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Continuity of diasporic fervour in Sujata Bhatt's poems

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Abstract

This article aims to cogitate upon the paradoxical succumb of a Diaspora writer who like a lover cannot forget his beloved even though the separation has befallen in his fate. So similar is the state of a Diaspora writer who longs to return to his indigenous land but cannot go back as of the responsibilities, compulsions, and duties of the worldly affairs separate him from his native vicinage. Reminding ourselves of Pablo Neruda's poem Tonight I Can Write, we can find an analogical relation exists between a lover who writes reminiscing his love for his beloved and the Diaspora writer who reminisces leaving his homeland due to many constraints did take place in his life. By contemplating why a man leaves one geographic region and settles elsewhere; this study analyzes the poetic works of the writer Sujata Bhatt who lives in Germany otherwise, at the same time, she yearns to return to her indigenous land through mythologizing the historical and cultural renaissance of her native nation.

Keywords: Diaspora writer, reflective memory, indigenous, nativity

Introduction

I no longer love her, that's certain,
but maybe I love her.
Love is so short, forgetting is so long
-Tonight I Can Write

A state of paradox, when the lover remembers his beloved and cannot forget her be of any reason that had led to their separation; is a state evident in Diaspora writing. It is a type of writing when the lover is away from his beloved, when they could not wed whereas the lover reminisces each moment he had spent with his beloved and he writes of that pain. This is a metaphorical explanation yet that cites a serious message that even if one leaves the permanent place where he was born, the attachment and love towards home do not deter. Sujata Bhatt is a Diaspora writer, and amazingly she is a diverse explorer who traveled to many countries and yet never has abandoned her 'reflective memory' or 'implicit long-term memory' towards her first love 'India'.

Any person who leaves her/his own nation because of various compulsions s/he undergoes in her/his life perhaps due to economical burgeon, ethnic crisis, cultural crisis, or if matrimonial suit takes her/him away, or if parents settle away, even then, the nostalgia to the indigenous state does not get renounced, is called diaspora. Subedi defines the term 'diaspora', "in the globalized world today which has become a vital phenomenon which connotes a "settlement" or "state of being" or "category" of people who reside in a foreign land away from their home land for various reasons and purposes." (Dev 2) Nonetheless, the last reason (mentioned above) took Sujata Bhatt away from her indigenous land to the foreign country. She was born in India; then, later landed in the USA with her family, worked in Canada, and at present, lives with her husband Michael Augustin in Germany. Despite her huge and varied proximal distance from India, she always covets in describing Indian cultural memory as essentially as that can never be disappearing from her life and that suitably gets reflected through her writings too; her love, attachment and memory remain visible for her homeland in her works.

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Many scholars question why does she pen her works in English, if she reminisces being an Indian? So, a question regains, if how does it affect whether you write in English which is a colonialist language or a language that tongue hails that mother; it's an expression or nostalgia that germinates even if any language of any region is manifested in convenience. However, Sujata Bhatt remarks that English was imposed upon her when she began surviving in the USA and after then, it became confere like other languages she had known since her birth. She recounts, "I left India twice: first to New Orleans from the time I was five until I was eight, when we returned to India - and then later to Connecticut 'for good' when I was twelve. I learned English when I was five. But I have no memory of learning it! I describe this in my poem 'New Orleans Revisited' (from Augatora)." Also, her poem 'History is a Broken Narrative' (from Augatora) describes "learning English in New Orleans first and then returning to India and learning a different type of English" (Interview 1). Sujata Bhatt though reluctantly got associated to learning English when she was very young, indeed, she also employs Gujarati, Hindi, Low German, High German, and Spanish in her poems that are popularly known as diaspora writing. Sujata in her longer piece of work, 'Search for my Tongue' she mixes English and Gujarati: "I ask you, what would you do/ if you had two tongues in your mouth." (From 'Brunizem') In 'The Undertow', she writes "There are at least three/languages between us. there's a certain spot/ we always focus on/ and the three languages are there/ swimming like seals fat with fish and sun" (Interview 1)

So, we assume, no language determines one's talent being a good poet. Similarly, what matters if one lives in Canada, Germany or in India, the fervour to cling to the cultural admiration to the native place of past infers a diaspora. So, is the life of the lover who remains aloof from his beloved but cannot stop forgetting his beloved and we have an analogical exemplar Tonight I can Write. Sujata Bhatt's each work (of any language as stated above) adorably reveals her reminiscing love for her beloved India and its culture. Her poems are so vivid in expressing Indian love through 'onomatopoeia' and 'metonymy' that she relates to every incident that she had experienced there. Sujata Bhatt's poem 'Muliebrity',

I have thought so much about the girl,
Who gathered cow-dung in a wide?
Round basket, along the main road passing by our house,
And the Radhavallabh temple in Maninagar.
(from 'Brunizem')

A poem that showers abundant love to Indian georgic culture is 'Muliebrity'. It shows a poor native girl gathers cow dung in a wide round basket, and has much zeal to sell that near Radhavallabh temple; located in the Indian territory. The girl was often seen to the poet who would keep basket on her head to sell the dung. This line in simple and elegant language abounds in the Indian vicinity and its environs.

Another stanza from 'Muliebrity',
I have thought so much about the way she,
Moved her hands and her waist,
And the smell of cow-dung and road-dust and wet canna lilies,

The smell of monkey breath and freshly washed clothes.
(from 'Brunizem')

"And the dust from crows' wings which smells different", And again the smell of cow-dung as the girl scoops, it up, all these smells surrounding me separately and simultaneously" ('Muliebrity') is appropriately written to prove naïve girl's state of livelihood, by giving sensory imagery too of the dung that one expects that it surrounds the countryside. A girl collects cow dung. It is clearly shown that the girl hails from countryside, she is poor, and she has pride in conducting a natural work. The 'smell of cow dung and dust from crows' wings' are again the onomatopoeic sense of expunging the boastful Indian culture. "I have thought so much, but have been unwilling to use her for a metaphor, for a nice image – but most of all unwilling, to forget her or to explain to anyone the greatness, and the power glistening through her cheekbones, each time she found a particularly promising, mound of dung." ('Muliebrity') Her poems though in free verse, recount her intense pain of being away from her native land India and how she perpetrates returning to reflective memory through her writing to Indian house and Indian markets and its natural and organic sphere.

However, many critics contravene with her writing style that is too slippery and that runs like a complete prose. Dr Tripti examines the lines, "The lines are much definite complete structure and give a comprehensible and clear explanation in them, in one reading that neither the speaker nor the girl can feel abstained of the nativity. And, do they need a paraphrase to provide expansive teaching to readers? Poems even if written in free verse, must release paradoxical statements in short and compressed formation that readers and even critics do keep sparing their time in reaching to an inference until they keep oscillating their minds amidst the many criminal words that are witty and wise to be dealt." (Preface) On the other hand, the Indian English poet Michael Schmidt observes "free verse in her poems is fast-moving, urgent with narratives, softly spoken." (860) Sujata Bhatt herself vindicates on her writing style "When I am most deeply absorbed in writing a poem, I feel that I am 'translating' images and sounds, rhythms and an emotional 'tone' into words." (Interview 1) Nonetheless and undeniably, Bhatt's propensity in writing original compositions is to revive Indianness and its aroma in the foreign land and to visualize its primary and permanent position in her life.

In her poem 'Lizard', the speaker shows an Indian man who sees a dream is well connected to a simile how lizard like a dream wags its tail; and if the dream revives the nativity, then the tail wags,

I learned to stare at the walls
In Maninagar in the summertime
When the lizards come inside
(from 'Brunizem')

It is not Sujata Bhatt who like Rudyard Kipling presents Indian culture as to be revised and modified yet she infers how pure has been the Indian culture that needs a static and unchanging revision of its presence, and it always sustains in her poems in the heroic manner. Specially, mythology of Indian history gets reinforced by Sujata Bhatt in her poems that clarify that she has still not abandoned memorizing the

Indian artefacts of history and mythology. The poem 'Nachiketa',

Did you know that long ago Nachiketa Visited?
Great Yamaraj? Yes, long ago
Nachiketa travelled through jaundiced grass
Past choleraed cows, past black-lunged horses
Standing before leprosid trees
(from 'Brunizem')
In 'Kalika',
As Kalika parts the hair in the centre,
a straight-line curving down
the back of her daughter's head
(from 'Brunizem')
In 'Brunizem',
Pure Sita, returns again and again
It is worshipped by prostitutes in Bombay
As they cleanse themselves, leaping
Over flames between customers
That Agni returns again and again
Even to me
(from 'Brunizem')

In the above poems, we can see the references are taken of the mythological characters - Yamraj, Kalika, the Goddess Sita to examine the Indian culture as intact and robust. The strength of Agni is well correlated to Sita the goddess; are sung by her in her poems.

William Saffron in his essay 'in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return' defines diaspora as "Diasporic people are those who live outside the homeland and who are said to retain 'collective memory', vision or myth about their original homeland". (1) Bhatt's love for nature enshrines her homeland; does take her back to nostalgic and continuous fervour to her past. In 'Brunizem' poem, she talks about finesse of Asian soil,

Dark prairie soil found in Asia,
Europe and North America
"Cow-dung and road-dust and wet canna lilies,
the smell of monkey breath and freshly washed clothes"
(from 'Brunizem')
In 'Swami Anand', she praises of Himalayas in Kosbad
a region in Palghar, Maharashtra,
At that time
I am seventeen, and have just started
To wear a sari every day.
Swami Anand is eighty-nine
And almost blind
(from 'Brunizem')

In 'Buffaloes', Indian myth is circumvented through showing the importance of a pyre, and an intense grief an Indian woman possesses on her husband's death, and who wonders how she will nurture her infant in her husband's absence,

The young widow
Thinks she should have burned on.....
Her husband's funeral pyre
Her dreams lie
Lazily swishing their tails
In her mind like buffaloes
Dozing, some with only nostrils showing

In a muddy pond.
(from 'Brunizem')

In poem 'The Peacock', she gives a very good personifying image of India as a peacock that uses an apostrophe hailing her back to India. Peacock too is personified as 'He', who makes a loud call,

His loud sharp call
seems to come from nowhere.....
and as he darts away, a glimpse
of the very end of his tail.
(from 'Brunizem')

Her poem 'Trees' speaks of Indian trees which are ascetic and spiritual. Her poem 'Indian Cultures' revives varied culture of India. She recalls the serene nature and organic aroma of Assam in her poem - 29 April 1989' (From 'Monkey Shadows') when she has brought the assam tea "I make a large pot of Assam tea", she sings in the poem. Her few poems utter a grief over serious historical retrospect occurred in India like her poem 'Partition' adheres on Partition of the British India into India and Pakistan, which speaker's mother recounts,

How could they
have let a man
who knew nothing about geography
divide a country? (34)
Her poem '3 November, 1984', recounts her grief over looking at the horrific pictures of dead bodies in Hindu-Sikh riots,
Today I don't want to think
Of Hindus cutting open Sikhs-and
Sikhs cutting open
Hindus-and Hindus cutting open (5)

Her few poems do also praise global artefacts and aesthetics like her A Colour for Solitude (2002) which narrates the life and work of the German painter Paula Modersohn Becker. Her poem 'Fish Hat' (From 'Monkey Shadows') lavishes praises on Picasso's painting located at Amsterdam's Museum. Anjana Neira remarks, "Her poems complement each nation as of showing a global village in a text book." (4) But, a quest to envision Indian history and its culture is a matter of giving pride to India on global level, even if it is taken as a voyage on a sea of poetry. Bhatt has written several poems most of which secure pure revival of Indian culture, myth and its aroma that does never allow her to get abstained of its memory, even if she lives anywhere on globe. Her survival lies in another country, but her continual love for Indian culture has let her receive several awards like the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia), a Cholmondeley Award. In 2014, she was the first recipient of the Mexican International Poetry Prize, Premio Internacional de Poesía Nuevo Siglo de Oro 1914-2014. Jagdish Joshi and Mahesh Bhatt in their article remark on her poetry, "A sense of continuity in terms of her relationship with home pervades through her poetry. She makes her decision clear-cut, as she writes in her poem 'The One Who Goes Away',

I am the one,
who always goes,

away with my home,
 which can only stay inside,
 in my blood my home which does not fit,
 With any Geography. (Joshi 2)

Therefore, diaspora writing will never cease until the lovers depart from their first lovers and reminisce still being closely associated with the latter. It is a case of Sujata Bhatt, who has an abundant poem on diaspora amour; that we have discussed above.

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