

THE HISTORY OF MIGRATION AND COLONIAL EXODUS IN THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH

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Abstract:

Indian diaspora pertains to Indian migration, their socio-economic and cultural experiences, experiences of adaptation and assimilation in the host societies. Literature written by these diasporic writers is clearly inspired by their personal experiences. The pain of migration and displacement felt by these writer's flows in their narratives too. Novels and stories are the tales of deep anguish, nostalgia and of rootlessness where characters feel more emotionally and mentally tortured than physical fatigue. Predicament of dual identities i.e of their homelands and of nations they migrated to, corrodes their psyche. In a cosmopolitan world one cannot be a cultural and social outsider in a foreign land for long. Migration sometimes becomes an instrument in regaining one's identity.) n Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide and, Sea of Poppies (2008), the ship Ibis offers a platform for asserting one's true identity. In their homelands, Deeti and Kalua, were subject to deprivation but migration brings them at equal levels beyond caste and class bar. The present paper is limited to the theme of migration and its effects as presented by diasporic writers Amitav Ghosh in Sea of Poppies.

Keywords: *Indian Writing in English, Diaspora, socio-historical, Migration, Identity*

Migration refers to very specific events- for example, the seasonal migration of birds or the (voluntary or involuntary) geographical uprooting of people. Etymologically the concept of migration originates from the Latin migrate meaning simply to wander or to move. The word migration nowadays possesses a wide range of complexities of meaning as Soren Frank refers to the modern application of this term in literary studies as the oscillatory and inconclusive processes that manifest themselves on different levels in the literary work for example, in relation to personal, national and cultural identity, language, narrative form and enunciation (Frank,2008:08).

Migration displaces an individual from his home country. Displacement, whether forced or self-imposed, is in many ways a calamity (Saha,

2009:186). The moment one steps in on a foreign land, the social ties and social roles he enjoys in his motherland are lost and he is alone to face the hardships wel-coming him in new land. From having a home, family and comforts of life in India, migrant becomes homeless and lonely. Adjustments are hard causing migrants not only physical alienness but spiritual too. Amitav Ghosh in his novel The Glass Palace (2000) narrates the sufferings of Indian soldiers of Empire in Malaya, Singapore and Burma and their tragic deaths and longingness for homes.

The concept of home is undisputedly the most important in context to displacement. Outlying from their home and the roots the feeling of homelessness arises. Guruprasad S Y said, "Nostalgia/ memory and the theme of identity and lost home, play an important role which explores the theme of an original home." It is the commemorations of their home that haunt them and yearning for home cultivates. Sensitivity for home is one of the most crucial aspect of diasporic life. Thus, the concept of home, homelessness is very much prominent in displaced people. As David Brooks in his Diasporic Identities and Empire: Cultural Contentions and Literary Landscapes suggested, the mind journeys faster across boundaries of space and time. Displaced people do shuttle across these boundaries faster than the speed of light with the long-cherished memories of their homeland. The longing for home, the possible return to home and their desire to develop home at new place, what we aptly describe as 'imaginary homelands', 'motherland', or 'home' have well been exemplified with the help of fiction. Ghosh's novels well delineate the feelings for home, relationship between the diasporic community and the aliened land and trans nationality of home. Both the approaches towards home, like yearning for home and ability to make home away from home is the characteristic features of the characters of his novels. In most of his novels, characters are able to come out of their diasporic anxiety with the help of their ability to adjust in a new land by their

efficacious assignation in tantalising pursuit for the family in transnational locations.

Sea of Poppies (2008):

In his ambitious novel, “Sea of Poppies,” a finalist for the (2008) year’s Man Booker Prize, Amitav Ghosh attempts to fill in the blanks left by the archives. Set partly in Bengal, the scene of Grierson’s inquiry, and drawing on accounts the Englishman left, it opens in 1838 on the eve of the Opium Wars. A former slave ship called the Ibis has been refitted to transport coolies from Calcutta to the sugar estates of Mauritius. The first in a projected trilogy, “Sea of Poppies” is big and baggy, a self-styled epic with colossal themes and almost a dozen major characters, including the son of an American slave (who is passing as white), the orphaned daughter of a French botanist (who is passing as a coolie) and an Anglophile raja (who has been wrongly sentenced to a penal colony on Mauritius). But a majority onboard is Indian peasants from the opium-producing countryside, forced by famine or scandal to seek a new life elsewhere. Devoted to reinvention, Ghosh’s plot focuses on one of these villagers: Deeti, a widow who assumes another name and the (lower) caste of a new love as they escape together on the Ibis. In Sea of Poppies mainly followed the opium trade down the Ganges to Calcutta and towards Mauritius. At the end of Sea of Poppies, the clouds of war were looming, as British opium interests in India pressed for the use of force to compel the Chinese mandarins to keep open their ports, in the name of free trade. Ghosh obviously wants to make the novel a literary excavation, digging up the stories of people lost to history, but in the process his characters themselves often seem like artifacts. The displacement operates here in different levels. First the people are displaced from one land to another and therefore their culture, their root; their economy is also dislocated.

The Hungry Tide:

The novel, The Hungry Tide refers to the history of settlement at Lusibari and other nearby islands in the Bay of Bengal. Yet the tide country had its life on the margins of significant events of the country, Ghosh projects it because it is important to be reminded that there is no place which is too remote as to escape from the flow of history. He attempts to trace the origin and the history of the people settled in Sundarbans. This novel has the two main conceptual plots: exploration of the plight of displaced people with the cross-currents of history and the complex ecosystem of humans and animals The significance of the tide country is

that it is a marginal region, where different cultures interact for eras. Morichjhapi is one of the uninhabited islands in the Sundarbans where Bangladeshi refugees after fleeing their homeland tried to settle down. Interestingly, Lusibari was first populated by the effort of a philanthropic colonialist Thus Ghosh recognised colonisers as well-intentioned individuals who can be appreciated in their effort to develop the lives of the colonised

The histories of migration and dispossession and displacement are thematically clustered around the smaller island of Morichjhapi. It was a place with its past, where the major battle between a group of powerless refugees and a dominant as well as brutal political force, becomes the focal point of the novel. In addition to that, Ghosh competently delineates the sense of homelessness in the lives of immigrants in many places. The actual history was that in search of better life the Bengali Hindus entered West Bengal from East Pakistan that is Bangladesh at present. But the West Bengal government considered these refugees as a burden. In this context, Dandkaranya, a place situated deep in the forest of Madhya Pradesh, was conceived as a solution to 27 this problem of rehabilitation of Bengali refugees. When they were sent there, they felt alienated as it was a barren land and that they were cut off culturally, physically and emotionally from their known world.

Ghosh’s intention was to look at the private histories of the individuals so that he uses Morichjhapi incident, a part of the public history as a background for his reconstruction of victimised private histories. This historical event of an exodus was skillfully blended with the plot of the novel The Hungry Tide. Through this novel Ghosh exposes the untold sufferings undergone by the migrants. It also spoke in volumes about the humanistic concerns in Ghosh. Ideas of territory are important from the point of view of this paper since it is an important aspect of the novel under discussion, Amitav Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide. The species homo sapiens is as much a territorial animal. 'e act as we do for reasons of our evolutionary past and our behavior is a mar\$ of our species. Hence, we defend the right to our land or the sovereignty of our country, we do it for reasons that are similar to and not very different from animals that fiercely protect their territory.

The story of the individuals reflects the eternal sufferings of man who is tossed between two countries. It was indeed a great psychological trauma when people were made to feel that they were not sought after and their presence was

insignificant. Though they try to acculturate themselves and acclimatize to current scenario, the government insists that the settlers have no rights over the physical borders. The alarming truth was that the government mercilessly butchered thousands of refugees. The settlers were regarded outsiders and so they were turned out by government in May, 1979. The emotional wounds created by migration took a long time to get healed and had left a deep scar in their heart. The novels highlight man's search for identity and roots in the ramshackle of history. "The barriers of nation, country and time dissolve in the consciousness of the author, and he reaches a tragic realization of how unscrupulous political forces continue to suffocate human aspirations". (153) says Sharmila Guha Majumdar

The *Hungry Tide* functions as Ghosh's political messenger, being published in the very year when the Bengal government dispossessed fishermen from the island of Jambudwip to start a tourism project. Ghosh is spiteful over the denial of space in India for East Bengal refugees, particularly Muslims who are regarded "transnational migrants". They were rejected by both India and Bangladesh as economic liabilities (Ramachandran 14). Recalling the Morichjhapi massacre, he writes: "It is scarcely conceivable that a government run by the same Left Front is now thinking of handing over a substantial part of the Sundarbans to an industrial house like the Sahara Parivar" ("A Crocodile"). Nonetheless, Ghosh who depicted the endless sufferings of the settlers of Morichjhapi, ends the novel on an optimistic note. And that points to the need to have a story which is not anthropocentric. Ghosh's declares: "The one place where tigers have held their own is in the Sundarbans where, despite an inordinate number of animal-related fatalities, people still Strut of Political Events and Disavowal of Borders in Amitav Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide' display a

general willingness to coexist with the species—for which more is due, in all probability, to the Bon Bibi legend than to any governmental project" (Ghosh, WF). The novel *The Hungry Tide* stands as proof of Ghosh's inclusive vision of human worth through the stories of one of the least known communities in the world.

Amitav Ghosh's novels show how the sense of displacement taxes human mind and its strains are felt very clearly on human relationship. In fact, relationships best display the conditions of being in exile, of diasporic living of migrant population and even temporary dislocation and how this sociological concept has got a literary base in the hands of Amitav Ghosh will be discussed in the conclusion. Displacement denotes a journey. Homi Bhabha treats the journey from 'home' to 'world' "as gatherings of exiles and emigrants and refuses, gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres". In this way a diasporic space is created which Bhabha calls 'third space' which owes its origin to Bhabha's "hybrid space" philosophy that shows the gate way to come out from the claustrophobic state of nowhere ness.

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