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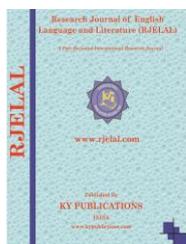
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DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *SEA OF POPPIES*

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ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh is famous in Indian English literature. The characters in Ghosh novel have decided to move across the Indian Ocean to an unfamiliar island. They replace new identities there. It also explains the concept of diaspora by focusing on Deeti, the female character of the novel, and with some other characters, to show their undesirable condition in Indian society. Considering diaspora as the major theme of the paper, it reflects the problems of the Indian society and exposes different oppressions faced by the characters. National borders are not important to communication.

The novel highlights multiple concerns that the author used to propose, directly or indirectly in his work of fiction. The author gives importance to almost every character belonging to different levels of society. These are continuous movements of people from one place to another, crossing the geographical and political boundaries, trade, commerce, lives of men and women with little power, question of past, culture, identity, gender and caste. The different events that take place in the character lives are interconnected. This is the important form of Amitav Ghosh. Identity phenomena are not a stable aspect of some body's personality. Displacement is a central process in his fictional writings, departure and arrivals are a permanent symbolic relevance in Ghosh narrative structure. It is a movement; therefore, it is evolving by nature. Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* has a relation to diasporic sensibility and reconstruction of identity.

INTRODUCTION

'Diaspora formed unavoidable point in the heart and mind of the lovers of art'.

Indian writers mingled with the subject of diaspora. We could trace the concept of diaspora in Indian writers particularly in the works of Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, and others. The diasporic writers' writings express their new experiences in a new region and their culture; and the themes of dislocation, displacement, dispossession, and the hybrid existence. Ghosh is one of the famous new diasporic writers. His *Sea of Poppies* is marked one. It

minutely narrates the remarkable history. This novel captures the experience and journey of the North Indian labourers who were indentured within the early Indian diaspora. Ghosh's novel is well known for its intimate portrayal of the constant diasporic community who was willingly or forced to lose the status and face many struggles under the British colonialism. Nevertheless, in the journey of the migration Ghosh manifests how the migrants closed down the caste system and became jahaz-behens and jahaz-bhais to come in terms with the new reality. They maintained successfully their own cultural, individual and national identities even in the poor circumstances. In the attempt of standing

with two cultures; the old one is lost and the new one is received. Diasporic writing is distinguished by a “dislocation from” and “relocation to” a foreign region.

Many people are migrating from their country for economic growth causing trouble for themselves and nation too. The researcher’s point here is to emphasize the central role of literature and the play is recording and reminding us of history, the social, cultural, economic, religious, political and familial problems were also submerged in it. Amitav Ghosh was greatly inspired by the political, cultural and social environment of post-independent India. The works of Ghosh are reflecting the political, historical, cultural events and social consciousness are marked by themes that go side by side with colonialism.

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Sea of Poppies portrays imperialism and the migration of the indentured labourers of North India; specifically to Mauritius. The novel ‘*Sea of Poppies*’ revisits the Indian diaspora and a represents their hopes, fears, and aspirations in the appearance of a historical saga. In such historical improvements, the transportation and the recruitment of indentured workers from India became a commercial venture for the Britishers’ imperialism. The workers must sign an “agreement” called *girit* in the North Indian language, so they were known as *giritiyas*. The novel “*Sea of Poppies*” is about the *giritiyas* those who were the first Indian diaspora. In the novel, Amitav Ghosh mentions the different diasporic vista in the early Indian diaspora. The main aspect of the novel is the loss of the homeland, national and cultural identity and subaltern conscious because of the migration, how the labourers try to find a new identity in a foreign land, exemplified by the slave-schooner *Ibis*. In *Sea of Poppies* we can see some of these oppressive trading strategies of the British traders.

Sea of Poppies is a historical novel which opens in 1838 on the eve of the opium wars, sets in Eastern India and the Bay of Bengal. The story starts with the arrival of a former slave ship *Ibis* at Ganga-Sagar Island. Discontinued as a black birder with the abolition of slave trade, the schooner is settled to

transport *giritiyas* or indentured coolies from Calcutta to the sugar estates in the British colony of Mauritius. The ship *Ibis* becomes the shelter for migrated and displaced people. Amitav Ghosh discusses the multiethnic and multiracial problems in this work. Without any difference of caste, colour, religion, language or creed, they move towards a similar fate. Now they feel a collective identity called ‘*giritia*’. *Giritias* means labours on agreement.

The story is split into three parts- Land, River and Sea. The first part represents the situations that bring the characters to the ship. In the second part, the ship is anchored in the river near Kidderpore, all these characters moved into the ship by some stroke of destiny or other. In the third part, they start to sail in the *Ibis* to a new life that awaits them in Mauritius. Deeti is the first character from a small village, fifty miles east of Benares, in the northern province of Bihar.

Amitav Ghosh not only focuses on a group of indentures in this novel but also a challenging and established concepts of the Indian past - including that of colonialism and nationalism. People are located in the beginning then, moved towards the process of dislocation. While travelling in the *Ibis*, the characters try to reconstruct their identities, influenced by power hierarchic people and the world surrounds them with their own beliefs, feelings, and imaginations or memories.

Identity is recreated through the effects of names, familial ties, social class, and racial affiliation, role of image, the imagination, memories, relationships, environmental forces, and historical background. All of these concepts act continuously to shape identity of characters. The identity transformation of the important characters in the novel get place on the *Ibis* ship. Deeti becomes Aditi, Kalua becomes Maddow Colver to change their real identity or perhaps. They have to start a new life with a true and respectful identity. Mr. Zachary Reid moves away from the American racial discrimination. So he is transformed into Malum Zikri, Jodu turns to be Azad Naskar, Paulette disguises as Gumasta Baboo Nob Kissin’s niece Putleshwari or Pugly, and then she is moving away from a rigidly defined and divided European community in India. Though Raja Neel Rattan is a

Raja, he owes a lot of money to the white money lender. The court gives punishment to him to work as indentured labourers for seven years in Mauritius. Raja Neel Rattan Haldar turns Neel and transported as a inmate for the crime he has not made. All these characters forge ahead a new identity for themselves, and the colonial setup works as a catalyst for their transformations.

Paulette, a French Orphan, who also matured in India, is nursed by Jodu's mother and her father, but Mr. and Mrs. Burnham take Paulette to their home after her father's fate. She determines to move away because Mr. Burnham behaved in an ugly manner with her in private. Intending to lead a new life, Paulette joins the Ibis under the disguise of a Brahmin's daughter. She renews her identity under the strong impact of her upbringing by an Indian ayah who becomes her 'Tantima'- 'aunt mother'. She senses more at home with Indian clothes, food, language, and her ancestral European culture. Ghosh builds this European woman's identity as a duplex constructive.

Heeru, Munia, Champa, Ratna or Dookhaneer have the same past of Patriarchal Society and they try to abandon restrictions of complex society and go ahead identify themselves as indentured on a strange land. They desire to leave from their complex past experience and seek betterment in future. They built up a democrat community which is classless and casteless. After all, crossing the dark ocean, the kalapani, signified the loss of caste with a new form of socialization that moved by the name of Jahaji-bhai emerged.

Identity transformation takes place heading towards one destination that is Mareech Island. Deeti and Kalua change their original identity because they wanted to live a new life with frequently changing situations and locations. And it was rather gaining of a true identity. If the back to their homeland they would be subject to deprivation due to a subaltern identity. Kalua becomes the representative of subaltern consciousness. Amitav Ghosh almost recaptures the subaltern consciousness through Kalua. Ghosh's vision mirrors Spivak's thesis of subalternism. The historian must preserve his effort in awareness of history. The absolute limit of the place is where history is

narrativized into logic, but moving brings them at an equal level beyond the caste and class bar. Deeti also reassumes of her name before marriage. A journey on Ibis provided them a sort of free space to act and react. It was on her lips to identify herself as Kabutari- ki-Ma, the name which she had been known ever since her daughter's birth... her proper name was the first to come to mind and since it had never been used by anyone, it was as good as any.

The novel expands the identity matter as retaining of identity after displacement. Deeti name is identical with her current situation of subsistence; Aditi was a woman granted by a blessing to live her life again and the mythological history repeats itself.

In diaspora, people come outside and then start to write like psychologically land means back to vision and its past whereas in travel writing. Ghosh's novels are a journey of past; as if past is an unchanging dialogue with present and travelling through time. Diasporic writers are frequent visitors of the culture, nation, tradition, and past because she/he had been a part of that.

Undergoing the moving of migration from roots, the travellers of Ibis experience the journey of their lives. A change in identity also opens up culture. Ghosh gives a sketch of diasporic culture: When one step into the ship, to pass the Black water, the fellow transporters becomes a brotherhood. One will feel like a home village, family and own caste.

The configuration of a new society of diaspora people on some other land is an act of creation and this is how civilization progresses. Societies are formed and Cultures are developed. This is a progressive aspect of the journey presented in an imaginary space of novel. The ship becomes 'new home' for the migrants. The ship is a shelter to migrant people. And the boundaries obtain a new identity called 'Jahaz-bhai' and 'Jahaz- bahens'. The travellers are aligned. They seek to renew their lives too. As the ship was leaving behind their life and time and moving ahead, so the life of its inhabitants was changing. This is how old treaty is getting weak and past is tamed to construct fragmented identities in to new. This has been well exemplified in the *Sea of Poppies* when Bahram Modi realizes that journey away from home provides new persona. To quote:

"In Canton stripped of the multiple wrappings of home, family, community, obligation and decorum, Bahram had experienced the emergence of a new persona... he had become Barry Modie... but when he made the journey back into his wrappings... yet it was not as if anyone aspects of himself were more true or authentic than the other" (Ghosh 2011:52)

One can also discuss language factor in diasporic novels. A physical displacement makes deviation on the standard norms of language and experiments neologism and includes vernaculars along with that. A movement away from the origin also affects the language because it becomes a strong medium to bear cultural heritage and ethnic identity. Language is also a prominent feature to be read as migrated element in diasporic writings because it is also a journey of language along with people. Meaning there by, when people travel from place to place, cross national frontiers, their culture and language also undergo a move. A linguistic migration is a part of that ongoing mental and physical journey of emigrated subjects. Linguistic migration may bring up the challenging approach to a Standard English structure by use of regional dialects as vernaculars and pidgin words. A migrant writer is displaced from all norms of fixities which are factors to define his being.

CONCLUSION

Amitav Ghosh within the text *Sea of Poppies* has been successful in exposing the crude reality of caste binarism existing within the social structure. The distinction of Ghosh's vision lies in investigating the full humanity of the dehumanized subalterns and he finally takes the ground to construct their identity that can enable them to make spaces in the main stream of caste best oppressive mechanism of social order. The diasporic Hindu is no longer a Hindu happening to live abroad, but one deeply transformed by his diasporic experiences. Though Amitav Ghosh admits that the overseas Indian diaspora is an important force in world culture and its culture is increasingly a factor within the culture of the Indian subcontinent, he does not encourage his sentimental pursuits in India.

Diaspora is taken as an illustrious account for the scope of cross cultural development. Diaspora effects of diverse of the geographical, regional, cultural identities to interact and negotiate to generate new culture. Diaspora involves in a resetting of boundaries; diaspora approaches double constitution of identity, diaspora allows one to see things differently from what they are and how they are, differently from how one has seen, and differently from what one is. Thinking diaspora writings as travelling can thus turn out to be a process whereby the self loses its fixed boundaries.

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