

Hybridity of Culture and Race in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies

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Abstract

The present paper intends to study of 'Hybridity of Culture and Race' in the postmodern world through Amitav Ghosh's novel Sea of Poppies. It is based on historical setting of colonial desire and to fulfill its need of supply of opium to China. Ghosh creates the cosmopolitan habitat bringing together a group of characters of different races and nationalities hailing from all strata of society.

Keywords: Culture, racial hybridity, language

Now days, we are living in the modern and changing world in which nothing is stable. Hybridity means mixture and originates from the Latin word hybrid, a term used to classify the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar (Wikipedia, 2009). Hybrids are considered as inferior races, weak and second rate persons. Hybridity is an every-day reality that we encounter in an increasingly multi-ethnic and pluralistic society. It means a mixture of culture, religion and nation. Many inter-religion and inter-caste relations and marriages have taken place. Hybridity leads to the return to cultural purity. It is a subversion of the dominant force. Homi Bhabha points out the fix identity are the necessity for a cultural exchange. It is a cross cultural aspect where different cultures and the interaction of people from different regions and cultures take place. It is well known phenomenon in Amitav Ghosh's novels where he explores the identity of man.

Amitav Ghosh in Sea of Poppies portrays the picture of all kind of classes suffered due to colonial rule by the British colonial masters prepared people to be migrant, hybrid for their colonial desire. Ghosh shows dark web of the empire's history as a mixed cast of characters and Ibis is a projection of the uncertainties of their lives and routine of home. At the survey of this novel, we can find out a mixture of different characters from different cultures, castes, religions, nations etc. which becomes a symbol of hybridity. Colonial desire reflects throughout this novel. Deeti is a central hybrid character in the novel. Kalua, an untouchable man from a socially lower class, rescue Deeti, a poor high caste Hindu widow, from her husband's funeral pyre. They elope and marry by breaking all social rules because of society will not allow to enjoy the life

after their marriage. So they change their identities and name to avoid recognition and become Aditi and Madhu and also change their caste to mix up with indentured labor and accept the Chamar caste. Ibis is a rich source of different cultural backgrounds, a new race from out of certain cultural encounters. We can find out a mixture of different characters from different cultures, castes, religions, nations etc. which becomes a symbol of hybridity. Dr. B. K. Nagarajan said in his article Deconstruction Human Society: An Appreciation of Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies,

Sea of Poppies tells the story of how it is that in the ship Ibis, headed to Caribbean sugar plantations; small new worlds are forged, bringing together north Indian women, Bengali Zamindars, black man, rural laborers and Chinese seamen. It is a story of people whose fate is written by poppy flower, the British who forced opium cultivation on farmers, the ruined lives of farmers, the people who were addicted and poor factory workers, deceit of the British, ship that transported the opium and which carried Indians to life of slavery. [Nagarajan: 2011: 102-103]

Poppies are sign of cross-cultural encounters because where people have attained significant position in the global market. The novel throws light on people who speak everything from pidgin and Bhojpuri to the comically mingled English of a Bengali Babu and a young Frenchman. Miss Paulette was born in Jodu's father's boat and her mother died after giving birth to the baby girl. She is an example of hybrid culture because she becomes the daughter of Jodu's father. She learns Bengali language and food eat rice, dal khichri cooked by Jodu's mother. She accepts hybrid culture with passes of time and live life somehow with Jodu. She is born as a French woman and lives together with her foster brother Jodu. She is daughter of a French Botanist. She brought up with Indian nurse and adopted by Mr. Benjamin Burnham the rich, odious and flawed Calcutta Merchant. She took interest in culture of migrants on the Ibis, a merchant ship. Her personality is a combination of French and Indian culture. She is a fine instance of open-mindedness, a person who pays equal respect to all cultures of the world. Her use of French, English and Bengali carries distinctive traces of

specific cultural contexts so that she is bracketed within particular social groups the moment she is heard. (Chaudhary:2009:171). She becomes a *girimityas* on *Ibis* as niece of Babo Nob Kissin to reach Mauritius.

Zachary, a mulatto freedman from Baltimore; the dishonest British merchant Mr. Benjamin Burnham has a Bengali agent, Baboo Nob Kissim, the superstitious and Serang Ali. They said down the *Wooghly River* into the sea so called themselves as ship brothers and ship sisters to make complete *Ibis* family. They have different language, caste and creed so they have been exchanging their words in different dialects. Ghosh sets the colonized India where migrant laborers make a bound to go to Mauritius. They have gone through the cross-cultural interactions. Migrants mix up with the different people from different places, caste creed and religion shares their experience and problems in different languages. The novel is record of several characters from various class, creed, religion, race, culture and nations which are symbols of hybridity.

Neel had illicit relationship with Elokeshi, she was considered a great beauty; her face was too rounded, her nose was so flat. She uncovers herself in front of Neel for sexual intercourse. She has affection with Neel and asking for money and land for relatives and friends. She takes responsibilities of relative and friends and village people. They speak up with each other in *Bhojpuri* dialect, shared their experiences and handled the entire migrant on the vessels. Ghosh has shown the epitome of hybrid culture of migrants how they live together, how they talk to each other and how they get new hybrid identity as '*girimityas*'.

The novel throws light on people who speak everything from pidgin and *Bhojpuri* to the comically mingled English of a Bengali *babu* and a young Frenchwoman. However, the novelist doesn't provide only a political history, but an understanding of culture, religion, diversity, the opium trade, heritage and so much more. The words like *thug*, *pukka*, *sahib*, *serang*, *mali*, *lathi*, *dekko* and *punkah-wallah*; *dhoti*, *kurta*, *jooties*, *nayansukh*, *dasturi*, *sirdar*, *maharir*, *serishtas* and *burkundaz* have created the true Indian atmosphere in the novel. The second mate on the *Ibis* is a handsome twenty-year-old with curling black hair from Maryland named Zachary Reid. His mother was a slave, his father the slave owner who freed her so that Zachary could be born a free man. He becomes the ship's carpenter and by the time the *Ibis* reaches India, Zachary has been promoted to second mate. Sea of *Poppies* is also a sea of language. The *lascars* speak an entirely new language. He shares his first experience as a species of sailor. He was thinking they are from different tribe and nation. As he was thinking:

They came in group of ten or fifteen, each with a leader who spoke on their behalf. To break up these groups was impossible; they had to be taken together or not at all, and although they came cheap, they had their own ideas how many men would share each job-which seemed to mean that three or four *lascars* had to be hired for jobs that could well be done by a single able seaman. (SOP 13)

The leader of the *Ibis*, Arakanese Serang Ali speaks a simple, sly, Yankee-Chinese colloquial speech. He is from *blongi Rohingya*- Arakan side. Zachary has to try to navigate, Serang Ali impatiently takes over that task: "What for *Malum Zikri* make big dam bobbery'n so muchee buk-buk and big big hookuming? *Malum Zikri* still learn-pigging. No sabbi ship-pijjin. No can see Serang Ali too muchi smart-bugger inside? Takee ship Por'Lwee-side three

days, look-see" (SOP 12). Ghosh suggests a collection of exiles from the four corners of the globe, men swept together by the nineteenth century's version of globalization. In the *Hooghly River*, Zachary hears yet another vernacular: Damn my eyes if I ever saw such a coffle of barn shooting badmashes! A chowdering of your chutes is what you budzats need. What do you think you're doing, toying with your tatters and luffing your laurels while I stand here in the sun?" (SOP 17). Ghosh has used different languages because of different characters had been spoken in their language. These different languages and culture used by the different people who create new language to bind them together and communicate in their language. The colonial India was influenced by English so national language, Hindi became Hinglish.

Ghosh also mentions how hybridity took place on the vessels where caste does not matter. All kinds of men are eager to sign up-Brahmins, Ahirs, Chamars, and Telis. He tells how migrants accept the Christianity by forcefully and becomes hybrid in the modern era and shows how man's name became the symbol of hybridity. He gives an example of Zachary Reid how his name has been changes according to trends Paulette said, "I asked you here, Mr. Reid, because I wish to discover whether you are fit to bear the name you have been

given :Zikri" (SOP 305). Custom also plays a vital role in the novel where everyone has to involve with the new culture and that's why Bishu-ji signaled to Neel to follow the custom as a prisoner. Deeti has no daring to ask the girl directly to her identity so asks their identity by asking their names: *Munia*, *Heeru*, *Sarju Champa*, *Ratna* and *Dookhane*. *Pugli* reveals her identity as niece of *Baboon ob Kissin*. Deeti asked *Pugli* as she was *bamni*, a Brahmin's

daughter but she replied that she was working on a plantation. She has crossed the sea for a wedding and then became a wanderer. She replied to Deeti:

Not at all, the girl replied, in a tone of unalloyed certainty. On a

boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same:

it's like taking a boat to the temple of Jagannath, in Puri. From

now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship-sibling---

jahaj bhais and jahaj baahens to each other. There'll be no differences between us. (SOP 156)

All the migrants lives like, they are knew each other. Women were using gestures and share their experiences and communal touch. They said that they don't have any differences between them. They called themselves jahaj-bhai and jahaj-bahen, the children of ship. They came from different countries like Javanese, Malayas, Malayalis and black-Hat Arabs. These people had different dress culture but for the sake of business profits they seemed to live the Fanqui life on the vessels. Ghosh portrays their life:

But of these many kinds of creature, the Most easily recognizable, without a doubt was the small but flourishing tribe of White - hatted Aliens-Parsis from Bombay...the White-hats' garments were in no whit the same as those of the Fanquis: they wore robes and turbans not unlike those of Black-hatted Arabs. (SOP 177)

Migrants understand each other and try to mix-up with all the people. They all are cut off from home; there are nothing to prevent men and women from pairing off in secret as beasts, demons and pischaches. All these migrants are shipmate of each other:

With no parents or elders to decide on these matters, who knew

what the right way to make a marriage was? And wasn't it she

herself who had said, at the start, that they were all kin now; that

their rebirth in the ship's womb had made them into a single

family? (SOP 432)

In the novel, Ghosh shows hybrid relationship between Kalua and Deeti and other characters also in the novel. We find some issues like gender relation, man-woman relationship, effect of English language and culture on Indian people, Indian concept of caste system and arrange marriage. Different people create new language to bind them together and communicate in their language. Ghosh tells how migrants accept the Christianity by forcefully and becomes hybrid in the modern era. The lexicon used from the diverse cultural sources creates the multicultural communion in the novel. Thus we can say that through this novel and its characters emphasis on the global issue of hybridity of race and culture.

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