

Research Article

Identity at the Crossroad: Explicating Diasporic Ramification in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*

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Abstract: Human identity always attains a significant dimension concerning societal positions. An individual is established when a specific identity is granted. External environmental positions are equally important for situating a person within the broader social context. Contemporary societies have been integral to understanding the nuances of literary narratives addressing diasporic concerns. Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* is a pivotal diasporic narrative that examines predicaments of identity and selfhood. Characters like Debendra become the epitome of the uncertainty that diaspora engenders in one's identity when one is dislodged from one's physical place. This novel hinges on two distinct physical settings: the English landscape of Oxford and the Indian terrain of Calcutta. It identifies how individuals grapple with large-scale attributes associated with their positions when they are spatially separated. This paper aims to portray the nuances of diasporic identity that are no longer intact or stable in a diasporic environment. Following Stuart Hall, this paper argues that an individual's identity is a "social subject" that centres itself through social articulations. It seeks to provide a critical explication of the nuances linking diaspora and individual identity through a qualitative research approach.

Keywords: diaspora; environment; identity; selfhood; space

Modern literary periods have witnessed a remarkable rise in different connotative understandings that focus on individual identity. There have been numerous developments that contemporary scholars have been associating themselves with concerning a person's position in a society. Identity, in earlier periods, was regarded as highly fixed. It was never questioned, given its essence. With modern developments, it has undergone a gradual change, becoming very feeble. In the present context, individual identity has become a by-product of society at large, where social interactions take precedence. Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, a significant diasporic text, examines how individuals, regardless of age, succumb to various insecurities when they are dislodged from their roots. With a twofold focus on the locations of Oxford and Calcutta, Gupta has delicately showcased how individuals grapple with loss that centres on their selfhood. Featuring Debendranath Roy and Niharika as central characters, this novel centres on pain and crisis arising from one's ties to one's native locations. What is paramount in this novel is the detailed elucidation of their association in their native Calcutta, which is shown to be their hub of memories. It rendered their personality and emotional stability quite in sync with the physical features of the external environment. As Gupta shows, they experienced significant disruptions to their sense of belonging and difficulties with assimilation upon relocation to a completely alien English landscape. Calcutta gets portrayed as their source of emotional strength and cultural belongingness, which granted them a semblance of individuality.

Diasporic difficulties primarily surface when Niharika gets portrayed as a diasporic character at Oxford, a journey that was actually meant to fulfil her desires by following various cultural attributes. However, readers learn that gradual removal from her roots turned out to be a traumatic experience as she was not able to cope with her emotional state. As Gupta states, "she endeavours to retain the memory of her companions like a basket of sparks, something that would perpetually expand in a new environment" (Gupta 85). Gupta, throughout this narrative, artfully blends modern attributes with native cultural features, introducing an alternative dimension to diasporic reflections in this character's life. As a significant depiction, readers are presented with Debendra's affection for his future sister-in-law, Reba, which prompts him to leave his native place and join the English landscape. However, his decision to remain in English to suppress his own internal desires is a primary reason for his conflicted state of mind. As it turns out, there were numerous struggles centred on nostalgic experiences of the homeland, coupled with inner reflections that encountered strong opposition during his stay in Oxford. The writer makes it very apt when he says, "he fled, seeking solace in academia, yet the spectre of Mandalay pursued him, its walls imbued with a love he could never attain" (Gupta 47). Hall opines that a person's identity is actually a "sociological subject" (Hall 3). A person's engagement with various societal members plays a primary role in granting a specific identity.

Discomfort becomes a central concern for both protagonists as psychological troubles gradually emerge. These troubles primarily arose from their inability to adapt to an external environment that did not accord them their preferred identity. Hall makes a very notable elaboration of what he actually means by contemporary individual identity as he remarks I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture,

between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken.' Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. (5-6)

Niharika is highly interested in pursuing higher education abroad. Her desire becomes a significant marker of her struggle at Oxford, as her cultural traits never aligned with those of the foreign environment, creating a contradictory context. She was constantly nostalgic while living in a foreign land, haunted by her cultural heritage. Thus, Calcutta provided her with a completely different atmosphere, one that had profoundly shaped her growth, which was severely disrupted once she became part of the English landscape. Individual memory becomes a powerful force in this narrative, serving as a constant, nostalgic reminder for the protagonists. Individual roots and native locations become key in identifying emotional trauma, which acts as a chief cause of leading a life of turbulence. This becomes notable because "despite departing from Calcutta, she bore its memories akin to a tapestry interlaced with threads of yearning and affection, a testament to her identity and the inescapable remnants of her past" (Gupta 85). The crisis in Niharika's identity becomes evident in her constant efforts to come to terms with an alien environment, as she must identify her position while grappling with her identity concerns. As Hall argues, in a diasporic environment, a person both becomes and navigates, thereby altering the understanding of "being." Niharika's position epitomises the struggles of a diasporic individual at Oxford, reflected in her constant efforts to assimilate.

Diaspora generally introduces tendencies that make it difficult for individuals to attain a specific position in society. It is also notable that a lack of belonging is a primary cause of Niharika's loneliness, as diaspora is characterised by "a sensitive feeling of loneliness, where the homeland becomes a sanctuary of the heart, eternally unattainable yet deeply present" (Singh 38). As with numerous diasporic characters, home exerts a strong influence in this narrative, as both Narendra and Niharika constantly long for it. This influence is so strong that Narendra ultimately returns home, underscoring his deep desire to remain rooted in his native physical space. In Niharika's case, her experiences at home, along with the associated comfort, serve as a significant marker because Oxford presented her with contradictory scenes that never aligned with her desires. Several remembrances centred on experiences in Calcutta. This serves as a signpost for various diasporic characters, who draw on their native reflections and memories to reconstruct their "imaginary home" while struggling in an alien land. As Gupta states, "she envisioned her recollections of Calcutta as orchids flourishing in a hothouse, delicate yet vivid, sustained by the warmth of her yearning" (Gupta 108). To highlight cultural differences, the narrative also shows how Debendra attempts to form a union with an English woman, Jennifer, only to realise that she is a complete mismatch for his native experiences. Contradictory depictions between Jennifer and Debendra find primary depiction in cross-cultural exchanges, which further heighten diasporic struggles.

Marriage underscores cultural tendencies that do not primarily validate the union of cultures that are contradictory. As seen in Jennifer's case, Indian dress was never truly accepted by her, although she wore it because it was expected, given her cultural background, which always preferred Western clothing. As Gupta remarks, "Jennifer wore a sari with the elegance of a bride, yet her heart longed for the refreshing breezes of her English moors, a quiet reminder of her displacement" (Gupta 131). In line with Hall's argument, human identity not only becomes a product of social interaction but also a weak outcome that lacks a fixed nature. This presents weak depictions that reiterate that contemporary identity does not occupy a well-defined position across its essential dimensions. Discursive principles also become notable in identifying how individuals are constructed within a social rubric, thereby bringing paradigmatic concerns into play. Discursive stances further become important because a person's identity gets "constructed within, not outside, discourse" (Hall 4). To further indicate cultural discomfort, the writer presents Daniel's character in his relationship with Niharika, which vividly illustrates how cross-cultural tendencies can hinder the ascertaining of a person's primary identity. Although there was initially affectionate behaviour between them, readers learn that this relationship could not last because differences in cultural and physical features created discomfort. Connections with various individuals are equally important for understanding how individuals are placed within larger societal structures. Gupta aptly summarises their conflicting scenario when he says, "the river separating them was not solely composed of water but represented divergent worlds, a divide neither could traverse without relinquishing aspects of their identities" (Gupta 139).

Diasporic journey becomes a metaphor for struggle related to homelessness and identity, which does not find an easy reconciliation. The characters of Niharika and Debendra serve as illustrative examples of how diasporic characters grapple with contradictory situations that marginalise them. Various diasporic concerns need to be identified because "for diasporic individuals, the journey of belonging is fraught with risks, as they navigate unfamiliar spaces while bearing the burden of memories and cultural expectations" (Ilcan 46). A constant effort has been shown by these two diasporic characters in this narrative to create alternate versions of their own identities while leading lives of diasporic characters. However, this proves unsuccessful because the attributes of the past are difficult to shed, as reflections of their homeland continually haunt them. Their home-related experiences become very telling signs of how "the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha 13). With the presentation of twin locations, that too poles apart, concerns related to unfulfillment in personal lives, struggles in creating new identities, coming to terms with alien conditions, and diasporic difficulties become even more prominent. Constant depiction of attributes focusing on the home indicates that "the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha 13). If anything, it is a depiction of the characters' longing for their roots, a notable feature of the narrative.

Individual identity, in today's world, turns out "not essentialist but strategic and positional" (Hall 3). Various factors influence the formation of ideas about a person's

selfhood, which, in turn, lead to different understandings of modern identity. This leads to a totalizing validation that both Niharika and Debendra become struggling diasporic figures who almost turn out to be strangers. However, they consistently sought to integrate with the English landscape. Understanding a person's identity in society also entails showcasing ontology, which remains inextricably connected, as Diaspora presents the process of representation and identity construction at the complex juncture where the categories and impulses of empire, nation, religion, gender, and metropolitan location converge. Unlike nationalism, which makes territory the ultimate aim and battleground, Diaspora is territoryless. It is a point of tenuous balance. Diaspora implies negotiation of borders and frontiers, exile and alienation, ambivalence, duality, and even duplicity. Based in a "host" space, Diaspora is often defined by outside danger and as dangerous to the outside. (Salhi and Netton, 2006. p. 82)

A Sin of Colour becomes a poignant reflection of diasporic predicaments arising from one's ties to home and native lands. By portraying the characters Devendra and Nivedita, Gupta orchestrates a different landscape that hinges on how ideas about individual identity become equally important in situating a person within society. What is significant for understanding diasporic concerns in this narrative is that geographical positioning becomes irrelevant to how a person becomes emotionally affected. Characters like Niharika could not adjust to such conditions, as reflections of her homeland in her mind constantly prevented her from becoming one with the English landscape. At the end, it was shown that Debendra drowned himself in the Cherwell River, a very prominent symbol of how an individual gets emotionally affected by various memories and experiences that revolve around attributes of home. Debendra's final depiction is a highly accurate reflection of diasporic characters succumbing to the weight of remembrances associated with home. Niharika can be identified as a woman who longed for personal development and growth. However, she has also been presented as someone who remains tied to her roots and native locations in her mind, which constantly prevents her from becoming one with the English landscape. She becomes a conflicted individual who resists her dreams but succumbs to her home-related obligations. As the writer states, "she carried Calcutta with her, in memories of monsoons and music, a part of her that refused to be silenced by the grandeur of Oxford" (Gupta 85). Thus, this narrative significantly endorses diasporic predicaments while allowing readers to interpret how individuals identify themselves in a different physical space when removed from their native locations.

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