

Overtones of Diasporic Consciousness in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh: A critical Study

Rekha Shukla

Research Scholar

Jiwaji University, Gwalior

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh is one of the great fiction writers and can be seen as the flag bearer among the modern Indian writers in English. Salman Rushdie is considered the pioneer who put the post-colonial issues on the literary map, yet Amitav Ghosh has become one of the prominent figures to arise after Salman Rushdie. Ghosh is one writer who combines history with a very contemporary vision of a world free of discrete cartographical divisions. Diasporic consciousness is chosen with special reference to works of Amitav Ghosh, who has got prominent place in Diasporic literature. The paper aims to attempt to find out Diasporic elements in the works of Ghosh.

Key words: Diaspora, Consciousness, post-colonialism, Fiction, Writing, Home

Introduction:

Diaspora has been derived from the two Greek word 'Dia' and 'speirien' means through and to scatter. It is used to show multiple journeys throughout the world. It may not be regarded as casual journey nor do they normatively refer to temporary sojourns. Diasporic journeys are essentially about settling down, and putting roots "elsewhere". Diaspora has been considered by the societies or nationalities into different kinds like, American, African, Russian, Chinese, Greek Indian, etc... These are categorized by each of its culture and life style. Indian Diaspora has its autonomous space as well as identity in Indian writing in English. Its

exceptional characteristics determine its distinct position and reveal “Indianness” in true sense. Indian Diaspora fiction in English is a result of some prominent writers settled in different countries of the world and concentrating on their native land and their writings also expose their feeling and emotions in their writings.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the great Indian Diasporic writers after Salman Rushdie in English literature. His fiction is a true example to show unfavourable conditions faced by writers in alien land. The characters in most of the novels of Ghosh have decided to move across from their native land and decide to settle in an alien world. Their identities are being replaced by new identities. His fiction also reflects the problems of the Indian society and exposes different oppressions faced by the person who settles in different countries.

Indian writers have been mingled with diaspora. Ghosh expresses his new world in a new region with new culture and language in his most of the novels and took the themes like dislocation, displacement, dispossession, and the hybrid. His *Sea of Poppies* is one of the great novels which thoroughly narrate the significant history. The novel portrays the experience and journey of the North Indian labourers who indentured within the early Indian diaspora. The novel is famous for its close portrayal of the constant Diasporic people who were not only willingly but forced to lose their position because they have faced many struggles and problems under the British colonialism. Ghosh tries to show how the people who migrated from one place to another closed down the caste system and became *jahaz-behens* and this to come in terms with the new reality and identity. The novel revisits the Indian diaspora and shows their hopes, fears, and aspirations in the appearance of a historical saga. In such historical improvements, the transportation and the recruitment of indentured workers from India became a commercial venture for the Britisher’s imperialism.

Amitav Ghosh's another novel *The Glass Palace* has been given importance with the impact of colonial encounter on the cultural, social and political and religious lives of independent countries like Burma, Bangladesh and India. The novel is about geographical entities – time, space and distance. Many stories in the novel are interlaced together. There are characters with the family sagas, their connections and relations with each other. Ghosh being a humanist raises his voice against oppression and cruelty throughout this novel. At levels he dominates man by man – military, economic and political. The novel shows about imperialism done immense harm to capture nations. The novel tries to highlight an imaginative reconstruction of the most trouble and confused period of the history. It is a novel about various places, movements, identity struggles, wars, suppressions and exiles. In such scenario, it depicts the helplessness of the human beings. A human being could try to compromise, adjust, live and form new relationships.

The Diasporic writers have always been longing for home, their native land, feeling of nostalgia and same way the possible return to home. Ghosh's fiction is well delineating the feelings for home, relationship between the Diasporic community and the aliened land and trans-nationality of home. Both the approaches towards home, like longing for home and ability to make home away from home is the basic features of the characters of his novels. In most of his novels, characters are able to come out of their Diasporic anxiety with the help of their ability to adjust in a new land by their efficacious assignation in tantalising pursuit for the family in transnational locations

The Shadow Lines reintroduces us with the theme of the desire for home and belonging and the pain associated with uprooting and disjunction. David Brooks says, "Amitav Ghosh dwells at length in his novels on the concepts of home and homelessness. In

the novel *The Shadow Lines* almost all the characters feel homeless in one way or another” (77).

The yearnings for home and homeliness are the elementary phenomenon that frustrates the life of the characters of *The Shadow Lines*. One of the namely Leela Gandhi expresses akin view in Post-Colonial Theory, “Diasporic thought finds its apotheosis in the unsure, temporary, culturally polluted and borderline figure of the exile, caught in a historical midpoint between home and the world” (Shadow Lines 132) is also particularly relevant. The feeling of home exposes more in the case of cross cultural association. This cross cultural adulteration and strangeness is well revealed by the characters of novel belonging to two generations of migrant women – grandmother and Ila. Both Tha'mma and Ila have diverse genera of workings and sympathy towards home though neither of the two has real home other than the fictitious one for the former and the abandoned one for the latter. Bill Ashcroft et al's comment made in *The Empire Writes Back* need to be implemented here “Diaspora does not simply refer to geographical dispersal but also to the vexed questions of identity, memory and home which such displacement produces” (217-218).

The women in the novel *The Sea of Poppies* at Ibis were also thinking about the insignificant things that they will unable to experience again in their life. Being far from those, such basic and normal activities also become significant and important:

Colour of poppies, spilling across the fields like abir on a rain-drenched Holi; the haunting smell of cooking-fires drifting across the river, bearing news of a wedding in a distance village; the sunset sounds of temple bells and the evening azan; late nights of the courtyards, listening to the tales of the elderly...(397).

Ghosh expresses his basic idea of disagreement that home is not located at the innate habitation only but it required to be made again in the process of adjustment of displacement, to fight the angst of diaspora. So the characters of Ghosh's fiction world as 'disposed to routes and not the roots' is very much compatible with his concept of 'transnational home'. For him, the home can be transferred transnationally; beyond the home country or at different physical spaces. Thus, the journey of his characters in almost all the novels are not disposed to a simple journey away from home/family, but from one home/ family to another.

Thus, If the immigrant goes by will, there is greater scope of adjustment as compared to the situation in which circumstances force him to leave his own motherland and move into an alien country. In the former case, the Diasporic has nothing to lose in a nation, which gives him greater opportunities for personal betterment and at the same time freedom to wrap himself in his personal heritage. People moving in from the cosmopolitan cities of their native land and settling in a cosmopolitan atmosphere abroad are perhaps less uncomfortable comparatively.

References:

- Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009.
- Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi: 2008.
- Permanent Black, 2003. Mishra, Vijay. "The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorising the Diasporic Imaginary". London: Routledge, 2007.
- Brooks, David. "Diasporic Identities and Empire: Cultural Contentions and Literary Landscapes" edited by David Brook states: 2001
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. Uttar Pradesh: Harper Collins India, 2000, Print.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. (2004). *The Empire Writes Back*. New York: Taylor's & Francis