

AMITAV GHOSH – A POST-COLONIAL WRITER

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ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh brings out the patterns of colonised India in all his novels. During colonization Indian people were become a hybrid product and later they became conditioned by the western culture, customs, and beliefs. Amitav Ghosh also a product of hybridization. Now let us see what post colonialism is-

Post colonialism, postcolonial literature and theory – is concerned with the situation of former subject nations and cultures whose histories have been irremediably altered by the experience of colonialism. Post Colonialism looks critically imperialism and its legacy and seeks to undo the ideologies that underpin and justify imperialists' practices. Post-Colonial writers also works to reclaim the past, because their own histories were often erased or discredited under imperialism, and to understand their own culture and personal identities and chart their own futures, on their own terms rather than the terms superimposed on them by imperialist ideology and practice. (The Empires Writes Back 151)

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INTRODUCTION

Thus, postcolonial literature exhibits the results of colonialism. Through the word 'post' means 'after' – symbolically means the end of the British colonization as well as independence of colonized. The word 'colonization' reminds the British's dictating attitude on suppressed, treatment of slave, less privileged on government sectors, and lack of freedom of expression. Thus post colonial literature questions repression of the Britishness and stuffing of Englishness. Sometimes the emphasis given in post-colonial literature reflects the changing aspects of the British nature itself, which is now called in many cases, transnational literature.

Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan, had witnessed the British domination during colonization. They are the pre-independent Indian Writers of British India. They reveal the facts about the British domination from different angles. According to British sayings, the West is superior and East is inferior. This is the thing make a Western writer writes about India from a colonizer's point of view but a writer from the East doesn't do this. So the Western attitude towards India can be summarized in Macaulay's writing in the book Post- colonial Literature by Christopher O'Reily: "Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion and in intellect" (23).

British made India who would understand him and follow without asking question. That's why most of the Indian English writings concerned with colonizer and colonized cultures, and their two common religions, Hinduism and Islam. They give importance to the culture and tradition of them.

Indian English is different from the English of the native English speakers. Indian English is strange, simple and also complex because it is influenced by the thoughts, philosophy and even the dialects of the sub-continent. Indian writers

use the English language according to their needs and accommodating it to their convenience. They use the alien language to express their indigenous culture and tradition.

The British Empire colonized India and looted our sources, hardworking, and made us believe their culture is superior. In India the British government abolished Indian education system and established the English education system. They impose their culture, literature, and customs. They taught their own history. Christopher O'Reilly mentions the writer Mulk Raj Anand in his book *Post-colonial Literature*, who asked,

Renaissance is the cue for all human passion, the freedom to grow, ever to high consciousness, 'How would you express this in your words? How might those sentiments reflect the broader developments of the time?' (Post – Colonial Literature 45).

The same book records Raja Rao saying,

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a Language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought – movement that looks maltreated in an alien Language... we cannot write like the English. We should not, Our method of expression has to be as a distinctive or colorful as the Irish or American... the tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression. (PCL 48)

Indian English Writing of today makes other colonized countries to emulate of ours. Even the British English Writing ponder over the quality of English with that of Indian English. The writers of India do not follow the ways of the British English Writing.

There are many writers sprouted up after the end of colonization. They are basically called the post-colonial writers. Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh are the notable writers of Indian English Writers. Their writings may not directly discuss postcolonial issues. For example Amitav Ghosh writes in the style of travel writing. His novels attempt to present the colonial, pre-colonial and postcolonial worlds through the mouthpiece of the protagonist or any other character.

The novels like *In An Antique Land* and *The Glass Palace* we can find the picture of Post-Colonial elements in Amitav Ghosh. *In An Antique Land* is an inner journey and attempts to uncover the connection between the past and present. The writer present his own experiences that he spends his time in the villages and towns in the Nile Delta and his rebuilding of the lives of a Jewish trader and his Indian Slave in the eleventh century from documents from the Cairo Geniza lie at the core of this novel in the shape of a traveler's book. The book also tries to present the history of various nations and brings to limelight the people of Egypt who has lost their cultural privileges. The writer too feels impact of colonization in his writings by saying that he begins to use Western theories to uncover a history that is part of his own heritage.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* is set in Burma, Bengal, India, and Malaya, spans a century from the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay, through the Second World War to modern times. Focusing mainly on the early 20th Century, it explores a broad range of issues, ranging from the changing economic landscape of Burma and India, to pertinent questions about what constitutes a nation and how these change as society is swept along by the tide of modernity. He presents the background of India under the colonization and examines the burdened years of the Second World War and India's struggle for independence. Following which how Burmese Royal family at the advent of the British

Empire lost their dignity, culture, and rights are explained in a lucid manner. He reflects the lives of ordinary people lively. Ghosh also skillfully displays the Indians in different colours. The most interesting thing of both of these novels is that the author utilizes Western methods to uncover history, but no major character is a European. His perception is always the viewpoint of a suppressed that tries to understand, react and arrange the circumstances according to his thoughtful.

In An Antique Land is the story of Amitav Ghosh's personal experience in the village community. The book contains two narratives. The first, an anthropological narrative, revolves around two visits made by Ghosh to two villages in the Nile Delta, while he was writing his doctoral dissertation (1980–81) and again a few years later (1988). In the second narrative, presented parallel to the first one in the book, Ghosh constructs a fictionalized history of a 12th-century Jewish merchant, Abraham Ben Yiju, and his slaves Ashu and Bomma, using documents from the Cairo Geniza.

In an interview about *In An Antique Land* Amitav Ghosh said,

No this time I am not writing a novel. Not even sociology, history or bells-letters based on historical research. My new book cannot be described as any one these. It's a strange sort of work. Within the parameters of history, I have tried to capture a story, a narrative, without attempting to write a historical novel. You may say, as a writer, I have ventured on a technical innovation. (*The Novels of Amitav Ghosh* 132)

Ghosh's sculpting for this work is an extraordinary one. He uses an excellent narrative with pregnant of rational ideas which makes it a distinctive art and typical work. This book has been divided into sections, 'Lataifa', 'Nashawy', 'Mangalore' and 'Going Back'. It begins with 'Prologue' and ends with 'Epilogue'. In 'Lataifa' we can find the historical facts of the 'Egyptian Babilon' and a description of Ben Azra's Synagogue and its Geniza in Cairo. In 'Nashawy' Ghosh presents his childhood experience in post-partition Dhaka. In 'Mangalore' we can find about Ibn Batuta, the folk life of Tulundua, the origin and the history of Tulu Language and culture.

We can trace out the three parallel stories in *In An Antique Land*. First, the character of Abraham Ben Yiju who leaves Aden and comes to Mangalore for trade with his Indian slave Booma. Secondly, Ghosh's budding experience during his stay in two Egyptian villages. Thirdly, Ghosh's search for his slave and for the Antique world of Ben Yiju. These three stories may appear surfacely as not connected with one on the another. But intricacies of the stories revealed that all the three are interrelated and interconnected.

The book's dexterity exists in its miscellaneous theme and in its construction of characters according to the history and civilization. Every character chisels with its perfect emotions, which contemplating and conceptualizing the circumstances at ease before us. Ghosh's extraordinary skill in writing lies in his distinction of presenting the story of twelfth century world and twentieth century in various tracks but without creating any ambiguous it presents the elements with crystal clear. The accounts of these two completely different worlds reflect some attitudes and behavior patterns which are identical. They expose some human bonds that weep out the distance between the middle age and the modern age, between antiquity and modernity and that remain unchanged in the eternal tension between the old and the new.

In An Antique Land, Abraham Ben Yiju is the protagonist. Every scene center around him and his Indian slave named Bomma. It is a herculean task for the author to present the historical facts in a narrative mode. But Ghosh handles it masterly. He beautifies the story by mingling the history and narrative in a lucid manner. He presents the twelfth century with sequence of historical details that makes the story to see the history in a transparent manner. Presenting of characters

with circumstances and narrating of events in the story appear to be a real one because of its lifelike exhibition.

Although at few places Amitav Ghosh uses his fictional mind to fill in certain gaps. He still remains faithful to the historical materials that he gathered. He did not give up historical validity to the assert of fiction. The most fascinating part of the Ben Yiju's story is his relationship with the slave. Mostly the slave Bomma appears through the letters written to and by Ben Yiju. Amitav Ghosh's hunt for the origin of the slave pulls the readers to the world of anthropology and history. He sows the seeds to visualize the utopian world of our ancestor to know about them. This journey of inner world takes the reader to analyses the Middle Ages' religious beliefs, social conditions and geographical divisions of Middle East and the Indian subcontinent and it made the crossing of the paths of the Jewish merchant and his Hindu slave possible. It is a novel and a colorful world presented in the style of a traveler's tale. "Cairo is Egypt's own metaphor for itself". (*In An Antique Land* 32).

Amitav Ghosh in *The Glass Palace* portrays the barbaric act of colonialism. Dictating nature of British begins in the year 1885 at Burma. The rude and humiliating treatment on Burmese Royal family makes them exile. Actually, 'The Glass Palace' refers to the Burmese royal palace at Mandalay. There is a magnificent hall where the Burmese monarchs held audience. But it is also the name of a small photo studio which derived its name from its original, as a reminder of the old days when Burma got its freedom, both of the colonial powers and the junta which controls it now.

The book describes the character of Rajkumar, how he encounters his life's sufferings in spite of being orphan, and becomes a rich teak merchant. The unique thing about the book is it never mentions directly the British's rule. They are shown in a backdrop of the scenes but not bring into the characters list. Ghosh has treated them almost in the same way 18th or 19th century British writers used the colonized countries- as backgrounds or as references that may influence the life style or the story line, but do not have direct association with the characters. It is actually a short history of a nation visualized through the mouthpiece of suppressed and colonized.

As aforementioned earlier, Despite of being an orphan, Rajkumar realizes himself with the postcolonial identity of a writer. In her essay, '*The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace*', Rukamani B. Nair very appropriately observes:

Rajkumar's symbolic as well as real orphan-hood implies that he has to invent A family where none exists Rajkumar has in effect to solve the same dilemma That confronts the postcolonial author he has to make sense of the 'existential' corundum that plagues all individual who cross the well-defined Lines of 'national identify' and 'family genealogy'(166).

As he has no relation to call as father or mother or brother, he finds solace in his life by finding the relations in his life. In Saya John he finds a father, in Matthew a brother, and in Dolly, his soul mate. He is an Indian by birth, wants to look after himself at an early age, sojourns at Burma for the better prospects, comes to India to seek out the girl whom he had met when he was only the age of 11, goes back to Burma and ekes out to lift his family, and then again returns to India in old age after his fortune has been destroyed by war, and his elder son and daughter-in-law killed. He has to leave the land of Burma as he is not a Burmese, and yet, that has been his home all his life. And it is not only Rajkumar, or for his family members or other characters of *The Glass Palace*, the cultural space for most of characters in Ghosh's other novels is huge. As Robert Dixon comments in *Travelling in the West: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh*, "This cultural space is a vast, borderless region with its own hybrid languages and practices which circulate without national or religious boundaries".

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In *The Glass Palace* the positions of the colonizer and the colonized are expressed with all the twofold convolutions and indistinct associated with the terms. The plot begins in Mandalay, the capital city of Burma, and the downfall and the subsequent confusion and banishment of the Burmese Royal family are limned very vividly and realistically. The dilemma of the king Thebaw and his Queen Supalayay show the extent of deliberate brutality and insult that was dealt out to them:

Just as he was about to step in, the King noticed that his canopy had seven tiers, the numbers allotted to nobleman, not the mine due to a king In his last encounter with his erstwhile subjects he was to be publicly demoted, like an errant schoolchild. Sladen had guessed right: this was, of all the affronts Thebaw could have imagined, the most hurtful, the most egregious (43-44).

The King Thebaw accepts his life's reality with patience. Having trained as a monk in his past, has helped him to foretell the coming of nature calamities like storm. More than that, by the quality of his future prediction, he is surrounded by fishermen of Ratnagiri. Also, he could tell the numbers of boat would return from the sea venture. Queen Supalayay is the exemplar of dehumanization of colonial process. She lives in sorry state Outram house where slums are surrounded by it, and welcomes the few guests she occasionally has in defiance. Her attitude is clear in the provide, thin lipped smile she has for all of them:

We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of progress; millions more will follow. This is what awaits us all: this is how we will all end – as prisoners, in shanty towns born of the plague. A hundred years hence you will read the indictment of Europe's greed in the difference between the kingdom of Siam and the state of our own enslaved realm. (88)

Ghosh clearly portrays that the British may boast themselves in keeping the royal families of India and Burma alive, but the way these prince and princesses are kept and treated, it questions the basic ideology of the Western civilization and the British's morale code of treating prisoners or colonized, which the ruling power boasts of.

It is happy to find that while portraying the subjugated Burma, Ghosh's views on India and the Indians get different from his treatment of the Burmese people. Even though the protagonist Rajkumar, an Indian born, he is far from being a flawless character. He portrays the Indians in a light manner and they do not ill-treated as much of Burmese. Indeed, the British colonized both India and Burma, but in Burma the Burmese are the ones oppressed whereas the Indians as well as people from other countries were given many opportunities to prosper. The escalation of Rajkumar in his life is only one of many stories of such success. Through him and the world revolving around him, Ghosh shows how colonialism is a process where people and values compromised.

From the analysis of these books, *The Glass Palace*, and *In An Antique Land* we can definitely find the postcolonial perception of the writer. In these books he deal with not only postcolonial issues but also the precolonial and the colonial ones.

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