

EXPLORING MULTICULTURALISM IN POST-COLONIAL INDIAN LITERATURE WITH REFERENCE TO SELECT NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH AND BHALCHANDRA NEMADE

Prof. Mukta Mahajan,
School of Language Studies,
KBC North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon.

Dr. Avinash Badgujar
Head, Dept. of English,
Nutan Maratha College,
Jalgaon.

Introduction:

Present research paper is an attempt to explore multiculturalism in post-colonial Indian literature with reference to two contemporary Indian writers —Amitav Ghosh and Bhalchandra Nemade. Amitav Ghosh who writes in English was short listed for Man Booker Prize in 2008. Bhalchandra Nemade is an academician who introduced trends like existentialism, nativism to regional literature in Maharashtra, one of the influential states in India. Both of these novelists are acclaimed for and unique in generic experimentation. Louis Beam boldly states that, 'No nation is born multicultural. Multiculturalism is an unnatural as well as unhealthy condition that can only afflict states in national decline'(1) But in country like India multicultural social set up is an age-old pattern. Traditionally this multicultural set up is celebrated as the strength of India but at the same time it affects the social structure of country because the Indians who had been treated as subalterns by the occident, they have their own subaltern structure due to caste system. The writings of Indian writers frequently reflect the note of multiculturalism through human relations. Commenting on the nature and insights of multiculturalism Bhikhu Parekh rightly says, the multicultural movement sprang up unplanned in many different political contexts attract a diverse cluster of groups --- is best understood as a perspective on or a way of viewing human life '(2) and he further states three insights of multiculturalism — the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural plurality and the plural and multicultural constitution of each country.

India has been known as 'contact zone' since ancient days. Therefore, multiculturalism is looked at India's significant attribute. In the words of Mishra, Palai and Das, 'Through multiculturalism, India recognizes the potential of all citizens, encouraging them to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs'(3) But this is part reality. Post-colonial Indian writing highlights another part of reality which makes the reflection of multiculturalism more deliberate. Post-colonial India writers through their writings show that, 'multiculturalism is closely associated with identity politics, the politics of difference and the politics of recognition all of which share a commitment to revaluing disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representations and communication that marginalize certain groups'(4) Ghosh and Nemade analyze inter cultural and cross-cultural relations and through that they voice the existence of identities vigorously. Writers like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie. Amitav Ghosh, Nemade reflect descriptive and normative forms of multiculturalism.

1.2 Post Colonial literary Scenario in India

The thematic concerns of post-colonial literature are mostly nationalism and euphoria of decolonization in general. As far as Indian literature is concerned the post-colonial writers emphasized a return to cultural roots and belief systems. They also assert cultural nationalism. Post 1970 literature in colonized countries presented impact of colonialism on native cultures. Writers like Githa Hariharan, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh specifically focus on post-colonial issues in their writing post-colonial literature in India specifically highlights the rewriting of the colonial past and writers like Ghosh, Rushdie and Nemade do so more from the viewpoint of a researcher. Rushdie seems more a history writer. But Gosh and Nemade feel it essential to reconstruct the colonial past of India. Both of them also underline the multiculturalist tendencies in India that if on one hand celebrate the unity in diversity on the other hand same diversity is intentionally maintained for the sake of diversity. The writers emphatically voice the issue of national identity which makes their individuality as a nation distinct, which was crushed during the period of colonization. Forced migration during colonial period caused hybridization of society that made the issue of multiculturalism more prominent.

Ghosh necessarily illuminates the points of forced migration and consequent cross cultural human relations.

1.3 Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghosh is a renowned writer of post-colonial period in India. Dhawan admires him, 'perhaps the finest writer among those who were born out of the past- Midnight's Children revolution in Indian fiction' (5). His four novels-The Calcutta Chromosome (1996), The Glass Palace (2000), The Hungry Tide (2004), and Sea of Poppies (2008) elaborately reflect the three insights of multiculturalism mentioned by Bhikhu Parekh. Out of which we are going to focus on The Glass Palace and The Hungry Tide. Through the themes of subaltern history, migration, colonization and human relations Ghosh unfolds inter cultural and cross-cultural issues. In 'Calcutta Chromosome' Ghosh writes the cross-cultural relations between easterners and westerners. As a researcher he dismantles malaria research history with the help of a counter science, religious belief, silence a religion and irrationality of the primitive society. India had always been interpreted as country of snake charmers and jugglers but their irrationality conceals a silent knowledge. He deconstructs the history of modern science by rewriting an alternative or subaltern history and acknowledges the contribution of non-western knowledge systems represented by the marginal or subaltern. The medicinal knowledge in their primitive cultures/ m existence but because it is silent, western culture takes the credit of it by popularizing it. Ghosh, thus, researches the cultural confrontation. In his another novel, The Glass Palace (2000) Ghosh takes a dispassionate view of the significant social, political, economic and cultural phenomenon known as colonialism. He focuses on how culture, myths, religion and heritage that blend and merge and present curiously hybrid culture. The Glass Palace presents story of three generations spread over three interlinked parts of British Empire- Burma, Malaya and India. The novel tells the stories of a cast of characters, royal, working class, and bourgeois, Indians, Bengalis and Burmese. Ghosh further reveals how tactfully and shrewdly the colonizers have conquered countries and subjugated whole population, exiling kings to erase their identity completely from the public memory at home. Besides the power politics, the Indian diasporic experience in South East Asia is the focal point. The novel demonstrates how the economic exploitation of the land, resources and people work as a counterpart to political oppression. The novel can be read as a post-colonial text that revises and transforms Anglo colonial biased

histories that traditionally erased the subaltern presence and agony. The revisiting event can be read as real restoration of subaltern history and cultural memory. Ghosh records the predicament of an individual in history that affects the national and individual history. All the major characters are affected by the colonialism. These protagonists are driven from India to Burma, Burma to India, Malaya, Singapore and back again. In *The Glass Palace* the theme of migration in the context of imperialism plays a central role and moreover it clearly shows the tremendous impact of moving between and across cultures on the lives of people who are affected by such encounters. Ghosh is familiar with the politics of identity and understanding sensitive to the problems of migrated people uprooted from in the name of identity. Ghosh faithfully portrays the trauma of cultural dislocation, disorientation and displacement suffered by the millions of migrants and how desperately they try to balance themselves between home and abroad. To some extent the colonialism, through scientific education and democratic institutions did exercise a liberating influence but the modernization appears to be initiated by no means an unmixed blessing, being more or less elitist and exclusive in nature and designed to reach only a small privileged group of native population. The colonial rule degrades the characters by promoting their own culture. The true nature of colonial rule is seen in its culture adopted by these characters. The central issue of the migrant is how to cope with the past and their meaning. In the novel Ghosh outlines the tension within the characters and hostility of the migrants met with by those who have an established sense of identity. In *The Glass Palace* Ghosh presents Burma in a multicultural mosaic way where people and their languages are interlocked. Burma appears as a space of interpretation of different groups. In this locale multilingualism operates as a metonym for the multicultural encounter. The multicultural dimension is present from the beginning of the novel. Homi Bhabha in his essay, 'Of Mimicry and Man' talks about colonial mimicry and suggests that the transformation results in a hybrid identity. The colonial educators in India wanted that the Indians should follow them 'in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (6). The hybrid identity of the colonial mimic man challenges the structure of colonial discourse as the mimic men occupy the hybrid culture- their hybridity makes their state of in betweenness as they stand between two cultures. Ghosh writes about the culture of other people and organizes the human culture in space and time according to an ideological hierarchy of modern western society which positions as cultural norm. Ghosh arranges all cultures in

relation to the western culture. The western culture refers to all other cultures as backward and primitive. According to Frantz Fanon colonialism entirely disrupts the cultural life of a conquered people, moreover every, 'effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of culture--- to recognize the unreality of his nation and in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his biological structure' (7) Ghosh's presentation of multiculturalism makes Bikram Chatterji to point out that Ghosh, 'contributes something essential to the current debate about Indian cultural identity in the face of western hegemony'(8) Through the themes of migration, exile, refugees and diaspora Ghosh captures the socio political and cultural turmoil of colonial period.

The Hungry Tide (2004) centers on theme of inter cultural and cross-cultural relations. The novel reveals the relationship that exists between educated privileged peoples and uneducated impoverished peoples and how the westerners and city cosmopolitans respond to uneducated rural countrymen. In the novel inter cultural relationship is shown through the relation between Kanai and Fokir. Fokir never speaks directly to the readers. It is Kanai who translates Fokir and speaks for him. Kanai being urban and educated expresses his privileged and cosmopolitan background through language. The cross-cultural relationship between Piya and Fokir develops on the basis of non-verbal communication. There is no dominance in this relationship. Piya, the privileged cosmopolitan accepts Fokir's uneducated background and appreciates his knowledge and skills as a fisherman. Piya, the westerner and Fokir the easterner communicate through gesture and symbols. The tiger killing incident in the novel highlights the truth about the cultural difference between Piya and Fokir. Piya expects that Fokir should be against the brutal act of killing tiger but for the people of the tide country and its history with the tigers, their act of killing the tiger is justified. Samrat Lasker points out that 'Transcultural communication becomes primary motif in this novel'(9) Though Piya and Fokir do not comprehend each other fully, the deep respect exists between East and West, city and country, privileged and impoverished and cross cultural, a union that may help for the progress of the poor people of the world over. It is Fokir's memory that draws back Piya to the tide country after his death. Piya begins with mistranslation of the people and environment around her and proceeds to represent a movement towards equality between elite and subaltern culture. Ghosh wants to suggest if the world is to see the positive change there is the need to promote cross cultural relations.

Edward Said's 'Orientalism' reveals the superiority of the western culture over the east as it identifies by setting itself against the orient that it regarded as surrogate or underground self. This idea is reflected in the cosmopolitan culture that assumes superiority over rural society. This kind of relationship prevails between Kanai and Fokir.

1.4 Bhalchandra Nemade:-

Nemade who is a professor of English writes in his mother tongue Marathi and whose novels are translated in English is the writer of a Novel Hindu. This novel reflects on socio cultural life of Hindus, a prominent religion in India. It is a novel of epical span that moves around the life of a young man from farmer family doing his career in Archeology. The protagonist of the novel Khanderao analyzes urban and rural culture and the human relations based on cultural plurality. He criticizes urban and agriculture society responsible for the exploitation of lay man. He unfolds the pretension and hypocrisy of high class people who exploit and assault working class men and women that exposes the formality of unity in diversity. He comments that Hindu is a rich culture because it keeps on accommodating old and new. The novel elaborately covers number of topics like colonization and its impact on native culture, deprivation of local subalterns by the native empowered social classes and keeps on attacking the out-dated customs of Hindu culture which dehumanize lower class people and women. Nemade undauntedly keeps on whipping the subsystems of society that are based on pseudo practices in the name of culture and tradition. At one place he defines culture as 'culture means that transaction of impression that is in practice traditionally but not hereditary' (10). According to Dr. Ransubhe (11) Nemade does not make difference between culture and religion and therefore the features of Hindu are more or less features of Indians in general. Being an archeologist by profession Khanderao provides ample evidences of cultural classification of society and the consequent under cover anarchy. During his ruminations on social, religious and political life of India in general and Maharashtra in particular, Khanderao refers to number of historical and political issues and leaders who set the life of the state. In the context of novel Khanderao records his opinion on various subjects and thus relates Indus culture and culture of his place, of past and present, of ideology and reality. On the background of the novel, Nemade evokes the readers to think in renewed manner about religion, culture, civilization, agriculture, partition, democracy, exploitation, corruption, religious sects etc. The novel minutely explains the cultures of different

castes, communities and groups. Khanderao's place Morgaon consists of all these cultural varieties and he comments that, 'all of them have become one just as sugar dissolves in milk' (12) He also tries to trace the rise and reasons for the social deprivation of untouchables and finds that some multiculturalists on purpose structured the social classes ladder like so that working class people would be deprived of their rights and upper classes can practice their superiority. He reaches to the conclusion that great leaders like Gandhi could not bridge the cultural gap.

1.5 Conclusion:-

Both Amitav Ghosh and Bhalchandra Nemade are experimenters and unique in the introduction of new type of novel that is multileveled in its structure. These novelists have used several disciplines to highlight the neglected aspects of social, political history of castes, women and minorities on one hand and ideas like class culture and ethnicity on the other hand. Multicultural approach to their novels focuses the evolution of Indian society and its constituent subsystems in the context of natives and even foreigners. They try to discover the meaning of Indian past by incorporating various themes like migration, hybridization of cultures, mythology and reconstruction of colonial past and realities of colonization in their writing. They have used multiculturalism as a tool to examine history, religion politics and society. Their writing exactly frames the multicultural mosaic of colonial India and Its consequent post-colonial condition. Ghosh studies multiculturalism to show results of transculturation whereas Nemade reflects on multiculturalism in terms of assimilation of customs and traditions that result into unity in diversity that helps people belonging to different cultures survive as fraternity, Novels of Ghosh and Nemade also confer voice on the subalterns who have not only been victimized but also dehumanized in the name of culture and religion.

Works Cited:

- Beam Louis- Multiculturalism As a Tool to divide and conquer The Layman's Primer, p.1, www.louisbeam.com/Multicul.htm
- Parekh Bhikhu- What is Multiculturalism? P. 1,3, www.india-seminar.com/1999/484/484parekh.htm 3/17/12
- Mishra, Palai, Das- Social Cleavages, Multiculturalism and emerging space for the state in India under globalization regime p. 3 www.helsinki.fi/iehc2006/papers1/Mishra22pdf
- Young 1990, Taylor 1992, Gutmann 2003 - From Social Cleavages, Multiculturalism and emerging space for the state in India under globalization regime p.3 www.helsinki.fi/iehc2006/papers1/Mishra22pdf
- Dhavan R.K. (ed.)- in Introduction to the Novels of Amitav Ghosh, Prestige Books, Delhi 1999, p.11 Macaulay, T.B. Minute dated 2nd February 1835
- Fanon Franz- 'The Wretched of The Earth', translation, Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 148-149, quoted in M.A.R. Habib 'A History of Literary Criticism', Atlantic publisher, New Delhi 2006 p.743
- Chatterji Brikam- The Glass Palace, The Genealogy of Empire, A post-colonial Family Drama ties history and romance, 13 Feb. 2011 <http://www.yale.edu/yrb/fall01/review.htm>
- Lasker Samrat- Multilayered translation and transcultural communication in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide, 25 April 2011 [Http://www.museindia.com/regularcontent.asp?issid-35&id-2422&title—article](http://www.museindia.com/regularcontent.asp?issid-35&id-2422&title—article)
- Nemade Bhalchadra- Hindu, Jaganyachi Ek Samrudh Adagal, Popular Publication, Mumbai, 2012, p. 543
- Dr. Ransubhe Suryanarayan- Hindu, Jaganyachi Ek Samrudh Adgal from 'Akshar Wangmaya' Research Journal. Vol. 2 , 2010 p.62
- Nemade Bhalchadra- Hindu, Jaganyachi Ek Samrudh Adagal, Popular Publication, Mumbai 2012, p.120