

Acceptability and Feasibility of Peaceful Global Living: A literary Introspection by Amitav Ghosh

- Tamishra Swain

Abstract: The paper addresses some of the issues related to human concern in the contemporary world. As a novelist Amitav Ghosh has shown a picture of deep human concern in terms of migration, borderless nation, multiculturalism, human trafficking and environmental issues. The paper further consolidates the above said critical issues with detail description of its magnitude. The novels taken into account are starting from his debut writing *The Circle of Reason*, to the latest *The Sea of Poppies*.

Keywords: Globalization, Migrancy, Multiculturalism, Nation.

Introduction: Novelists in their works come up with various solutions to the world, society and the people. In many cases the solutions though imaginative have immediate reflections on possibilities which might change or transformed the human living. However acceptability to these views are seldom materialized. Contemporary society be it national or global the human being run after no-possibility attitude towards finding the solution to the problems they interface. Nations competes each other with their possible infrastructure and warfare to succeed and dominate in a fashion acceptable to monarchical style understanding at the international level though propounded by some corners of the advocates still failure is the next existing phenomena. Among the theorist the novelist and the literary people come out with some humanitarian and natural attitude towards each other; a human to human, a nation to nation and a community to community. The author herewith argued in the following lines how global living and multiplicity in all spheres can coherent to give meanings in this shaky and fractured world. The paper further argues Amitav Ghosh's argument the acceptability vs. possibility in global living in terms of the human to human, nation to nation and community to community relationship. The argument will be based on some of the key factors Mr. Ghosh has employed in his novels i.e migration, borderless nation, multiethnicity. All these points would be discussed in the context of some of the exemplified situations in narratives of his three novels *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*. Amitav Ghosh's writings stir in the line of screening the causes of south Asian communities with a local touch – and global reach for every reader. His major issues of writings especially postcolonial features provide challenging features for the readers.

The Circle of Reason has brought the literary image of Amitav Ghosh as the champion of migrant writings and the text laid the foundation of searching logical inferences in his novel writings career. Being Ghosh's first novel *The Circle of Reason* displayed how writings can show a

different image of society, culture, history and migration. His writings show arrays of themes and subthemes interweaved to illustrate the concern of Asian communities, their history, movement, culture and the best part is how the people of Indian subcontinents were treated and imagined by other history writers, especially “Westerners”. Ghosh wanted to drop those assertions tagged with the Asians, the Asian communities and the marginalised. The novel shows the dangerous and horror picture of movement of people from one place to another, suffering of the migrants, the continuing process of the deculturization from their own, the persistent forcible compulsion in entering into foreign land and civilization. Will they survive and sustain with their own societal and ethnic values, customs and morals, has become the questions of inquiry in the novel? These features are regular tendency among the writers of migration. However Amitav Ghosh is champion among those writers. His main incarceration is South-Asian people and perspectives often with a very little deviation. He tries to propagate a deconstructionist ('deconstructionist' and 'postmodernist' will be described simultaneously together throughout the chapter and the work) view of 'history' and observations on 'movement of people'. As Dixon observed, “Amitav Ghosh has been able to move freely in his writing between anthropology, history and fiction is those disciplines have themselves broken down” (13).

Amber Fatima Riaz has observed these views how migrations and relocations forced a renegotiation of identity, and led to the formation of a new community within Pakistan which is called Mohajir. Despite the heavy suffering in the process of migration of the people, how the marginalized never leave up hope to retain their identity is what concerned of Ghosh. In the *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh provides a list of diversified migrant characters; 'Alu', 'Jeevanbhai Patel', 'Abusa', 'Mast Ram', 'Zindi', 'Kulfi', 'Professor Samuel', 'Dr. Mishra' and many more. All the migrant characters have travelled and crossed the border, left home and struggled for their identity, feeling homelessness, searching a 'home' in a foreign land. These newly arrived had struggled to learn the new language and culture and identity. Alu, a weaver from small village near Calcutta, who leaves home to travel across the Indian Ocean to the oil town of al-Ghazira on the Persian Gulf. Reviewers of the novel read it as “an allegory about the destruction of traditional village life by the modernizing influx of Western culture, and the subsequent displacement of non-European peoples by imperialism” (Dixon, 13). They coped not only with the pain of separation but often also with the resentments of a hostile population. Ghosh's beauty is that all these characters try to retain and reconstructs new cultures, identities although fragments by fragments. Ghosh's position on migration is that “migration as a new way of being”. The 'new way' phrase is related to the deconstructionist claim or the anti-essentialist position of knowledge as accepting the 'old' means to accept the system or a structure. To examine this little further, and in keeping the views of Ben Okri, a strong postcolonial migrant writer, that Migrancy becomes the name for the condition of human beings as such a name for how we exist and understand ourselves in the twenty-first century. To understand this more clearly, it might be helpful if we to look

briefly at the arguments of Homi Bhabha, which begin with recognition “no necessary or eternal belongingness”. Refuting to believe a stable and ‘pre-given’ culture, identities, whether ethnic or national, Bhabha argues for non-essentialist position of culture and identities. Bhabha used the term *cultural compulsion*. (Bhabha, 59). Ghosh’s crowd of characters are temporarily settled in al-Ghazira at Zindi’s place making it as ‘home’ facing numerous difficulties in language, culture, dress-code and also social behaviour. These settling processes are the stages of acquiring new culture and identity by imitating the foreign land’s culture, food habit, rites and rituals. This hybridity makes the migrants tougher in learning their culture. In the battleground of jealousy, intrigues and conspiracies where passion and desperation reign supreme, the jobs are being lost for unimaginably bizarre reasons. Kulfi is fired as the cook in a rich Ghaziri’s house because she spit in a pot of food because this is what she thinks her mistress asks her to do. Professor Samuel has to leave his job in the departmental store because he is blamed for outraging the modesty of a Ghaziri woman while as a matter of fact he is trying to help the woman in her shopping.

Migrancy precisely is a concept Ghosh celebrates. Migration refers not only to the displacements of the people in history but to a state of displacement that befalls humankind in general. The frequent slippage that Ghosh performs, in which he invites his reader’s collusion, among tropes of migrancy, immigration, and exile as they traverse semantic, linguistic and cultural fields often lead to an under privileging of the political arenas from which immigrant and diaspora politics often emerge. Migration is also linked to ‘migration’ to ‘globalization’. The limits of the archives are also explored in the pivotal section of *The Shadow Lines*. As the narrator tries to piece together two seemingly discrepant events – the death of his uncle Tridib in a communal riot in Dhaka, and his own frightening close encounter with a riot in Calcutta – into a coherent historical narrative, his constantly frustrated by the archival record of those events, which seem to bear only tangential evidence of what his memory had assumed to be an incontrovertible ‘truth’. Against the silence of the archive *The Shadow Lines* counterpoints memory as another channel into the past, one that in some ways is more adequate than ‘history’ but in other ways less so. The ‘truth’ of the past that is delivered by memory is of a different kind to that delivered by the historians. Indeed, there is a suggestion in a novel that ‘history’ is not synonymous with collective memory but is instead a particular form of relationship with the past that privileges certain kinds of narrative about it, whilst memory, whether personal or collective, conceives of the past in different ways. History, which is based on the archive on the document, on some relations to institutional power, cannot grasp, the experiences that are undocumented, for, as we have seen, the question it seeks to answer are presupposed by evidence it sees as significant. *The Shadow Lines* proposes memory as a means of thinking about the past which in contrast to the ‘official’ past composed by historians, is felt rather than known. Memory’s past operates tangentially to the recorded past of ‘official’ history, intersecting it and disrupting it, revealing its gaps and fissures, its ‘fragmentariness’, despite its ‘apparent solidity and

comprehensiveness'. Amitav Ghosh has taken a front foot of the arguments propounded by Benedict Anderson. Anderson construed nation not as an inevitable product of sociological factors such as common language, race, religion and history but as an "imagined political community – imagined as both – inherently limited and sovereign" (6). For him nation is a discursive formation. This view is a development of Ernest Gellner's view for whom nationalism "invents nations where they don't exist".³ Many others have also propagated the similar views on and about "nation". Some of them are popular some of them needs more upliftment and discussion. For the present work I would like to bring in the views of Edward Said, Fredric Jameson and Homi Bhabha. (Said to be added) Fredrick Jameson, in what became contested argument proposes "situational consciousness" as an important narrational condition in which "telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the labourious telling of the collectivity self". These above arguments collectively say that narratives of nation operate in multiple times and are necessarily polyphonic. The extension of this argument further takes as to admit that many voices coming from various and different location. Be it margins, minorities or diasporic communities - jostle for space in the arena of national representation. These voices further contest, contradict and complement each other. And what result is no cacophony but the essential composite nature of the collectivity called "nation". These multiplicities are heteroglossic by nature. In the present analysis Ghosh would be examined through the lens of these mentioned arguments.

Cross-Cultural nuances are the vibrant features in the novel. Ghosh illustrates how the marginalised search their home and homelands. *The Glass Palace* contributes something essential to the current debate about Indian cultural identity in the face of Western hegemony; it is a contribution which could not be made nearly as well by a twenty-something author. Ghosh lends his experience and insight to an examination of the nature of colonialism and the struggles that were inherent in winning independence. In doing so, he informs our understanding of the process of assimilation, so much debated today. The thorny nature of the issue is exemplified by the attitude of Arjun, a Calcutta-born officer in the British Army who has dedicated his professional life to the service of the Raj. When Arjun speaks of himself and his military buddies as the "First True Indians" yet in the same breath describes their inclinations towards Western food and customs, one can see at once the conflict between the desire to adopt a new, supposedly progressive way of life and the need to understand oneself in terms of one's own traditions. The contemplation the characters exhibit sometimes lands them nowhere after which they seek after. Determining the home has become a dominant feature in the novels. The shifting of their homelands ranges from India to Burma and again Burma to India. The union and separation of the key characters vehemently reveals the message of the novel. The story is not singularly Indian-centred and in its telling links the fates of ostracized Indians to the Burmese. Dolly, maid to the last reigning Burmese royal family, is forced to flee her country twice in the story, first at the hands of British invaders and then

with her Indian husband. Whether Indian or Burmese, through the dramatic and inescapable tremors of world war and national liberation, people are placed and displaced without a care to their individual character or the lives they lead' (Mondal 2003).

In his most celebrated novel *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh highlighted the global problem of territorial dispute community and cultures are one and can settle down in one unified sphere. The partition story of Bangladesh and the Bengalis provides a horror picture at both the side. On one side it is Bangladesh in another side it is Calcutta. The riots and the frenzy spread out in one part is reflected at the other side. The Grand ma refuses to accept the lines which demarcates the two countries with the lines which is merely shadows. These lines does not hold the permanent characteristics which can segregate the community, the places the memories and the imagination. Ghosh imagines the nations without borders. In *The Glass Palace* brought the images of cultural hegemony between the people of Indian Malaya and Burma. How history is placed and distorted by the historians and can be re-written to provide a different picture of these south Asian nations. Once *The Glass Palace* was symbolism of power, monopoly and tyranny which ruined into a place of debris in history. The Queen Supalayt and King Thebaw were thrown into the exile into a remote corner of India called Ratnagiri. The British soldiers fight for the Britishers in Burma against the Burmese which are Indians thought of their own status of being for whom they fought and with whom they fight were always a question of thinking and re-thinking. Ultimately Gosh provides a diversified picture of commonly understood multiplicity in cultural harmony and co-operation. What the Ghosh have shown that as a novelist there are many solution to this human chaos in society. He provided the multiplicity is inevitable and life, history and human movement is always turbulent. The possibilities are open-ended however acceptability is very few in practice. In this sense Amitav Ghosh's concern for mankind is enormous in all his novels even including his latest *The Sea of poppies*.

References :

- Bhabha, Homi K, Interrogating Identity, *The location of Culture*, Routledge 1994.
- Travelling in the west, The writing of Amitav Ghosh in Amitav Ghosh a critical companion, Ed. Tabish Khair, Orient Longman, New Delhi 2003. Print
- Handa, Sangeeta. Contemporary Diasporic literature Writing history, culture, self ed. by Manjit Inder Singh: n.d. Hawley, John C. Amitav Ghosh: An Introduction. Foundation, New Delhi. Contemporary Indian Writers in English, 2005.
- Mallot, Jack Edward. Transtextualities: Memory, Nationalism and Narrative in Contemporary South Asian Literatures In English (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) Unpublished Dissertation, 2007. The University of Iowa.
- Mondal, Sumit K, The book of Note, March 2003
- http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/issue/issue2/article_250.html

