personal problem of the agony caused by the unfaithfulness of her husband. Though she is not jealous and hostile to Anna, her husband’s lover, she goes on silently suffering this injustice done to her by Anthony, who under the pretext of gaining inspiration for his creativity in the intellectual company of Anna makes Moni to bear the situation. She does not relate this to any of her family members at
home or try to seek out help and advice from any other person in her contact, even Anna’s mother who is sometimes a source of comfort in her lonely life though it is not a firm bond between the two women.

Similarly “You” in *The Glassblower’s Breath* is lonely in her diasporic home. Her attachment to her sister is broken by the death of her sister due to cancer. It makes an indelible mark on the mind of the protagonist. To come to terms with this loss she turns a rebel against all the rules of morality because her exploits of sexuality to experience the wild and uncommon, represented in her temporary affair with Daniel the butcher, is a way to confront the experience of death for her. Though her niece Rima provides her some comfort and reason to live it is not still a surviving bond of women as the girl herself is in need of shelter and protection. Besides she is too young to understand the agony and turmoil in the heart of “You”. Thus loneliness is the reason for the bizarre character of “You”.

The mother daughter relationship in *A Sin of Colour* is also fraught with tension as Reba is always engrossed in her own world of art and music even though she believes in the bliss of motherhood which she expresses through her daughter Niharika:

> When you were a baby, I used to sit and watch you ...
>
> and I could not believe that anything so beautiful could be alive ... The boys ... were an event in the family’s history, you were simply mine (SOC 78-79).
In spite of this somehow she is unable to make Niharika feel loved. It is Jennifer on the other hand gives her the love and affection of mother for some time, during her stay in Mandalay. Jennifer’s craving for motherhood and its fulfillment is seen in her tending act of Reba’s children, particularly Niharika. It continues even when Niharika goes to England for her university education. She even dreams that Niharika could marry someday in London and settle down so that she, Jennifer, “might be inducted in to the role of a grandmother to the child, how happy she would be to take care of the baby while Niharika worked” (SOC 112). This was the dream of a craving motherhood in Jennifer. Though it is more genial a relationship still it does not establish into a bond between the women. All the women in the novel are lonely and alienated trying to find solace in their own vocation as Reba in her music and theatre; Niharika in her university life in England, pining in the pain of separation from Daniel and her family; Reba’s mother in law in her lost world of dreams of education and career; and Jennifer in her grief of her husband’s pseudo death.

Esha is another lonely woman character in Moonlight into Marzipan. Like Moni she is also a silent sufferer in the pain of dislocation on the one hand and the infidelity of her husband on the other. In the strange land she has no one to share her feelings though sometimes her actions belie her condition to Promothes who but neglects her. Her spent dream of motherhood after her three miscarriages in her early married life adds to her loneliness. That is the reason she devotes completely herself to her husband and his research. But his disloyalty and unfaithfulness in marriage brings her utter shock along with his disinterest in research for the sake
of which Esha has to suffer pain and migration. These pains and sorrows ultimately claim her life and she ends up her life committing suicide.

Thus women live lonely lives devoid of any other company and support in Gupta’s fiction and the idea of female bonding does not apply to them. The burden of dislocation, the disappointments of life and expectations, the desires and married vows and bonds all weigh upon them. As a result they either end their lives in trauma like Esha or remain suspended in time and space like Niharika or undergo a confinement like “You”. But they hardly achieve selfhood, individuality and agency to construct life fruitfully like Moni and thus bear witness to the bizarre world of Gupta’s fiction of diaspora.

V

As already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Sunetra Gupta’s fiction does not subject itself to the easy categorization, for the reason of its technicality and highly stylistic experimentations. Her fiction combines both modernist and postmodernist trends and for this technicality she is being compared to the writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce in the western fiction (Kirkus Reviews). Thin and bare skeletal plots, experimental narrative techniques like using second person narration, stream of consciousness etc., ornate style and metaphoric language are the features of her fiction worthy of comment since they place her in a different order compared to the other women writers of her generation. This section therefore discusses a few of her stylistic features.
First of all Gupta's fictional themes are complex and interwoven with multiple plots which are nevertheless thin and abstract. Her *The Glassblower's Breath* though is about the bold sexual experience of an intelligent young woman whose quest is for unlimited experience, the experimentation for a new language is the main purpose of Gupta in which she tries to build multiple, cosmopolitan migrant identities in a postmodern, transient world of uncertainty. Nasta rightly comments on this feature as: “Gupta’s Primary concern is to explore the possibility of generating a new language in this novel, a language which can break down the existence of any stable mirrors of identity and exist in a new haven without rules” (235). In order to convey this bizarre tale Gupta creates a new language in which strange metaphors and images are made use of with several literary references. Protagonist’s friend Jonathan Sparrow actively engages in the foreplay of language activities as the following words reveal when he combines the description of the process of curdling of milk with the language experiments:

He told you that the molecular contractions that separated water from the substance of milk were given the very same name as the condensation of two vowels into the absurdity of diphthong, syneresis they called it, the sin of syneresis, he said, was no more than a frantic attempt to rid the language totally of vowel, as was aphesis .... he explained patiently, the elimination of unstressed (huh!) vowel as in the transformation of esquire to squire(TGB167).
Besides he argues that in communications of language vowels play an important role, thus the play of language, its structure, its utility for communication are all discussed by Gupta by creating a new language through Sparrow’s dialogues. The metaphors and imagery used in the novel also speak about the ornate linguistic style. For instance the main metaphor of ‘glassblower’ and his ‘breath’ used in the novel is taken from the thirteenth century Persian poet Jelaluddin Rumi’s translation of his verse which symbolizes the shapelessness of migrant human subjectivity in the world of chaos. The verse symbolically suggests that like the hot molten glass which has no shape of its own until the glassblower gives shape to it, the migrant human subjectivity is also fluid. In this condition before finding a fixed identity, it digresses all the rules of the society that confine it into a particular shape or identity in terms of gender, class, religion and nationality of the migrants’ world:

Last night the moon came dropping its clothes in the street.

I took it as a sign to start singing, falling up into the bowl of sky.

The bowl breaks. Everywhere is falling everywhere.

Nothing else to do.

Here’s the new rule: Break the wineglass,

and fall toward the glassblower’s breath (Rumi).

Similarly the looking glass image is also rich in evocating the pictures arising out of the shards of memory and the fissured identity of the protagonist. It
is used for the metaphorical representation of illusion and reality, with the metafictional overtones:

And here you are now in the city of your dreams, in a house full of mirrors that each screams your story … Somewhere, among these, hide lineaments of your destiny that you will always search. Yet every one of them, my love, down to the last looking glass, will tell your tale differently, as we will, my love, all of us who have loved you.

The extensive use of imagery and metaphors speak about Gupta’s ability and love to create a new language even for the abstract, complex and disjointed experience of migration which is subjective and personal in nature which Gupta herself explains in her lecture delivered in Melbourne in 2005 on the topic “Relationship between language and Thought” thus: Language was never a monolithic construct for me and I was sensitized to the distance between a word and its referent almost as I became conscious (Gupta 1).

The second important feature of Gupta’s prose is her narrative technique. She experiments along with language the narrative mode with a rare second person narrator in The Glassblower's Breath. The protagonist is unnamed and referred to as “you” and her tale is constructed by the male characters who tell her tale switching from past to present and reverse. Similar experiment is there in the third novel Moonlight into Marzipan, where the first person narration is combined with
the second person address. Here the narrator Promothesh tells his story to Alexandra.

As a postmodern writer Gupta’s technique is full of postmodern devices. She uses intertextuality, Metafiction, magical realist language without events combined with modernist techniques of stream of consciousness narrative mode. The element of intertextuality is a very common feature in all the novels though it strongly makes its presence in the first three novels. The songs of Tagore capture Moni’s varied emotions and her silent suffering in *Memories of Rain* where Gupta constantly evokes the image of rain and Tagore’s songs for the play of memory and to highlight the cultural estrangement of Moni. These songs of Tagore are Gupta’s personal translations from Bengali into English. In the third novel *Moonlight into Marzipan* the lines of the play Chandalika by Tagore and Prose pieces of the epic novel of Bhibhuti Bhusan Banerjee highlight the effect of Esha’s tragedy and Promothesh’s neglect and infidelity to her. Apart from the translated verse of Rumi recurring in several situations (already quoted in this section) and quotes from Flaubert and other writers in the novel *The Glassblower’s Breath*, the result of an adulterous relationship ending in a catastrophe is suggested in the story of Mother Goose’s nursery rhyme “Three Men in a Tub” which tells the story of three men, a baker, a butcher, and a candle stick maker. While attending a fair they meet their death in a bath tub – a hint of an adulterous tale suggestive of death of the protagonist’s lovers in the house of the jealous husband.

Similarly the thin plots and multiple themes are other devices in modernist trend of writing. In *Moonlight into Marzipan* one can witness that the story is built
upon the thin line of Promothesh’s scientific project which does not come in a linear way. Mixed with it are the plots of Yuri Sen and Anya and the infidelity of Alexandra Vorabyova with whom Promothesh falls in love and tells his personal events in her absence. In The Glassblower’s Breath metafictional elements make the readers conscious of the facts of reality out of the fictional world and their connection with the details of the author’s own world. The statement of Flaubert “If all is metaphor what about the fact” is the key line that brings the reader to the world of facts suddenly. Similarly the protagonist in her childhood is made to write two stories simultaneously in both Bengali and English in the same notebook inverting the pages and as her father suggests doing this he says “somewhere they would meet” (61). The reader is again made to note the element of self-reflexivity in the text as it reminds the fact that even Gupta’s father gave her similar suggestion in her childhood. So the reader is made conscious of the fact that the loose ends of this bizarre tale of the protagonist with several connections of the events with many of its characters will somehow meet in the end of the novel. This shapeless story is like a molten glass (the plot is thin and fluid) and blown by the breath of a glass blower (the author) it will take a final shape in the end in the tragic death of the lovers of the protagonist. Speaking about these stylistic, technical experiments in the novel Nasta comments that:

The text constantly draws attention to its self-conscious artifice, creating a patchwork of literary references which derive, like the protagonists consciousness from a wide ranging cultural history.
Thus we hear, in different keys, the voices of modernists such as Nabokov, Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, who sit side by side with Rilke, Rabindranath Tagore, the nursery rhyme story of ‘Mother Goose, Gepetto’s *Pinocchio*, and the Bengali tales of the protagonist’s Calcutta childhood. This is not however simply a postmodernist use of either an exoticized embroidery or a hybrid polyphony (234).

Gupta employs the technique of stream of consciousness in *Memories of Rain* and *The Glassblower’s Breath* also. The whole events of the novel *Memories of Rain* are arranged in the time frame of a single weekend and in *The Glassblower’s Breath* on a single day. The narration oscillates between past and present giving room to memory which structure the dreamy events in both these novels. Similarly the reflection of this is seen in *Moonlight into Marzipan* where the oscillation of the narration is between past and present and with an unstructured plot but with a flexible time frame.

These stylistic and technical features have made Gupta a complex and difficult novelist. Though several women writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Suniti NamJoshi are engaged today in experimenting and using devices like magical realism in their fiction, Gupta stands completely apart from these writers as an experimental novelist because she employs multiple devices and experiments with language in its highest discourse. Her sensational and scholarly background and her two different interests, literature and science have
made an impact on her style and made her unique among her contemporary women writers.

VI

CONCLUSION: In this chapter an analysis of Gupta’s fiction has been undertaken with reference to her handling of diasporic theme of dislocation in relation to gender. Gupta’s focus is on women’s suffering and tragedy caused by man’s infidelity in marriage, patriarchal subjugation, gender bias in the societal set up etc, in the diasporic location. She portrays the fragmented and bizarre world of women in their personal experiences of dislocation, trauma of alienation and estrangement since her characters live their lives in a distracted condition. Their mental state is moving between memory and reality giving them a surreal touch. Indian women’s issues in societal set up find expression in her writing both in her major and minor characters which are analyzed in the chapter in terms of her gender perceptions.

Gupta’s characterization is also bold where on the one hand we have Indian women of Bengali origin belonging to high caste, upper and middle class society with education and anglophile habits; on the other we have women of different nationality like Russian in Alexandra Vorobyova and Anya in Moonlight into Marzipan, Jennifer and Anna, the English women in A Sin of Colour and Memories of Rain. These women with multi-farious backgrounds along with male characters like Daniel Faraday in A sin of Colour, Anthony in Memories of Rain, the lovers David, Daniel, Jon Sparrow, Alexander in The Glassblowers Breath
give a cosmopolitan touch to Gupta's fiction. By her own experience, a true migrant Gupta delineates the diasporic sensibility of instability in the portrayal of her characters. Her use of postmodern & modernist devices of writing becomes useful in conveying this diasporic sensibility. This element of her fiction has made her to be compared with writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Kirkus reviews have described her as a “true heir to Virginia Woolf”. Tabish Khair makes an appropriate observation in the following terms: “Like Woolf, Gupta provides a gendered reading of the society while not making a militant political statement” (4). So it is her female point of view, to experience and delineate the diasporic subjectivity and identity that gives her writing a distinct quality among the present day women writers. Regarding the dreamy nature of her prose, it is to be noted that she tries to capture the strange and disjointed experiences of men and women in diaspora through her verbal skills, which she herself admits in her article “Why I Write” that writing gives her a juncture between dream and reality and also gives her freedom for creating language (Kunapipi 289). As Nasta writes, Gupta’s fiction:

‘Making the memory’ itself the subject of fiction...

construct a poetics of diaspora in which return is no longer possible and filters of fragmented memory no longer provide an untroubled or celebratory route to an ‘imaginary homeland’. Instead the multiple layer of a diasporic subjectivity are inscribed through a precarious journey in to the gaps.... where writing
becomes the 'territory of loss and memory' and the act of narration enables the possibility of a re-turn to selfhood (213).

For all her artistic accomplishments Gupta stands apart among other women writers as a creative literary genius of Indian diaspora and her fiction represents the postmodern representation of Indian literary feat of women’s writing both in India and its diaspora. In the next chapter another woman writer belonging to second generation of diaspora, Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction is taken for analysis.
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