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UNRAVELLING THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVES: AMITAV GHOSH'S IN AN ANTIQUE LAND AND THE SHADOW LINES

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Abstract:- The present study is an attempt to unravel the post modern perspectives in Amitav Ghosh's 'In An Antique Land' and 'The Shadow Lines'. Both fictions voice to insecurities, disorientation, identity crises and fragmentation. The intermingling of his own text with his D.phil thesis locates the intertextuality. The alteration of narrative form by tracing history as a vital reality is examined. The contemporary Cultural rift, Search for identity and the baffling relationship with colonial culture were also analyzed. The study also strives to trace the feature of subversion by upholding cultural as well as anthropological heritage. Parody, Irony and Allegorical style were also included. The study to map the marginalized history and colonial migration brings forth a holistic reality of globalization.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Search for identity, Subversion, Fragmentation, parody,allegory .

INTRODUCTION

Post modern literature set aside many literary conventions and embraces novel patterns. It formulates a way to disorientation and fragmentation resulting in psychological and intellectual impact. Amitav Ghosh's world dwells with magically realistic plot structured with post modern narrative techniques. His fictions deal with multiracial and multiethnic issues sighted with human plights, displacement and dislocations. 'In An Antique Land' and 'The Shadow Lines' post modern techniques viz intertextuality, subversion, search for identity and fragmentation are quite conspicuous. It reveals to his readers surprisingly disparate aspects of his personal, cultural and national identity. Ghosh penned with enormous lucidity the underlying suspiciousness and insecurities existing in the society.

The perception Intertextuality asserts that no text exists as autonomous and self sufficient whole without the writer's and the reader's experience of the other text, its form and interpretations. The intertextual reference in Amitav Ghosh's novel 'In An Antique Land' constitutes a significant post modern element owing to its narrational engagement with the textual world of his own thesis, "Kinship in Relation to the Economic and Social Organisation of an Egyptian village Community (1981)". It was not a novel, but generically indefinable narrative; travel book, autobiographical piece, historical account and is effectively rewriting of the ethnographic and historiographic material with a completely revolutionized focus. He had a unique style of intermingling anthropology and fiction. Quoting his words: "While living in Egypt, I did two kinds of writing. I kept field notes and also I also wrote a set of diaries. In my mind the field notes were the "anthropological" part of my work; the diaries were more literary. My dissertation was based on almost entirely on my field notes; similarly the first-person narrative in Antique Land is based on my diaries."

Ghosh employs fragmentary element in his fiction 'In An Antique Land' as a fragmentary self, as a man of vast experience of travelling, visiting and living in countries like Bangladesh, Srilanka, England, Egypt and recently US. The portrayal of Mother India as an inverted self is the other fragmentary element. He upholds the cultural heritage and emphatically holds it in high esteem, which is evident in the heated argument with the villagers of Egypt. "In my country we have all those things too. We have guns and tanks and bombs. And they are better than anything. You have lot in Egypt (...) why, in my country we have even had a nuclear explosion. You would not be able to match

that even in a hundred years (Ghosh, 1992).

In the traditional history of third world countries slaves were considered inferior. But 'In An Antique Land' the subversion located Ghosh to discover the anonymous, unremarkable historical figure Bomma, a Hindu slave of a Jewish merchant, in the 19th century behind an ancient Cairo Synagogue. Ben Yuji considers him not as a slave but as a partner in his business matters. It is given as:

"Over the years, as Bomma's role as business agents grew in importance, Ben Yuji's friends in Aden came to regard him with increasing respects, and in time khalaf ibn Ishaq even began to prefix his name with the title 'Shaikh' (Ghosh, 1992.)

Ghosh first introduces this character through the letters of Arab-Jewish merchants as of the slave of MS H6: "(.....) Ben Yuji's Indian slave and business agent a respected member of his house hold (Ghosh, 1992.)

'In An Antique Land' has an ironic reference to Shelley's "Ozymandias" which features "a traveller from an Antique Land". It is apparent when the book completely disregards Orientalist and Eurocentric versions of Egypt's past and present, by thematizing the search for alternative, syncretic, non-nationalistic and non-Eurocentric history. The real history and the history written are also dealt ironically. Mysticism of Ben Yuji's slave, the memory, the Cairo Genzia document, the anthropologist's diary notes, the warmth of love and friendship shown by the Muslim host's are all encapsulated for the frame work of this book

"The irony is that for the most part they went to countries which would have long since destroyed the Geniza had it been a part of their own history. Now it was Masr, which had sustained the Genzia for almost a millennium that was left with no trace of its riches: not a single scrap or shred of paper to remind her of that aspect of her past. It was though the borders that were to divide Palestine several decades later had already been drawn, through time rather than territory, to allocate a choice of histories."

The explicitness of allegorical style is projected in 'In An Antique Land' by suggestive resemblances the thesis and the text. It contrasts irretrievable authenticity of the past with the corrupted and damned present. The Egyptian village depicted as an intensely mobile place, though conscious of its displacement because of its engagement with modernity at the centre of its own specific history makes it by definition anti-pastoral.

"Their relationships with the objects of their everyday lives never were innocent of the knowledge that there were other places, other countries which did not have mud-walled houses and cattle drawn plow, so that those objects, those houses and ploughs were insubstantial things, ghosts displaced in time, waiting to be exercised and laid to rest (Ghosh, 1992.)

It is an agricultural civilization painfully conscious of the fact that it is superseded; that it is historical. The so called "authenticity" of their traditional way of life is viewed by Fellaheen as a burden holding them back from "progress". Therefore if 'In An Antique Land' is anti-pastoral and the thesis is pastoral.

Ghosh's fascination for history enabled him to fuse history and fiction in a unique form opposite to traditional genres, inviting attention to the traumatic effect on the individual rather than the inexorable forces of history. The story telling is not presented as a privatized form of experience but establishes a bond between the teller and the told, within the historical, political, and social as well as intertextual context. Jameson associates with postmodernism, "a repudiation of representation, a 'revolutionary', breaks with the ideology of storytelling generally" (Hutcheon, Modernism/Postmodernism, 1988).

A historical novel does not offer us historical facts for it goes beyond the supposedly authenticated data of history books. It has its link with legends, myth and traditions of localities. Its background and setting, its episodes and characters may be real or imaginary. A political novel emphasizes the political aspects of history, but historical novel brings forth the social cultural, moral and political aspects.

The search of identity theme established in 'In An Antique Land' introduces the persona of the narrator-historian searching for the identity of a medieval Indian slave, Bomma as well as the anthropologist we see "at work" later on. The Indian slave provides the connection between the two narratives and two nationalities.-the Indian and the Egyptian and his cross cultural thinking.

In an Antique Land is towering in its intertextuality by the linking of his text and D.Phil dissertation, thereby blending ethnography and historiography. This technique has resulted in a divergent narrative method which can be identified as a new genre in literature. It also creates a presumption to the readers that we are global than our ancestors. The book reveals Ghosh as a diligent researcher, a social anthropologist and a social historian.

A comparison with Ghosh's more canonical ethnographical text his D.phil thesis in London brings forth another ethnographical text 'The shadow Lines' 'with the cultural interactions between the west and east and their modern India is re-negotiated through this cultural encounter between himself and the inhabitants of Egyptian village of Nashawy. Ghosh's 'The Shadow Lines' and Conrad's novella 'The shadow Line' proposes various connotations. Ghosh's unnamed narrator is similar to Conrad's Young Captain: they are not only of the same age but relate their narratives in an oblique way which create ambiguity in the readers. In both the text, shadow lines pursue the political symbol. The shadow Line is published in the First World War and is dedicated to Conrad's son "Borys and all others who like himself have crossed in early youth the shadow line of their generation. In the same way Ghosh's novel The Shadow Lines is related to second world war."(.....) as a European fracturing experience that parallels the South Asian experience of partition," as JhonThieme once noted, that these experiences are confronted by a young man who

wasn't alive when either of them happened, but whose family was deeply influenced.

The narrator's grandmother, Thamma, in 'The Shadow Lines' is attributed with multiple selves. She is always in a dilemma whether to go back to her birth place or to stay within her home land. Sometime she even longs to become a terrorist from a typical womanhood. The paradox between home and abroad, going and coming is also repeated in her confusion based on her Uncle's destiny. The mood of postmodernism is quite contrary. Ahem contrasts the terrors of High modernism at the prospect of inner fragmentation and social disconnection with the celebratory attitude of postmodernism. Postmodern culture, he suggests "one is free to choose any and all subject positions (...) because history has no subjects or collective projects in any case".

Riots recall the nation that precedes the nation, Tridib's death and the events relating it leads to the memory than the newly forged nation. Thamma's identification with Dhaka as home, and the repercussion of events in Hazratbal in Dhaka, demonstrates the power of pre-national memory. The silence of national history is reproduced in secrecy in the narrator's mind. Its marginalization in the written document, the newspaper, can be countered through imperfect memory, by nature fragmentary. The resolution comes through the map as the grown up protagonist return to a long-forgotten atlas to understand the meaning of distance.

"They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that one they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of prehistoric Gondwanland" (Ghosh, 1988.) The narrator's grandmother is always confused of her identity. Thamma's education in the fictiveness of the nationalistic construct begins with the preparation of her journey back to her birth place, Dhaka.

Ghosh unknots this paradox by particular verb "coming" in the Bengali language which connotes both coming and going. Travelling to Dhaka was different in those days, he tells her family, because she could "come home to Dhaka whenever she wanted" (Ghosh, 1988). The technicalities of passport and visa apprise her of the politics of border which in the modern world begin at airport. Thamma's present visit to Dhaka is portrayed as a home coming. She realizes that, post partition, for immigrants like her to come home is to arrive in a foreign country. Throughout the visit Thamma's search for the pre partition Dhaka of her child hood and youth is projected as nostalgic return home. Thamma's attempt to identify herself as a native Dhakaian demonstrates her amnesia to her new Indian identity. The irony of her alienation in her own home land comes to her only through Tridib's teasing reminder, "but you are a foreigner now, you are as foreign as may..." (Ghosh, 1988). Her visit to her a rental home ironically figures as a married daughter's "going home at last" (Ghosh, 1988) is used to explore the local and national identity.

The Shadow Lines examines the relevance of nationalism in affirming the Indian people's identity during the independence. Despite his interrogation on the validity of nation, nationalism and nationalist identity in the era of global capitalism, Ghosh attempts to fill up the gaps in nationalist histories by telling revisionist stories. Following Benedict Anderson's idea of "nations" as "imagined communities", post colonial commentators have rigorously investigated the nation, along with other 'narratives' during the last two decades. This contestations is most directly addressed in the works of subaltern studies group and the historiographic fiction of Rushdie, Ghosh and others.

The idea of thinking globally and acting locally is a post modern perspective. Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines examines the relevance of nationalism's concern with geographical restoration in the context of a new borderless, landscape. The narrator's grandmother wonders how people know where the border between Pakistan and India lies, if there are no trenches to mark it: "I mean, Where the difference is then?" she asks her son, "And if there is no difference, both sides will be the same, it will be just like it used to be before. 'When we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for them-partition and killing and everything if there isn't something in between?'" (Ghosh, 1988). Years after her death, her grandson revises her idea of lines, maps and borders, coming to the conclusion that you cannot separate two countries so simply as drawing a line on a map:

"I was stuck with wonder that there had really been a time, not so long ago, when sensible people with good intension had thought that all maps were the same, that there was a special enchantment in lines (...). They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet- undiscovered irony (...) a moment which each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking glass border (Ghosh, 1988.)"

CONCLUSION

A movement away from the traditional literary theory emerged with the appearance of postmodernism. It challenges the "logo centric" the "ethnocentric" and "phallogocentric." Postmodernism rejects the hierarchical, artistic devices using contradictions, discontinuity and randomness. It tends to blend literary genres, cultural, stylistic levels, the serious and the playful. The major stylistic devices involve the use of allegory, pastiche, irony, simulacrum etc. Postmodernism foreground intertextuality, intratextuality, search for identity, subversion, history, global thoughts

with ethnic absolutism, fragmented self and discontinuous narration.

The postmodern novel challenged the distinction between high and low culture and highlights texts which work with hybrid blend. Amitav Ghosh's 'In An Antique Land' and 'The Shadow Lines' were analyzed on this regard and is witnessed with various postmodern perspectives. Intertextual analysis in his work leads to genre conventions and to ideological and cultural studies. Ghosh, himself is attributed with bi-cultural or multicultural society compelled him to use ethnographic allegory through out the work 'In An Antique Land'.

The socio-political history of India during the partition is portrayed naturally as in pre-independence period. 'The Shadow Lines' also examined the relevance of nationalism's concern with geographical restoration in the context of a new borderless global landscape.

Nation as well as characters were seeking for identity in these fictions. The hidden 'core' of truth is archeologically uncovered with tools of excavation casually related to an apparently contingent surface. Searching of Bomma, the slave is an archeological notion to elevate the subversive nature. The narrator boys cartographical interest and Tridib's picture exhibition is invented to expose nation through imagination for its identity.

Ghosh's, being an immigrant to Egypt and his lack of fluency in Arabic language resulted in trapping up of language. In 'The Shadow Lines' he used this technique by the boy's teasing towards the grand mother. Many common words were dealt with for the readers' familiarity. Ghosh's writings bring forth the fragmentation of subjectivity through dissemination, which involves the displacement of identity. The technique of memory is used for the freedom of discontinuity. Traditional realism is rejected in favor of experimental forms. Divergent narrative patterns like myth, epistolary, microstoria are meaningfully connected.

The main feature of postmodernism in Amitav Ghosh's works may be identified as intertextual connection between 'In An Antique Land' and his Doctoral Thesis. History is rediscovered naturally, search for identity is regenerated, traditional status is subverted, ideas remarked by globalization, diverted language concept, subverted fragmentation and the narrative is discontinuous and random. The study analysed all these aspects in Amitav Ghosh's selected works and conclude that these works deserve consideration from the postmodern perspective.

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