

In the above passage Sidhwa hints at the changed social dynamics and order. Previously the Queen Garden used to hum with the sweet and melodious sound of Hindu-Sikh, and Muslim women who used to be there in majority. But after the Partition the ratio of women is considerably reduced. The Muslim women present there, are forced to cover themselves under black burkhas and white 'Chuddars'. They don't seem to enjoy so much of freedom as their counterparts i.e. the Sikh and Hindu women used to. In the changed situation she feels uneasy. She is overpowered by an impinging sense of sadness when familiar faces are missing from the garden. She gives vent to her feelings:

Adi and I wander from group to group, peering Into faces beneath white skull – caps and above ascetic beards. The Azan must have sounded. Some women spread prayer mats on the grass And kneeling start to pray. I feel uneasy like Hamida, I do not fit. I know we will not find familiar faces here. (237)

In the wake of the partition, people get uprooted from their surrounding and soil. The dislocation of life takes place in unexpected haste. Sidhwa is well aware of it and so is child Lenny. In no way, she wishes to be away from her Ayah who has been her friend, philosopher and guide for past so many years. She wants to enjoy her intimate care as usual. She advises her not to marry the Masseur, a Muslim man, because it would cause a separation. She is instrumental in getting the Ayah recovered and rehabilitated to a great extent. Lenny is extremely shocked to notice the brutalizing impact of communal frenzy on average men. Before the partition the Ice- Candy- Man appeared to be a man of fun and humour. He seemed to be a loving soul but the partition left him completely changed man. He is rather brutalized by communal frenzy. They put Shalmi on fire. The area also experiences massive explosions and flashes and the sensitive souls feel greatly shocked and horrified at the sight. The author presents the impact of the sight on the child Lenny:

The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming: hysterically sobbing. Ayah moves Away, her feet suddenly heavy and dragging, and sits on the roof slumped against the wall. She buries her face in her knees. (137)

The sight of burning Shalmi is rather satisfying and exhilarating to the Ice-Candy-Man. Instead of condemning the act, he gloats over it. Sidhwa records his response:

'What small hearts you have,' says Ice-Candy-Man, beaming affectionately at us. 'You must make your hearts stout!' He strikes his out thrust-chest with his fist. Turning to the men, he says: 'The fucking bastards! They thought they'd drive us out of Bhatti! We've shown them!' (137)

Even lovers turn hostile. Ice-Candy-Man, the Muslim lover of the Hindu Ayah, watches Shalmi and Mozang chowk burn with, "the muscles in his face tight with a strange exhilaration I never want to see". The

transformation of a fun-loving man who frolicked and acted buffoon in the park into an ogre due to communal frenzy is aptly revealed by Lenny's horror on noticing the sadism on his face.

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Natural Tones

- Durlabh Singh

I am the
 Springtime of leaves
 And song of brunt
 Meadows brief
 Where the water arms
 The earth's ploughed
 Scars
 Mingling with
 Moon's soft crust.

 Capricious images
 Of nursing plunders
 Shrouded to announce
 To the world at large
 Its blunders
 And crystallization
 Of amorphous mass

Of feelings & sensations
 Into significant forms
 In a universe of values
 Echoes of inner stance.
 I am the
 Spring sap of the leaves
 And song of meadows brief
 Scars of earth
 Peeled and ploughed
 With bloods of
 Moon's dried crust.

 I am the visibility of the day
 I am the invisibility of the night
 I am the spring sap of the leaves
 And the echoes of winter's last
 rites.

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Through the 'Window' of Sujata Bhatt's 'World': *...there is more than one way to cut out a voice*

- Dibyajyoti Sarma

Abstract

The essay tries to understand the experience of an expatriate poet, Sujata Bhatt, while arguing the fact that an expatriate author's experiences are not necessarily drawn towards a lost homeland, as argued by Salman Rushdie. The essay examines Bhatt as an expatriate Indian poet, and how she negotiates the issues of Diaspora: language, colour, culture, identity and homeland/s (both imaginary and real), her memory and her share of amnesia. Apart from language, the poetic universe of Bhatt's imaginary homeland/s centers around her parents, especially her mother. Memory, for that matter past, appears in Bhatt's poetry in surprising regularity. But the poet is not panic at the loss of her memory.

Keywords: nation, language, imaginary homelands, poetry, cultural identity, memory

Salman Rushdie made popular the concept of 'imaginary homelands.' (Rushdie: 5) Now, it is a kind of unequivocal standard, a yardstick to judge a text, especially a text by an expatriate Indian. What Rushdie tried to express was an apocalyptic moment of history as experienced by the Diasporic intelligentsia. Rushdie's vocal experiences changed the way we see the generations of Indians living abroad, especially their intellectual growth, sweeping over the issues of class, creed, colour, religion and other possible differences. Today Diaspora and Diasporic writing is a standard word in literary criticism. Rushdie's 'imaginary homelands' was just but a mythical beginning. Critics like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Neil Bissoondath have talked at length about cultural dislocation and its impact on personal perspectives. Talking about Diaspora as an expatriate experience, there are issues of rootlessness, and dislocation, experiences of both nostalgia and amnesia, which need to be answered. Writers living abroad live in the margins of two different cultures; there are issues of this margin to be explained.

The word Diaspora literally is a scattering carrying within it the ambiguous status of being both an 'ambassador' and a 'refugee.' (Jain: 1) But these two roles have their distinct connotations. While the former means projecting one's culture and the ability to enhance its understanding, the latter seeks protection and refuse, and relates more

positively to a host culture. There are yet a host of other words to talk about this diverse sense of experience; words like 'immigrant' and 'exile' make the matter complicated while arriving at a common theoretical ground about expatriate experiences. On the subject of cultural displacement, Homi Bhabha talks about cultural gatherings: "Gatherings of exiles and refugees, gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures, gathering of the frontiers, gathering of the ghettos, or cafés in the city centers..." (Bhabha: 130-40) Again, Bhikhu Parekh offers a diametrically opposite view. Accordingly, the Diasporic Indian is "like a banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world." (Parekh: 106)

Thus 'home' becomes the centre of cultural location/dislocation. However, this 'home' has its own problem of theorization. The point I am trying to make here is that an expatriate author's experiences are not necessarily drawn towards a lost homeland (meaning, an ideological moment related to the poet's personal history). First, for a particular poet, the homeland may not be as severally imaginary as in case of Rushdie (for example, Ramanujan, whose poetic ethos was firmly rooted in India, though he spent later years of his life in Chicago). Even if it is so, the way the poet negotiates the conflict may vary. Secondly, for an expatriate author, the homeland may not be lost at all. It may very much be the part of the author's memory, and it may in no way effect the author's current consciousness. There are thousands of things for a poet to talk about. As the cliché goes, poets are the citizens of the world. Even if an expatriate author talks about his homeland, imaginary or real, the degree may vary from person to person. This was the feeling I had while reading the poetry of Sujata Bhatt, especially her latest collection of poems, *Augatora*. (Bhatt: 1) In the present essay, I propose to examine Sujata Bhatt as an expatriate Indian poet, and how she negotiates the issues of Diaspora: language, colour, culture, identity and homeland/s (both imaginary and real), her memory and her share of amnesia.

Sujata Bhatt was born in Ahmedabad, in 1956. A graduate from University of Iowa, she has published several volumes of poetry from England: *Brunizem* (1988), *Monkey Shadow* (1991), *The Striking Rose* (1995), *Point No Point* (1997), and *Augatora* (2000). She lives in Bremen, Germany with her husband and daughter. Bhatt has duly received her share of applause. She received the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the first collection of poems, *Brunizem*; Carcanet Press, Manchester, publishes her; TLS calls her poems as one "that allows us to travel, dream and learn, but one that ultimately moves us by the quietude of its stance and its impeccable"; and *New Statesman* considers her to be "one of the finest poets alive." (Bhatt: 1)

Bhatt is literally alive, alive in a world of sound and sight, people and events, memory and experience. The name

'Augatora', in old High German, stands for 'eye-gate,' meaning window; thus the collection becomes an window that opens on real and imaginary landscapes: India, 'a necessary obsession,' Durban, Riga, the island of Juist, New Orleans, Amsterdam, Jerusalem, Barcelona...

What surprises us in Sujata Bhatt's poetry is her ability to move from one place to another with effortless candor and gaiety. She seems to have moved beyond the existential issues of East-West divide: colour, creed, culture, and language. She is at home wherever she goes: truly a world citizen.

If poetry is about internal conflict, we see this conflict blissfully missing in Bhatt's poems. Her poems are colourful picture postcards posted from different parts of the world, retelling the events in a simple, straightforward way, often from her memory soaked in a personal feeling. It is this feeling that makes her poems worth reading. In her poems she talks about a polio-stricken swimmer girl in New England, about a woman called *Abuela* who saw Franco's men pass by, about Jane of Tarzan, about a snake catcher, about partition, about shipwrecks, about green ambers, about an artist in Durban, about an unborn child, and about a blind boy, among other things. Bhatt is at ease with the subjects she has chosen, very sure of what she wants to convey and makes the reader see what she sees, and feel what she feels. These feelings and these sights are almost always urban Western and almost always personal. Being an Indian poet, writing in English, and living in Germany—these things do not seem to bother her. She is at ease with her situation. Unlike Ramanujan, for example, who always comes back to Indian in search for his poetic universe, Bhatt has found her universe in the world itself. The 'trauma' of being an Indian in the world is absent here. She has found a solution for herself:

History is a broken narrative
 Pick a story and see where
 it will lead you
 You take your language where you set it
 or do you
 Get your language where you take it? (*History is a Broken Narrative*)

In the broken narrative of history, one has to settle down for a language, which is ever changing, ever evolving. The use of languages, Gujarati, Hindi, English, do not seem to bother the poet anymore: "you make your language when you change it". The poet has done exactly the same. She has changed her Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi to make her own language. For the poet, history is not about few static facts. History is about changes. In her sense of history, the elephant Surus talks to his master Hannibal. Thus, history is what one makes out of it.

...where is the plot?
 And where is the image?... (*History is a Broken Narrative*)

The source of history is not outside, but within the mind. Memories change. Memories take different shapes. It is only through language that

history can be realized:

...it will give you time
time to gather up the fallen pieces
of your language-one by one
with your mouth, with your mouth-you need time
to pick up the scattered pieces of your language...

(*History is a Broken Narrative*)

To Bhatt, history, for that matter, language, never poses a problem. There are possibilities to find different meanings in the same memory. Language can change, but not the feelings. In the poem, "Language" she talks about her experience of German. Though English is her language, German is the language of her in-laws, her daughter. Gradually German also becomes the part of her own. Reading the German writer Bobrowski in translation she feels:

and I could walk beside the river
with your words
unmediated, untranslated
in my mouth... (*Language*)

The issue of language comes again and again in her poetry. Interestingly however, they do not constitute a poetic conflict in her. Bhatt is not Kamala Das, who's trying to force her language as a means of her self-identity ("*An Introduction*"). For Bhatt, language is the issue only of the memory. It has no effect whatsoever in the poet's current state of consciousness:

but what happened when I started
to learn the new words?
what happened when the Gujarati
and the Marathi and the Hindi
I spoke
made room for the English words?
Perhaps it happened quietly
.....
so no one noticed
so I can't remember. (*New Orleans Revisited*)

Memory, for that matter, past appears in Bhatt's poetry in surprising regularity. Again it is astounding to see how this memory is not the part of the poet's present disposition. Through her 'eye-gate' (Augatora), Bhatt views her past at a distance, without any bias, without any emotion. Her focus seems to represent her memory as it was, without any predispositions. Compare Bhatt with Kamala Das whose childhood memory of her grandmother's house in Malabar forms the entire mythology of her poetic oeuvre! In the poem "New Orleans Revisited," the poet recalls her childhood as a five-year old girl in New Orleans learning English as her first language. But now:

I have no memory
of learning English
No sound. No images. (*New Orleans Revisited*)

The poet is not panic here at her loss of memory. She represents facts with clinical accuracy, as *is*. Finally, it is the mother who informs the poet about the experience, and the poem ends with the mother's reaction, "how hard it has been for her." Apart from language, the poetic universe of Bhatt's imaginary homeland/s centers around her parents, especially her mother. We can't compare Bhatt's mother with Ramanujan's whom he remembers as a child ("*Of Mother, Among Other Things*"). Bhatt's memory of her mother is also soaked in her memory, but here, the point of view is essentially that of an adult. The image of mother as someone meek and much suffered also makes an appearance here. But it is not what the poet wants to highlight. She would rather not talk about it. Instead, she prefers to narrate the incidents she saw and observed as a child. Though her point of view is essentially that of an adult, she is laconic to express her impressions. "My Mother's Way of Wearing a Sari" is a brilliant memory poem, where the poet as a little girl observes her mother wearing a sari, how the "mother balance the pleated part of her sari against her waist", but there are other things as well, the camels are making noise outside, the brother is fast asleep, the father is far away, working in another town, and the mother wears only an ordinary *khadi* sari:

...her silk reddish yellow sari

 it lies beneath
 the green silk one, I remind her—and she nods
 but her silk saris can sleep forever
 in the wardrobe, they shine
 powerful as well-fed snake—
 she dares not disturb them—sometimes she strokes
 them when she shows them to me—that happens
 in the afternoon when my grandmother
 is asleep and the neem tree is quiet.

(*My Mother's Way of Wearing a Sari*)

There are strong hints of some overpowering tragedy. But the poet won't talk about it. Her memory is essentially photographic and never analytical. At the end of the poem, the poet could not sleep, but she won't tell us why. There is another strong hint of family discontent in her memory in the poem "Honeymoon." Here the poet talks about her grandmother, and for the first time the poet voices out a complaint. The poem narrates the mother-in-law-daughter-in-law quibbles seen through the eyes of a young girl:

No one could see me, but I could see you
 I could see the two of you
 I could see
 The hurt darkness in my mother's eyes
 turn into stones— (*Honeymoon*)

The poet wonders about the grandmother's inexplicable behaviour, but she doesn't understand the reason. She could merely ask:

... I always wanted to know, grandmother
What had you been denied?
 What great bitterness was it
 That made you decide
 Your twelve-year-old daughter, my father's sister
 Had to company my patents
 On their honeymoon? (*Honeymoon*)

This is a revelation. This is a key to understand the world of Sujata Bhatt, her western attitude of rationalization, and her Diasporic sensibilities. If we compare Bhatt with someone like Kamala Das and Jayanta Mahapatra, these features come into more prominence. Both Das and Mahapatra, with their distinct sensibilities and point of views, have a deep knowledge of how Indian mind works. Take, for example, Mahapatra's poem "Hunger." Here the poet's point of view is that of an adult, rational and detached, very much like Sujata Bhatt. But Mahapatra never fails to display deep-rooted compassion and understanding while narrating about the old fisherman and his young daughter. Compassion is also the part of Bhatt's poetic sensibilities. But her outlook is different. She is more genuine in her poems with Western setting than her poems about Indian memories. She is brilliant in her narrative of shipwreck near the island of Juist off the German North seacoast, "The Hole in the Wind." This becomes more apparent in Bhatt's use of the symbol of snake. The image of snake appears in Bhatt's poetry at slightest excuse. In "A Memory from Marathi," the poet talks about her father killing a snake, and in the poem "The Dream," the poet narrates her dream, again as a child, of facing a snake:

And my father, who stood
 Watching in the doorway
 Laughed—and said, 'don't resist
 You must accept it
 There's no point
 In fighting with the snake—' (*The Dream*)

The appearance of the father and the snake in both the poems make us feel the presence of a hidden motif in the use of the 'snake' symbol. But the effect is lost by the poet's almost 'stubborn' wish not to explain anything from her memory.

By contrast, in the poem, "A Swimmer in New England Speaks," is explicable to the core, and a moving account of unrequited love of a polio-stricken girl. Here 'the snake' at once symbolizes the girl's desire for the man with whom she is swimming and her wish to become strong:

It was so warm
 I'm sure the snakes
 Were awake sometimes—I'm sure
 The snakes were already
 In the water
 Oh, but I am a strong swimmer
 I told him. (*A Swimmer in New England Speaks*)