



Two Journeys Home: Gender, Class and Repatriation in Gupta's *Memories of Rain* and Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

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Abstract:

Outward migration has been studied at length in the Indian Diaspora, but the journey of return has not been covered in detail. It remains undertheorised. The present paper explores two distinct modes of repatriation to Bengal: Moni in Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* and Tara in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*. The two novels feature female characters from contrasting social backgrounds, a pairing chosen for methodological reasons. It allows analysing the impact of class by comparing two people of the same gender. It therefore meets the main objection: when class and gender differ, no reading can identify which particular process is at work behind the outcome. The circumstances surrounding the returns are different. Moni buys her ticket on her husband's credit card; her own limit is insufficient to pay for the ticket. The novel's ending highlights that her repatriation is a bitter sense of failure. Tara's elite capital carries her to the homeland without friction. She recovers the female ancestral line, along with the Bengali word that comes back with the memory. One return recuperates; the other liberates in aspiration and delivers a hollow homecoming. This paper reads the difference as the work of a single structure, not of two separable forces, drawing on Safran, Hall, Mishra and Brah for the diaspora frame and on Crenshaw and on Anthias and Yuval-Davis in a supporting role. Neither novel has been read in this way, and neither appears in the field's fullest comparative study.

Keywords: repatriation, Indian Diaspora, gender and class, New Diaspora Studies, Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta.

Introduction

Diaspora criticism has written the leaving at great length. A migrant's departure, her arrival, the shock of the hostland and the slow work of settling into it have all been read closely, and read well. The journey in the other direction has drawn far less attention. Where it has been considered, it is usually seen as the end of some processes rather than one of many types of movement. The diasporic individual comes home or stays where he or she is, and going is seen as the solution to previous uncertainties. Safran's founding account treats return as a largely eschatological concept, a utopian horizon held against the conditions of actual diasporic life (94). Bidisha Banerjee opens her study of Sunetra Gupta by observing that diaspora theory has taken the journey away from home to be one-directional and linear (1). Return has been theorised as a horizon or assumed away as a reversal that never takes place. This paper takes two returns that both happen, and asks what decides the shape each one takes.

Moni, in Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain*, buys a ticket to Calcutta on her husband's credit card because her own limit will not stretch to the fare, and arrives filled with what the novel calls a bitter sense of failure (Gupta 23, 173). Tara, in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*, travels to her ancestral village at the close of a search she funds herself, and finds there a Bengali word she has never used and the ancestress whose name she almost shares (Mukherjee 328). Both women are Bengali, both are educated, both marry young and follow a husband abroad, both spend about a decade there as wives, and both go home. What separates them is money.

The combination is deliberate, and it is part of the paper's methodology. If there is variation by both gender and class in one study, there is no way to know which is responsible for the results; it is legitimate for a reader to ask whether the distinction was actually a difference in the gender of the returnee. By keeping gender constant across two women and

varying class from one extreme to another, the paper answers that objection. The difference between Moni's homecoming and Tara's cannot be explained by gender alone.

The two terms will not stay apart. Moni's want of money turns out to be her position as a wife expressed in economic terms, produced by ten years in which the only arrangements she made were domestic. Tara's inherited hoard reached her through a marriage two fathers agreed between them. Neither woman's class position can be stated in terms that do not already carry her gender inside them, which is why the two homecomings differ in kind and not in degree. This paper reads the two returns as the work of a single structure, drawing on intersectional theory in a supporting role within a New Diaspora and postcolonial frame. The sections that follow set out the state of the criticism, set out the theoretical framework, read Moni and Tara in turn, place the two returns side by side, and close on what a controlled pair can establish and where it would break.

Memories of Rain and Desirable Daughters: The Critical Reception

Neither of these novels has been read alongside the other, and one of them has barely been read at all. The fullest comparative study of diasporic South Asian women's fiction, Ruvani Ranasinha's study, takes its corpus from Roy, Ali, Desai, Anam, Khan, Shamsie and Lahiri, together with a group of Sri Lankan writers (7). Sunetra Gupta does not appear in it. Bharati Mukherjee does, though as a precursor against whom the chosen writers are measured, and by way of *Jasmine* and *The Tiger's Daughter*; *Desirable Daughters* goes unmentioned. The point is not that Ranasinha has overlooked anything, because a study must draw its boundary somewhere and hers is drawn on defensible grounds. The point is where that leaves the two returns considered here, which is outside the field's fullest comparative treatment of their own subject.

Bidisha Banerjee's interpretation of *Memories of Rain* aims at reversing the teleology of diaspora; for Banerjee, Moni's movement towards Calcutta is circular, not linear:

I wish to suggest that Moni's return to a reimagined Calcutta—to a Calcutta that has been significantly revised in her memory—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)

It is a tough place to start a new life, this Calcutta of the last page, with its burst main and dead crow. Banerjee also observes, in passing, that Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Ashima in *The Namesake* carry out similar acts of return (2), though she pursues only Gupta at length. The comparative reading her sentence gestures at remains unwritten, and *Desirable Daughters* is not among the novels she names. Her account of the return is also, on its own terms, a formal and psychological one, tracking the revision of memory so that Moni comes back to a Calcutta she has remade, and not to a pristine origin (Banerjee 12). What the return costs, and who pays for it, are questions outside that framework.

Existing criticism of both novels analyses their women through gender or class, never through both. The emancipation interpretation of *Memories of Rain*, for example, sees Moni's decision at the telephone as her reclamation of agency. Krishna R. Lewis is more cautious. For Lewis, "Moni yearns for a purity of person which never was," and nostalgia at the close "reinscribes Moni as the English anthropologist's referent" (50). Lewis locates the qualification in colonial discourse and in Gupta's narrative technique, and not in what the woman can afford. On *Desirable Daughters*, Ruth Maxey offers the only sustained treatment attentive to caste and class. She catches the Brahmin world and the "Bengali exceptionalism" the novel reinscribes (Maxey 100). She treats these as marks of Mukherjee's own presence in the book, and not as forces bearing on a woman going home. Gender carries the meaning of Moni's return in the criticism; class carries the description of Tara's world. In neither case do the two terms meet.

This paper takes the two novels as a pair, and the pairing is the argument, therefore, and not a convenience of arrangement. An earlier study by the present author read Lahiri's *Ashima* and Desai's *Biju* through the same interlock; what that study could not do, working across a woman and a man, was rule out gender as the sole engine of the difference. Two women of opposite class settle that. What is new here is not the observation that class matters to Moni or that gender matters to Tara, both of which the existing criticism has in some form. What is new is the demonstration that in each case the class term is already gendered in its making, so that the two cannot be assigned separate work, and that a controlled comparison is what makes this visible.

Defining Repatriation: The Theoretical Framework

The old Indian diaspora left under indenture, and few of them could make the journey home. The new diaspora is educated, professional and voluntary, and it moves with passports, savings and the means to fly back whenever it chooses (Cohen 18). Moni and Tara belong to this second formation. Their journeys home can therefore be read against one another, and the question they raise is not whether return is possible but what the return costs each of them.

Repatriation, in this paper, does not carry the legal or demographic sense of formal and permanent resettlement in a country of citizenship. The term refers instead to a diasporic life turned towards return, one that may be seen through to its end, broken off midway, or refused altogether, and in which the body may or may not finally move. What makes such a return repatriation is that it bears on the direction the life actually takes, whether through a decision, an attempt, a journey or a refusal.

Avtar Brah distinguishes between the homing desire that diasporic identity makes room for and the desire for a homeland. She characterises home as a mythic place of desire, a place of no return even where the geography can be revisited (Brah 177, 188). Homing desire is the broader and commoner condition: Moni's nostalgia for ten years in London is homing desire;

her phone call to the travel agent is repatriation. The distinction lies in whether the life changes direction; it does not rely upon the strength of the feeling. Both novels make the distinction themselves, giving each woman ten years of longing before a ticket.

Ever since its inception, diaspora theory has challenged the possibility of such a repatriation achieving completion. Stuart Hall's account of cultural identity provides the reason. As Hall explains, identity is "a production which is never complete" (392). It involves a process of becoming as much as a state of being (394). There is no original condition in the homeland to be recovered, and no literal going home again (399). Vijay Mishra takes an even more radical stance and declares that an engineered return to a condition of purity is contradictory (432). His objection rests on the purity, not on the movement of return. Moni and Tara both fail to achieve completion in their returns. The prediction proves accurate for the two of them and yet explains very little about either, because the manner in which each falls short has almost nothing in common with the other. This paper takes up the difference between the two returns.

Intersectional theory is brought in to answer the question left open by the tradition, which is why the two failures take such different forms. It accounts for the difference; it does not replace the framework. Kimberlé Crenshaw supplies the principle. Writing about the position of Black women in antidiscrimination law, she argues that "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism," so that an analysis which leaves intersectionality out cannot address the particular manner in which they are subordinated (Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing" 140). Crenshaw criticises the single-axis framework in the same discussion, because it erases those who carry more than one disadvantage by confining its inquiry to the otherwise privileged members of each group. This paper takes a principle from Crenshaw, not a framework; New Diaspora Studies and postcolonial theory continue to do the primary work of the argument.

Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis go a step beyond Crenshaw. They object to the double-burden and triple-burden models, which treat a woman's disadvantages as cumulative, counting them and adding them up. Each one works through the others, and together they produce effects that belong to the combination alone. These cannot be treated as separate layers of oppression laid one on top of another (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 70). They go on to describe what an analysis of this kind looks like in practice:

At the empirical level it is important to explore the different experiences of men as against women; racially dominant as against racialized women; working-class as against middle-class women, in terms of their articulation and intersection and not only mechanistically, since each division is practised in the context of the others. (79)

The divisions are practised in the context of one another, and never in isolation. This is what lets Moni's insufficient credit limit count as a single fact about her position, not two facts. Tara's inheritance works the same way. It comes to her as a Brahmin daughter, not to a wealthy person who happens also to be a woman. They name three such articulations, and working-class against middle-class women is one of them.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty answers a difficulty that this comparison runs into early. Her target is the average third-world woman of Western feminist writing, a composite produced by assuming that women's oppression is uniform across class and culture (Mohanty 337). Moni and Tara could easily be made to look like one woman: Bengali, educated, married and taken abroad. This paper takes the differences between them as its object and not as noise around a shared condition. Mohanty does more than warn. She states the claim on which this paper rests:

Practices which characterize women's status and roles vary according to class. Women are constituted as women through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion and other ideological institutions and frameworks. They are not "women"—a

coherent group—solely on the basis of a particular economic system or policy.
(Mohanty 344)

No single system does the work alone. A reading that limits the female subject to gender identity, she argues on the same page, bypasses social class. James Clifford adds a further caution from within diaspora studies itself, having observed in 1994 that diasporic experiences are always gendered and that theoretical accounts tend to hide the fact by speaking of travel and displacement in unmarked ways (Clifford 313). Clifford also saw the shape of the problem this paper takes up:

Life for women in diasporic situations can be doubly painful—struggling with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile, with the demands of family and work, and with the claims of old and new patriarchies. Despite these hardships, they may refuse the option of return when it presents itself, especially when the terms are dictated by men. (Clifford 314)

Clifford wrote that in 1994. What he did not do, and what remains to be done, is read a novel's returning woman through it.

Moni's Return as Constrained Liberation

The child is watching television. Moni picks up the telephone and calls a travel agent. This is the first act of will in her married life. The narrator pauses over what that small task has cost her:

As the child watches television, 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 decision, in these ten years, she has never made any arrangements other than for dinner parties, other than getting a babysitter, other than buying birthday presents, these ten

years. She pays by Anthony's credit card, her own credit limit is not high enough . . .
(Gupta 23)

Ten years in England, and nothing chosen. The line works as a compressed account of a decade lived inside another person's arrangements, and it earns the weight criticism has placed on it, which takes the call as the point where Moni becomes the subject of her own story.

What that sentence grants, it withdraws before the paragraph closes. Two clauses on, Gupta writes that she "pays by Anthony's credit card, her own credit limit is not high enough" (Gupta 23). The instrument of the escape belongs to the man being escaped. The detail can pass for ordinary domestic realism. Gupta has set the assertion of will and the limit of that will inside one unbroken sentence, divided by a comma, so that the syntax refuses their separation. Moni takes her destiny into her own hands on her husband's account, so that one comma holds the freedom and its price.

The sentence cannot be sorted into two findings, one about gender and one about class. Moni is not idle, because she has work, "translating the complaints of Bangladeshi patients to physicians" (Gupta 44), and the brevity of that clause should not disguise its weight. She has entered the London labour market at the point held open for the educated migrant woman: community interpreting, casual, low-waged, valued for a skill that carries no proper wage. Ten years of that work, and her credit limit still falls short of a fare to Calcutta. Spivak's disenfranchised woman of the diaspora is the figure the sentence describes (252). Her dependence is not a want of employment; it is a want of employment at a living wage. The marriage is what placed her in that segment of the market, because the migration was his career and her wedding, and the arrangements Gupta lists for her decade run to dinner parties, babysitters and birthday presents (Gupta 23). Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue that social divisions are practised through one another rather than stacked in layers, and Moni's credit limit is the same argument, carried by one sentence of a novel. Anthony states the same thing

from his side of the marriage. She is “a lump of clay in his hands,” he thinks bitterly, and then: “what choice does she have, where can she go within this wide world without his support” (Gupta 81). The husband’s bitter question is the wife’s economic position, stated from the other side of the bed. Long before the airport, the novel has settled what kind of homecoming this will be. Moni pictures her parents receiving her and finds no welcome in the picture. She will go back to them, Gupta writes, and “bring to them a new grief, that of a daughter returned, a daughter rejected, a daughter spurned” (Gupta 32). Three nouns, each worse than the one before it. The return is imagined as disgrace in the family’s eyes before it is imagined as freedom in her own, and the vocabulary of that disgrace is gendered throughout: a daughter who comes home from a marriage carries a shame no son would carry. Her class offers no cushion. The Ballygunge household she left is educated and respectable, with a servant to fetch her father’s tiffin from her mother’s hands (Gupta 105), and nothing beyond that to absorb the scandal of a daughter sent back.

The return the card pays for is then given, at the airport, as anything but a deliverance. Moni has cleared the desk and watched her bags go, and the narration turns:

she is filled with an indescribable loneliness, a bitter sense of failure, she is returning home, the child is blinking, shaking sleep from her large eyes, she takes her hand, behind her impatient travelers shift upon their feet, two women are discussing loudly the presents they are taking for their families in Calcutta, the pujas are next week, they remind each other. (Gupta 173)

Two journeys to Calcutta sit inside that passage, and Gupta allows the two no resemblance. The women behind Moni travel for the pujas, with presents, in season, expected at the other end. Theirs is a festival. Moni’s is an exit from a marriage, and the novel gives her loneliness and failure while it gives them gifts and a calendar. The word “failure” is Gupta’s own. Yet the leaving is not clean either, because on the escalator Moni feels “the tendrils of

this land” pulling at her feet, England become “an indifferent parent suddenly entreating a prodigal child” (Gupta 174). The plane will be boarded. What the departure reached for is not what waits at the other end. Her repatriation is liberatory in aspiration and hollow in achievement, and constrained liberation is the name this paper gives that shape.

Calcutta, when the novel finally reaches it, has soured. The last page of the novel puts her in a taxi on Rashbehari Avenue:

Intoxicated by nostalgia, she leans out to contemplate the skies, from behind tall shutters, the reluctant strains of a thin child voice float down, faltering in the crevices of one of the poet’s most difficult songs, shrill, flat, it fades pathetically away into the paused sunshine, the taxi grinds to a sudden halt, upon Rashbehari Avenue the water main has burst again . . . the wheels rock upon a bird carcass, crushing crow flesh into hot tar, upon the streets, early crowds are gathering, she looks upon the faces of a generation who knew the poet only by the dregs of his dreams. (Gupta 198)

A burst main, a dead crow in the road, and a child mangling Tagore. The city she carried through ten London years was made of rain and Tagore. This one has a burst pipe and a dead crow in the road. This is what Rushdie describes when he calls the migrant’s homeland an imaginary one, built from fragments and shaped by the distance that made it necessary (10). Lewis reads the same closing paragraph as the moment Moni, having returned to Calcutta at last, recognises the fiction she had made of it (50), and this paper follows him on where the scene stands while parting from him over its meaning.

The novel’s small critical literature has mostly read this return as an emancipation achieved. C. Sindhu and N. S. Vishnu Priya put it without qualification: “She emancipates herself by going back to her home” (Sindhu and Vishnu Priya 148). Their Moni rises from her sufferings and resolves without help from anyone, and their evidence is the passage examined above. They read the telephone call. They do not read the clause that follows it. An escape

financed by the man being escaped is an escape on his terms, and no account that stops at the first half of Gupta 23 can see as much. Banerjee's reading is subtler and harder to answer. She does not call the return an emancipation; she calls it a new beginning in a reimagined Calcutta (Banerjee 3), which the closing page's burst main and dead crow do not straightforwardly contradict. The credit card is what answers her. A new beginning financed on the account of the man being left is a beginning made on his terms, and that material fact sits in the same sentence as the act of will. Krishna R. Lewis arrives at a comparable sense of a liberation withheld, though by another route. For Lewis the book is "an emancipatory narrative" that cannot attain its own liberatory strategies (45); his constraint is discursive and colonial, and it follows from a formal argument about Gupta's narrative technique. This paper locates the constraint in the wage and in the marriage that set it. The two readings meet on one textual fact, a homecoming that liberates incompletely, and part company over the cause. Lewis corroborates the result. He is not the authority for the mechanism, and only the first is claimed from him in this paper.

Tara's Return as Recuperation

Moni's journey home begins with a betrayal. Tara's begins with nobody at all. No husband has driven her out and no bereavement has released her; she goes because she has decided to go, and Mukherjee has her name the impulse with some embarrassment as "that most American of impulses, or compulsions, a 'roots search'" (17). The contrast with Moni sits in the trigger. Moni is leaving a marriage, while Tara is leaving an ordinary afternoon. Clifford, writing on diasporic women, notes that they may refuse the option of return when it presents itself, "especially when the terms are dictated by men" (Clifford 314). Moni's terms are dictated by a man; her ticket is bought on his card, and her going is an answer to his infidelity. Tara sets her own terms and buys her own ticket. That difference is what the paper varies, and it is a difference of class before it is a difference of any other kind.

Tara does not walk into the ancestral village on a pilgrimage. She walks into it at the end of a thriller, after a stolen identity, a firebombing and her husband's maiming. Ruth Maxey's reading dwells on exactly this, treating the book as a suspense plot folded into an autobiographical impulse, so that Tara becomes the vehicle through which Mukherjee recovers her own lost Calcutta (Maxey 99). A reader who takes that framing seriously may well ask whether the closing scene is a recovery or simply the place the plot happens to leave her.

The language of the passage answers that, whatever brought her to the village. Walking a raised path between ponds with her son, Tara names it:

The winter night of East Bengal falls quickly. The mosquitoes are fierce. Rabi and I walk along the paved road from the Tree-Bride's house to the last of the permanent structures. The road gives way to crushed stone, rising above ponds on either side. This is called a shanko, I say, a word I have not used in my life and only now suddenly remember. Many words are flooding in . . . "Rabi!" I say. "Remember this. It's a miracle." (Mukherjee 328)

A whole vocabulary follows that single word. Nothing in that exchange concerns the mystery, and the miracle is lexical. A Bengali noun she never once needed across an American adulthood arrives unbidden on the soil where her ancestress lived, and the woman who has spent the novel explaining India to Americans finds a single word of it returning to her.

What comes back is not what a homecoming usually restores. No property changes hands, and no title is claimed. What Tara recovers is a vocabulary and, through it, a woman. The novel has said so from its early pages:

All of my life, or at least ever since my mother told me the story of Tara Lata the Tree-Bride—and that I had been named for her—I have felt, for no discernible reason, a profound connection. She had two sisters, as do I . . . But my sisters and I are Calcutta girls, a city that Tara Lata never saw. (Mukherjee 17)

Tara Lata was married at five to a tree in the forest, never afterwards left her father's house, and yet "gradually changed the world" from inside it (Mukherjee 17). The line running to Tara is female throughout, and the novel has said so from its opening pages, where the story descends to Tara from her mother. She now hands it on to Rabi. A few lines above the shanku, the ancestral voices "drift through time" and "penetrate the thickest stone fortress," and Tara answers them with a Bengali proverb, *Bishey bish khai*, only poison delivers us from poison (Mukherjee 328). Her husband's name is Bish. The returning language arrives already carrying her marriage inside it.

The recovery costs her nothing, and that is the class fact. Tara flies to Bangladesh, takes rooms, engages guides and runs a search across two countries, and the novel never once pauses over the money, because there is no obstacle to detain the narration. Mukherjee has been precise about the source of that ease. The prologue lights its 1879 wedding procession by "a rich man's light, a light that knows English invention" (Mukherjee 4), and Tara names her own inheritance without irony as "that hoard of inherited confidence, the last treasure I'd smuggled out of India" (Mukherjee 46). Set that against Moni's credit limit and the distance between the two women is a distance of money. There is even a shared early scene against which to measure the two women. Tara spends her first American years "working in the library" on the Stanford campus while her brilliant husband dazzles his professors (Mukherjee 46), which is Moni's arrangement exactly: a wife's small employment beside a husband's career. Gender puts both women in that position, yet class decides what it costs them. Moni's version ends in a credit limit too low to buy a fare; Tara's ends in a hoard she can spend on a continent.

Class does not, on its own, explain what the return means once she arrives. Maxey reads Tara's class location with more care than anyone, catching the Brahmin world, the Bengali exceptionalism the novel reinscribes and Tara's own trophy status within it (Maxey 100), and she holds these as features of Mukherjee's autobiographical self-inscription rather than as

forces working on a returning woman. What the novel offers is tighter than that. The marriage that carried Tara to America was arranged between two fathers. Everything Bish Chatterjee did was best: “Best grades, best school, best wife. When he expressed a desire to get married, his father and mine cut the deal. Best boy, best girl” (Mukherjee 46). Tara is the third item in a list of a man’s accomplishments. Her class made her worth acquiring, and her gender made her acquirable. The same two terms return at the close of the novel, working the other way. Her class makes the journey home available, and her gender decides that what waits there is an ancestress and not an estate. Remove the class and no such search can be funded. Remove the gender and the search recovers a line of property owners. It is as a woman of the Brahmin elite, and not as a wealthy person who happens to be female, that Tara can go home and find the Tree-Bride waiting. The rest of the criticism on the novel stops short of this. Shailja Chhabra reads Tara’s movement between cultures as a crisis of diasporic identity, and takes the instability as the finding, yet does not ask what resolves it (231). Debjani Banerjee notes the ending accurately, naming Tara’s turn towards the ancestral home and the legendary Tree-Bride who waits there (D. Banerjee 281), though as the close of a narrative and not as a repatriation whose form anything in particular determines. Between them, the identity reading and the plot summary leave the question this paper asks unposed.

Moni and Tara: A Comparative Reading of Two Repatriations

Both women are Bengali, both are educated, both marry and leave Calcutta in their twenties, both spend roughly a decade abroad as wives, and both go home. Gender holds steady across the pair. What moves is class, and it moves about as far as it can between two Bengali women: from one whose credit limit will not stretch to an airfare to one who funds a two-country search without the novel troubling to mention the cost. The returns that follow move with it. Moni reaches Calcutta and finds a burst water main and a dead crow. Tara reaches Mishtigunj and finds a word she had never spoken and an ancestress she had never met.

The clearest measure of the difference is the question of payment. Moni's fare is charged to Anthony's card, and Gupta places the reason in the same breath: her own credit limit is not high enough (Gupta 23). She has employment. Her work as an interpreter for Bangladeshi patients in London (Gupta 44) is casualised, racialised and low-waged. Clifford, writing in the same years, identifies precisely this as the opening the metropolitan economy holds for immigrant women, an income independent and exploitative at once (Clifford 314). Ten years of it will not buy an exit. Tara's ticket comes out of what she calls "that hoard of inherited confidence, the last treasure I'd smuggled out of India" (Mukherjee 46), and no one has to be asked. One woman's return is underwritten by the man she is leaving. The other's is underwritten by the family that waits at the other end.

Take class away from Moni and the constraint disappears with it; a woman who could pay her own fare would leave Anthony's house on her own terms, and the airport would hold no bitterness for her. Take gender away and the case dissolves differently, since her want of money is not the ordinary poverty of a low earner but the specific condition of a kept wife. Tara answers to the same test from the other side. Strip out her class and the roots-search cannot be funded at all. Strip out her gender and the search still finds an estate, though it does not find the Tree-Bride, and the ending loses its point. Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue that social divisions cannot be sorted into separate, self-contained systems with causes of their own, and these two returns are that argument put to a controlled test.

If gender is held constant and only class varies, has the comparison not simply shown that class does the work? The class term in each case turns out, on inspection, to be gendered in its own making, so the two terms were never separate at any point. Moni's want of money is her wifeness expressed as an economic fact, produced by ten years of unwaged domestic arrangement beside a husband's career. Tara's capital came to her by a marriage her father and Bish's father settled between them, in which she was the third item on a list of a man's

accomplishments (Mukherjee 46). Neither woman's class position exists in a form separable from her position as a wife. The returns differ in kind rather than in degree. Class alone would predict the same journey made more or less comfortably, one woman travelling easily and the other with difficulty. The novels give something else: two returns of different sorts, one recuperative and one liberatory in aspiration and hollow in achievement, each recovering or failing to recover something the woman's gender specifies. Moni comes home as a daughter returned, rejected and spurned (Gupta 32). Tara comes home to a female line and hands it to her son. Class sets what each woman can spend. Gender settles what she is spending it on, and what she will find at the other end.

Conclusion

Moni and Tara are both Bengali. Both married young, both followed a husband abroad, and both went home after a decade. In each case, class turns out to be the economic form that gender has taken in the woman's life. Moni's credit limit is her position as a wife, counted in money. Tara's inheritance came to her through an arrangement between two fathers. Neither woman's class position can be described without her position as a wife inside it. That is why the two returns differ in kind and not merely in comfort. One woman recovers a language and an ancestress. The other reaches a city with a burst water main in it, and a sentence of Gupta's own waiting for her there, a bitter sense of failure (Gupta 173).

The pair examined here belongs to a larger comparative study that also takes up Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. In Desai's novel the same structure works the other way round, on a male labour-migrant whose class defeat reaches him as an attack on his manhood. In Lahiri's, a second-generation character never returns at all, and the scheme does not try to explain him. The main limitation of this research is that it compares only two novels, and both protagonists are female. It does not show whether the structure of

gender and class works on a male character to the same degree. The wider study takes up that question.

Criticism on these novels has asked whether the diasporic subject goes home, and the answer has usually been treated as enough on its own, either a resolution or a failure of one. Both women in this paper go home. The fact that they go settles nothing; the way they go settles a great deal. Return in the New Diaspora is not a single event that can be more or less successful. It is a set of differently shaped outcomes, and what gives them their shape is the interlock between gender and class. The better question is no longer whether the diasporic subject returns. It is what her return costs her, who pays for it, and what she is allowed to find at the other end.

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