

Indian Ethos in the Popular Novels of Amitav Ghosh

Dr. Smita Kamdi

Assistant Professor

Kamla Nehru Mahavidyalaya Nagpur Maharashtra

HHH

Abstract

In the Postcolonial discourse, the study of the nation is emerging as an ambivalent phenomenon that revolves around the political thoughts and literary languages. The term nation uses to describe historical ideas, society, the cultural, traditional and political condition of borderlines in searching the role of social life and nation formation. This paper mainly focused on the concept of the major features of Indian ethos. It explores Amitav Ghosh's contribution to the presentation of Indian ethos in three popular selected novels.

Keywords: *ethos, postcolonial, nation, society, culture*

The word "ethos" is derived from the Greek word *ethikos* which means civilized, viewing honest temperament. It is employed by the scholars, historians and anthropologists to illustrate the major principles that portray a society, nation or philosophy. The use of this word in rhetoric is closely associated with the Greek terminology used by Aristotle in his concept of the three artistic proofs. He used this word to highlight the power of music to make its impact on the listener's emotions, behaviors, and even moralities. However, Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines ethos as "a set of beliefs, ideas and others about social behavior and the relationship of a person or group". Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines Ethos as "the moral ideas and attitudes that belong to a particular group of society." In short, ethos is the disposition of character or a set of fundamental values particular to a specific person, people, culture or movement. It is associated with the geographical locations, languages, race, religion and culture of a nation. Ethos in India has a specific understanding and impact. Indian territory covers different geographical areas, languages, cultures, religions and races. Indian Ethos is based on "social reality" in India. Alexander the Great, Megasthenes, Apollonius of Tyana, Alberuni, Herder, Schelling, Schlegel, Schopenhauer and even the Chinese scholar Yi Jing came to India and observed the peculiar significance of the Indian Ethos in its social institutions, religions, structures, moral framework and peculiarities of food, ornaments and garments.

The Indian constitution celebrates tolerance towards various religious identities along with their linguistic differences. People living in India as a whole explore various cultures, languages, and customs. Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, and Zoroastrians also reside amicably in India exploring their own identities. Such complex structure of society, philosophies, religions, languages has contributed to the creation of Indian Ethos.

In the Indian value system money is powerless whereas knowledge, good health and sound character impart the actual power. There is a greater emphasis on values and ethics. Indians believe in the perfect supreme soul, so that there is always a struggle towards perfection on their part. They believe in the principle of reflection in nature. "If you are good, the whole world is good". In short, these distinct features of Indian society are reflected in the Indian English literature. Similarly, the novels of Amitav Ghosh are fine examples of the same.

This paper is focused on *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies* by Amitav Ghosh for the purpose of demonstrating how his work is soaked in Indian ethos. The modern Indian English novels seem to have westernized in terms of structure, technique, style, subject matter and other novelistic features. However, Amitav Ghosh's three novels namely *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies* reflect Indianness in their plots, characters, settings, dialogue, actions and themes. The novels create Indian milieu through the narration of human relations, behavioral patterns and social customs. The image of India with its multifaceted dimensions has been genuinely reflected in these novels.

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace* came on the literary scene in the year 2000 and got worldwide fame. It remains one of the best-sellers worldwide and it is surprising that more than half a million copies have been sold in Britain alone. Amitav Ghosh has realistically depicted the devastation which resulted due to Japanese incursion in Burma and its impacts on Army officials and common people. It narrates a sense of depression generated out of wars which can be seen as a human misfortune leading to death, destruction and

dislodgement. Rajkumar, the protagonist of *The Glass Palace* travels around the countries like Burma, Malaya and India. Through his consistent travelling to many destinations, Rajkumar obtains his earning too. Unfortunately, his son dies in the bomb blast by Japanese and his cheerful nature gets vanished due to the confrontations between nations.

The novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) shows the story of its very contemporary of journey and unlikely love, uniqueness and history, set in one of the most attractive regions on the Sundarbans which means, "the beautiful forest" which is situated at easternmost coast of India, in the Bay of Bengal. Piya (Piyali) Roy is a young marine biologist, of Indian descent but stubbornly American, in search of a very rare and endangered river dolphin. Novel starts with two main characters Piya and Kanai who is a translator and he runs his own business. Kanai sees Piyali in a south Kolkata commuter station and both get on the same train. Kanai takes an interest in her so he starts talking with Piya and he knows Piya wants to study river dolphin. Kanai gives reference to his aunt, Mashima (Nilima Bose). Piya's journey begins with a calamity where a young, illiterate fisherman, Fokir saves her from a boat in to crocodile-infested water when she falls down from the boat. Fokir helps Piya in her research to show Sundarbans area and river dolphins. Mashima and other minor characters also help Piya in the whole novel. Piya visits the launch in to the elaborate backwaters where she is drawn into the unseen hints of the isolated world. Piya is able to breathe freely again when she disappears from view of launch. After the cyclone Piya stays in Lusibari and she starts wearing colorful saris. Kanai offers Piya a ticket to the U.S. but she does not receive it. Lastly, Piya visits Nilima's house and asks about Kanai. Nilima informs her that he has been almost as busy as you. Amitav Ghosh received many awards for this novel *The Hungry Tide*. This is a predictive novel of extraordinary insight, attractiveness and mortality.

The novel *Sea of Poppies* opens on the eve of the opium wars. It is set in Eastern India and the Bay of Bengal. It begins with the arrival of a previous slave ship *Ibis* at Ganga-Sagar Island. Dropped as a black birder with the eradication of slave trade, the boat is refitted to transport grimityas or indentured coolies from Calcutta to the sugar estates in the British company whose owners intends to transport opium to China. There are three parts in the story that is land, river and sea. The first part, "land" presents the circumstances that transport the characters to the boat. In the second part "river", the boat is tied in the river near Kidderpore, all these characters get into the boat by some lash of destiny or other. In the last part, "sea"

they get to sail the *Ibis* to a new life that awaits them in Mauritius. Deeti, is the first lady character who is presented as a young mother from a small village near Benares. It is fifty miles east from Benares, in the northern area of Bihar. Hukam Singh is Deeti's husband and he works in the Ghazipur opium factory. He gets injured in the leg while portion as a sepoy in the British Regiment. Hukam Singh starts consuming opium to relieve himself from the pain that was caused by the clash wounds but it ends up in an addiction to the drug. This addiction slowly kills Hukam Singh and his wife Deeti is bound by the social tradition and her relatives to immolate herself in her husband's funeral pyre for a sati in the family would make them well-known. Deeti is saved by Kalua, the ox-cart driver, an untouchable from the Chamar caste, who takes Deeti's husband to the factory every day. They run away from their township but there is fear. Deeti's relatives are furious with her and they have not subsided. They all are in search of Deeti and Kalua who had brought shame to the family. Deeti and Kalua have no other choice but to escape the country and they end up in *Ibis* which is on its way to Mauritius. The novel ends with the boat getting caught in a storm and the escape of the five travelers on board.

The themes of the selected novels excel from the traditional way to handle the Indian ethos in the twentieth century. These themes vary from the mystic elements in the history to the basic facts of race at an international level. It is an important aspect of Amitav Ghosh's novels that they deal with the Indian contexts. The author has constructed the Indian identity through his novels. It is interesting as well as enlightening to study the constructions that he structures about the Indian society and culture. His novels deal with the Indian society, Indian philosophy and Indian culture. They furnish the Indian panorama in front of the world. Such picture of Indian identity gets authenticity when those literary pieces are awarded with Sahitya Akademi Award, the Anand Puraskar in India itself as well as reputation at an international level. Moreover, Amitav Ghosh, the Indian English novelist has an international reputation to handle the modern technique in his literary works which always reflect the Indianness

References

- 1 Ghosh, Amitav: *The Glass Palace*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal. 2000. Print.
- 2 Ghosh, Amitav: *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2004. Print.
- 3 Ghosh, Amitav: *Sea of Poppies*. Ravi Dayal, Penguin Viking, 2008. Print
- 4 Nayak, M.K. *Indian Writing in English*. 1982. New Delhi: Sahitya

- Academy. 2002. Print.
- 5 Dutta, Nandana. "Nationalism and Otherness: Reading Nation in the Literature Classroom." *The Global South* 2. 1 (Spring 2008): 70-90.
- 6 Ravi, P.S. *Modern Indian Fiction: History, Politics and Individual in the Novels of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Upamanyu Chatterjee*. New Delhi: Prestige Books. 2003. Print.
- 7 Majeed, Javed. 'Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land: The Ethnographer- Historian and the Limits of Irony*'. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 30.2(1995):45-55
- 8 Mukherjee, Meenakshi. 'Maps and Mirrors: Coordinates of Meaning in the *Shadow Lines*'. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1995. 255-67.
- 9 Mukherjee, Meenakshi. 'In *Antique Lands*'. *Indian Review of Books* 7.10 (1998): 6-8.
-