

DISPLACEMENT, INFIDELITY AND THE NARRATIVE OF BECOMING

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Abstract

The present paper seeks to explore the discourses of displacement, infidelity and the essentialising of self that is incorporated in the writing of the two major sub-continental women novelists namely Manju Kapur and Taslima Nasreen. The particular works under discussion are *The Immigrant* (2008) and *The French Lover* (2001). The two literary works as well as the theme of adultery/infidelity is looked at from the perspective of a Deleuzian becoming, which reconfigures the experience of the diaspora as a process of continued movement. Furthermore, the paper attempts to establish the relational terms of 'homeland' and 'fidelity' as more than denominators of a normative regime, but as located at the position of sublation, becoming rather than definitively organising itself either as being or nothing.

Keywords: Manju Kapur, Taslima Nasreen, Deleuze, *The Immigrant*, *The French Lover*, women's writing, diaspora, becoming, postcolonial sexuality, adultery

INTRODUCTION

Women's writing as an expression of an extra-discursive dialogue has a significant validity, endorsing a cultural construct framed by engagement, negotiation or resistance to social structures. The distinctive modes of interaction, interpretation and mediation with traditional cultural signifiers such as kinship, marriage and procreation and its interrogation of values and structures ratified and encoded by dominant discourses inscribe female subjectivities in literary text and context. However, to speak of an overarching theory of women's right to self determination, or 'being', in philosophical parlance, as an initiatory definition of feminism is perilous. Socio-cultural, economic, religious, geomorphic realities and a range of structural differences across global locations, in collusion with a range of other motivators and facilitators differentiate women's writings, the intensive practices, and feminist/feminine subjectivities. The

absence of overt statement of affiliation may be seen in different ways: from Althusserian interpellation, Zizek's interpretation co-option to plain fear of marginalization and victimhood, and with every issuance that is deemed contradictory. These silences are often significations of vacant resistance for they seek to express much that is subliminal or suppressed, as a covert correspondence and acts of resilience and resistance that maintain an esoteric communicability. It is the origin and denouement of such presumably truncated communiqué that could be deciphered using the proposition of marital fidelity interrogated from a Deleuzian perspective. Much of women's writings that are labelled feminist are irreverently those that deconstruct literary forms and socio-political constructs, and act as an apparatus of resistance against patriarchal inheritance, locating a speech for the mother, and often the process of assemblage remains unquestioned.

Manju Kapur and Taslima Nasreen are two novelists from the sub-continent who voice through their novels a woman's experience of locations, cultures and other qualifiers, and their narratives endorse that pseudo-construct. Also located in their writing is an undercurrent that explores and interrogates the paradigmatic discourse of the abstract social contract of 'fidelity', ensuring that there is an instinctual prohibition of paradigmatic references, allowing for a smooth space that is conducive of rhizomatic growth and nomadic movement, a "Body without Organs instead of an organism and organization" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 479).

Laura Kipins writes,

"Fidelity pledges whether to nations or marriages do hold particular property relations in place: break these vows and anything might happen . . . Let's not forget that nations too organise property relations, and citizenship signifies our fidelity to them." (Kipins 2003: 24)

As a commensurate extension of the above extract, the present paper is an attempt to understand how the contextual virtue of fidelity is bonded with the simultaneously integrative and alienating concept of the homeland, and how, as intricate subliminal formation, allows the philosophies of being and becoming, intensively bordering on the immanent questionnaire of Deleuze, to permeate into its interpretations. Furthermore, the paper seeks to establish the relational terms of 'homeland' and 'fidelity' as more than denominators of a normative regime, but as located at the position of sublation, becoming rather than definitively organizing itself either as being or nothing. With the thetical break with one's motherland and its associative cultural disorder, and the diminishing sense of responsibility toward familial and marital ties there is a definitive transmutative turn, and this unfolding is determinatively as much philosophical as it textually enforceable.

DIASPORA

Diaspora as a variegated experience is an attempt to study the different aspects of immigrancy which primarily focuses on the territory of displacement, cultural alienation, and the processes of reintegration that lead to emotional destabilization and insecurity, possessing a formative resonance to rhizoid structures.

The present study will deliberate upon adultery as a hypothetical space, where writers examine the results of the opted homelessness and intermezzanine nomadism entailing a thwarted image of family, fidelity and relationships. This paper explores the work of the two sub continental women writers namely- Manju Kapur and Taslima Nasreen and their respective novels *The Immigrant* (2008) and *The French Lover* (2001).

The main argument in the present paper is to focus on the psychological trajectories of the women protagonists, their moments of dislocative schizophrenia, who attempt to transform their entire being in the process of struggling and accepting the nuances of the migratory turbulence, and a formation that is definitive of the becoming of the assemblage that could be referred to as their Body-without-Organs. The construct here is of paradigmatic reference – in a Deleuzian mode one could justifiably make a reference to the continuing process of becoming that subjectifies diasporic positions as well as the currently concomitant resistance, the infiltration or transgression of the space of adultery into an acceptable prior, enabling the diasporic adulterer to exist in an interstitial space. This transformation or change stresses a gradual change in their exerted personality and aspects of their psyche which corrodes their selfhood, a construct of their homeland which has nurtured their mirroring of the self. Kapur and Nasreen have showed marked similarity in the behaviour of the females who are made to pave their way outside their homeland, due to their unfulfilled and dejected self, a symbolic manifestation of which is portrayed in the two works of fiction as possessing physical expression. The female protagonists in both novels, Nilanjana and Nina are thwarted in their self-prescribed love and find their ‘idealized other’ in arranged marriage alliances as a supplement to their absent objects of desire. Their prospective husbands become an instrument which serves a way to redress their lost respect at the hands of their lovers, and also enact the very Derridean trace while they fulfil their expected intentionalities. The women seek to find their somatic strength and dignity in the cohesiveness of the new relationships, their respective husbands being figured as

“a container for all the despised and disavowed aspects of the self. He may thus be an incarnation of the women’s negative identity – of all she fears she might be (or become) but dares not acknowledge. Here the partner can either be the repository of the women’s unacceptable sexual or aggressive impulses . . .” (Kakkar 1989: 83)

Thus the immediacy to accept the wedding alliance for the women is seen as their sharp yearning for partners, which subjects to their fulfilment of the want to be in pair, a socially accepted veneer that is an undertaking for plurality in their definitions of exigencies that are part of their becoming.

Kapur and Nasreen depict the protagonists’ move to the external world, away from their homeland with the paradoxes of immigrant subjectivities. In the texts the authors have reflected on the context of globalization, the hyper-rhizomatic proliferation of the worldliness of individual expression, which has initiated the search of international labour and business opportunities but has received the outsiders with feelings of deep grudge, aversion, and an exerted alienation in the host countries. Thus the immigrants fail to assimilate in the host country and are denied reception as naturalised social counterparts, irrespective of their success and prosperity. The gap between the adopted land and the real home is filled with a sense of fear, loss, with psychic and historical form of repression. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write in *The Empire Writes Back*, that Diaspora Literature,

“is the concern with place and displacement. the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (Paranjape 2001: 6)

The characters who initiate their journey of migration are intermediately modelled as diasporic subjects, experiencing a strained, tumultuous trauma of alien culture which they are

incapable to internalise. Thus the migratory experience apparently absorbs an impalpable violence, centring on resettlement rather than on uprooting. The distinctions of diaspora thus demonstrate itself in the switch across time and space, and in the process of reflecting the conflict, it narrates the attempt of the individuals to adopt in diasporic conditions, essentializing the transmutative turn that is the active signifier for both migration/diaspora and the ‘transgression’ of adultery.

TRAUMA OF DISLOCATION

In *The French Lover* and *The Immigrant*, the writers at the onset of the novels describe with marked similarity the first reverse-diasporic journey of the heroines of the texts to their respective foreign lands. Despite having their correct terrestrial and immigrant documentation, visa, passport et al in prescriptive preparation, they are deported, harassed and are subjected to disgraceful humiliation. Nina “feel(s) soiled, accused of trying to take something not rightfully hers . . . She does not like her introduction to the new world”:

“Rags fills her. Why were people so silent about the humiliation they faced in the west? She was a teacher at a university, yet this woman, probably high school pass, can imprison her in a cell like room, scare her and condemn her. Though she was addressed as ma’am, no respect is conveyed.” (Kapur: 108: 2008)

Nila undergoes a similar experience of rejection, discrimination and oppression as she lands in Paris,

“Not a single passport went through scanning machine. No one had to dig out money from their bags. No one was sent to the corner - the girl was the only one” (Nasreen 2001: 3)

Intertwined with elements of diasporic dislocations is the predicament of the immigrant women who are treated as alien by their host nations and are enslaved and treated as objects by men in their own communities. The social orientation is unqualified for the women at this stage, stuck in a limbo of conjunctive displacement and replacement, the two women are assemblages in progress, their conditions enactive portrayals of the smooth space. The institutions of migrancy and fidelity are both presented in light of a transient conflict, absorbing in its constituency the non-representability of becoming

“Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding . . . [nor] producing . . . Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, ‘appearing,’ ‘being,’ ‘equalling’ or ‘producing’.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 239)

In ‘The French Lover’ Nila married to Kishanlal is regarded as an object or as an attractive doll that is expected to render unquestionable obedience to her husband: “Nila the bride, the doll, the visitor”. Nila’s sense of alienation and inability to adjust in the new surroundings make her uncertain and insecure. She tries to make friends with Mojammal, Bachhu and the other migrants working in Kishanlal’s restaurant. In the beginning she struggles to cope up with her sense of ‘elsewhereness’ by creating a home for her by cherishing her self-historicised culture and allied customs in an effort to ward off exile and to prevent its devastation. This is a conclusive rendering of the assemblage’s nomadic movement of assimilation, the progressive localising of becoming-Nila through her oscillating processes of multiplying exile. Edward Said writes,

“Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience it is unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” (Said 2001: 173)

As an exile’s predicament, Nila’s sense of separation from her roots and her past evokes an urgent desire to reform her fragmented life by wanting to see her as a part of the adopted land, thus modulating a structure that absorbs her unitarily within a broader discourse. Her life that is controlled and dictated by the rules and regulations of Kishanlal, the authorial symbol of restrictive patriarchy, feels an urgent need to establish her own identity: “Nila got a job, packing computers in boxes: fifteen hundred francs a week” (Ibid: 35).

Her choice of job that is below her station conjures her craving for affectionate human relations which is amiss in her married life and her failure to live in isolation within the periphery of her house. She seeks a complex fulfilment that is unfamiliar to her present station and also referencing an opposition to typified patriarchal constructs. In her own way, Nila enacts the war machine that transcends the commodification of herself by obliterating the external rootings such negative constructs.

“The reason why I took the job is that . . . I have to live according to your wishes because you are the master, you are the boss; without you my life is pointless and I am a mere servant who will clean your house, cook , serve and provide sexual gratification at night” (Ibid : 79)

Nasreen, a confirmed feminist and humanist, through her book bespeaks of a woman who is a pawn to Kishanlal’s selfish interests and to the repugnant patriarchal norms, whereas Nasreen candidly expresses the violence and inhumanity suffered by Nila, Kapur has delineated Nina’s sympathetic portrayal, reminding the reader of the character of Ashima in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake*. The creation of the two characters thus follows from a paradigmatic capitulation to normative complexes, but uniquely leads to the unfolding of severe psychosomatic qualifiers, which opt for the sexual connotations that extenuate the conflict.

The textualization of immigration experience is seen when Nina suffers from a profound loneliness and the disorientation of alienation when Ananda fails to please her sexually and she finds herself vulnerable and forlorn which make her susceptible to the lust of Anton. Ananda and Nina fail to establish healthy sexual intimacy which stays at the level of mere verbal discourse and which leaves their marriage under tremendous strain. Discourse refers here to ‘conversation’ a verbal exchange, the death of which leads to the denouement of their marriage.

“Distance grew between them. Nina felt imprisoned by the stress . . . The single assurance that would have made it better was not forthcoming. The silence continued.” (Kapur 2008: 185)

In *The French Lover* Nila’s decision to leave Kishanlal is faced with an immediate sense of uncertainty and insecurity. Her prime objective to survive in a foreign land and her need of an immediate shelter make her an object of sexual pleasure for Danielle, a homosexual:

“Nila was still confused, when she came back to it, Danielle’s rapacious tongue licked her for the rest of the night. Nila lay there speechless and breathless”. (Nasreen 2001: 99)

Thus Nila’s recent claim to independence with her new autonomous identity is wrought with pain, loneliness and her ceaseless struggle to survive in an immigrant land. This act corresponds with the situation of proximity that performs as the active qualifier of extra-contractual arousal

“If we know sexuality through our opposition to another term as a reflection of the infinite possibilities of relation, then becomings create a sexuality of proximity; unthinkable relations with never quite apprehensible outside elements that fold within us and with which we fold, each transforming the other in a singular event of desire.” (MacCormack 2011: 200)

In *The Immigrant* Ananda’s sexual relationship with Nina is an opportunity to take on an interaction with his homeland or home. Nina represents the traditional Indian wife who is expected to cope with his sexual shortcomings with a loyal and silent understanding. This process of passive transference is the enactment of the parochial endemic that is stereotypically a representative of patriarchy’s latent inadequacies. Ananda’s resistance to accept his sexual inadequacy leaves Nina helpless and thwarted, as ‘her childlessness is reinforced daily’:

“She did not understand why he had suddenly turned hostile- surely he was aware he had a problem. Sex was a form of communication, and if they could not communicate on this most basic level what about everything else.” (Kapur 2008: 186)

Both the texts trace how the two women embark on a journey of synthetic return to their erstwhile homelands as an effort to establish links to their past and as an aid to boost their emotional and psychological support systems. But the death of their mothers breaks Nila and Nina’s last ties with their homeland and symbolically their ‘old self’. Their homecoming do not fetch them what they have lost. The motif of motherhood that existed as a unifier loses its consistency, and the allure of a home reserve is severely depleted

“She would not go back to that filthy society in Calcutta. If she returned to her father’s house it would dishonour the family name and if she stayed anywhere else in that city, people would call her names.” (Nasreen 2001:176)

THE TROPE OF ADULTERY

Nasreen and Kapur deftly interpose the trope of adultery as contrived by immigrant dislocation. As a part of the immigration struggle, the exposition of intimate relationship outside marriage stands out to be an important impact of it. Infidelity becomes a simulative response of the ‘diasporic-space’ that attempts to explore the outcome of the unhomeliness of immigration experience. This breaks the institutionalised notions of family life, identity and marital fidelity.

Nila’s torn relationship with her husband and home, with her displaced identity finds momentary solace in her relationship with Benoir Dupont a “blonde, blue-eyed, pink-lipped, Frenchman, six-feet three inches tall in blue jeans and white T –shirt . . .” (Ibid: 163) with whom she felt “that in this cruel, grotesque, world, love could be so intimate, sex could be so perfect” (Ibid: 170).

Nila’s intimacy with Benoire becomes an explicit link to rehabilitate and re-locate her in a foreign land. Her longing for stability and home is realized by Benoire but he proves to be a weakling who is unsure of their future together. She understands that her French Lover is no different than “my father Anirban, my lover Sushanta, my husband Kishanlal and that of Suniel” (Ibid: 286) who prove to be the structures of oppression. However, the novelists skilfully interweave the exploration of a greater sensibility that entails a crucial organ of the holistic assemblage of becoming-woman that both protagonists are experiencing with the vacuity of emotional establishments.

With time Nilanjana realizes the hollowness and emptiness of their relationship. But eventually this leads to her self- discovery where there is no place for the ‘French Lover’: “Nila’s French lover walked out, her handsome man with his blue eyes, blonde hair walked out” (Ibid: 291). Thus her newfound affection and love towards the foreign land and foreign people and her need to belong to it, leaves her unfulfilled, broken and with an emptiness revoking that a foreign land can never be a person’s homeland. At the end of the text Nasreen has emphatically pointed out that one can never cut the cord that ties them to their motherland.

“Was this her own country? Nila knew this land, decked up in such a beautiful autumn, was not her own land.” (Ibid: 291)

Manju Kapur through her captivating prose brings an end to *The Immigrant* by establishing the fact that both Ananda and Nina, lacked the mental strength of an immigrant. Immigration definitely calls for willingness of the mind to assimilate and adapt himself/herself to the foreign ethos without abandoning their old selves. The dilemma that this presents is the precise mode of one’s existence, whether one should abandon the state of flux that is ‘becoming’ and coordinate oneself in accordance to the essentialisation of either being or nothing, or should one embrace one’s constant displacement and envision it as the formulation of the Body-without- Organs into a complex stratum of operatives. For Ananda and Nina their displacement was not only geographically and culturally but spiritually too that ultimately made them lose their own selves.

“The things that might have made separation in India difficult for Nina were hers to command in Canada. Financial self sufficiency, rental ease, social acceptability . . . she looked down the path on which there would be no husband and saw the difficulties, the pain, the solitude.” (Ibid: 333)

It becomes imperative here to fathom the cultural impact on Indian marriages. In the Indian context the experiential acts of women are inwardly expressed without any explicit renderings. Even the contemporary scenario witnesses a conflict of interest when it comes to the question of the fulfilment of post-marital needs. In the normatively oriented sections of Indian society women are supposed to suffer the marital conflicts silently. Women’s writing in India has often tried to explore the areas beyond the tradition bound values of fidelity to a new and emancipatory sexual ideology. The marked observation here is this change in the social order in terms of premarital, extramarital; adultery and promiscuous relationship have been gradual, in a concealed and secretive way, minding the strict, conventional socio- cultural factors. The exposition of sexual freedom of women outside marriage is brought under severe scrutiny and at times severely reprimanded. Keeping the social context of India in mind, a woman has no option but to honour the values of chastity and sexual passivity and project herself as a virtuous wife. As a critic writes, in India,

“Sex is recommended only for the practical purpose of procreation. The satisfaction of sexual appetite, a natural need, is forbidden because it is a lust and, hence, sinful. Women in literature are either projected as ideal and sublime like Durga or Lakshmi . . . depending on her sexual role . . .” (Singh 2007: 273)

This equation assumes a different proportion in a foreign land. Nila and Nina both of them suffer from an absence of normal sexual and emotional compatibility with their husbands which echoes in their psychological thought process. As Kakkar writes,

“Sexuality, in psychoanalysis, is a system of conscious and unconscious human fantasies, arising from various sources, seeking satisfaction in

diverse ways, and involving a range of excitations and activities that aim to achieve pleasure that goes beyond the satisfaction of any basic somatic need.” (Kakkar: 21: 1989)

The man-woman relationship acquires a different dimension in a changed society and in a different land. The inner condition or mindset of the female protagonists experiences a substantial change due to their physical absence from their homeland. It is an extensive process that places the woman previously under restrictions in conditions that are far more conducive of a healthy psychosexual growth, and thus her nomadic self strives to attain a complexity of behavioural modifications. Western feminism observes more liberation and freedom in terms of women’s sexual behaviour. It codifies radical ideology of women’s sexuality/sexual identities which provide the independence and autonomy to women to become sexually free and to participate in sexual relationships according to their choice and consent. Their physical desire and sexual patterns do not observe and commit to any socio-cultural value patterns. They manifest their physical urges even by rejecting heterosexuality and embracing homosexuality, which is an important criteria as it acts as a prime substitute to the patriarchal status quo, and also functions as a deterrent in the predetermination of women as objects for the facilitation of procreation. Although it would not be suitable to adjudge the depicted issue through the lens of Western feminist practices, as Chandra T. Mohanty has warned against, but it nevertheless provides a plausible alterity.

In the two narratives, Nila and Nina sublimate themselves to the diasporic condition and emerge from their stoic, self-sacrificing image and set out as rebels. This ekes out the other side of their feminine sensibilities. The waning moments of tenderness, love and freedom absent in their legal relationships is satiated in the illegal ones with Benoire and Anton. The relationship acquires its pleasure due to the lack of commitment, false decorum and bindings of institutionalised marriage. But both women suffer severe disappointment when they look forward to the intrinsic essentialities of marriage in their adulterous relationships. Their demand of devotion, faithfulness from their respective partners leaves them disillusioned. For Nina her relationship with Anton leads to her physical incursion by him: “Was he trying to have sex forcibly? The idea of it was so startling and then so revolting, it collected her wits” (Ibid: 311). Nina’s sufferance in a foreign land is complicit at both psychological and physical levels. Her illicit relationship with Anton can be apprehended as an outlet for her self from her choked marital life. Visually, the portrayal has resonances with the sexual encounter between the characters of Anna and the waiter in Bergman’s 1963 film *Tystnaden (The Silence)*. This relationship initiates on the line to subdue the boredom and the physical incompatibility with her husband. The diasporic situation proves for the female protagonists to be an explanatory incident for seeking alternative sexual experiences that provide them with extra-rational stabilities and reassurances in their relationships outside the orbit of marriage.

Taslima Nasreen’s *The French Lover (2001)* and Manju Kapur’s *The Immigrant (2008)* are the texts which act as appropriate devices to distinguish and establish similarities between the two women writers with different nationalities, besides being instances of democratising the problematic that is the question of women’s position as passive participants, often involuntary, of a diaspora that is not entirely their own. The partition of India initiated on religious discrimination establishes the two writers’ perspective on a common theme of migrancy and living in diaspora, and the equally linear psychology of the woman-question is enacted with the constant calibratory argument, the becoming-woman, becoming-migrant, becoming-adulterer, endlessly proliferating rhizomatic anti-structure of which these acts of ‘infidelity’ are crucial

elements of. The paper italicizes the location of the subject position and the becoming of the female protagonists in the two contexts respectively.

“They have abandoned your soil,
to travel across long distances;
cry they shall, for the beloved country,
the abode of five rivers,
in barren foreign lands.” (Dev)
(Paranjape 2001: 114)

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