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Portyal of Women Character in the Major novels of Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract: The lists of contemporary Indian-English writers remain incomplete without the name of Amitav Ghosh. Amitav Ghosh has undoubtedly earned his position in the canon of Indian English Fiction. Indian Fiction Writers depicted Women and their experiences in patriarchal societies with a deep sympathetic understanding. Amitav Ghosh portrays his women sensitively and infect they are the leading spirits in his fiction. They are distinct portrayals of a cultural construction. He never presents his women as overt radical feminists nor as the stereotypical images of Sita and Savithiri. They are the characters of real life and in his novels he portrays the women characters in a realistic manner.

This paper dealt with the portrayal of women characters in the selected novels of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*. They act as independent entities, growing and developing according to their own inclinations and finding social acceptance, defining their own space, determining their own lives, fighting their own battles, enjoying the fruits of victory and never fearing to taste the bitterness of defeat. The avoidance of vilification, victimization and degradation of women is commendable, though not surprising considering the fact that the author hails from the land of Kali.

Keywords – Identity, postcolonial, anti-imperialist, patriot, diasporic, exile, cultural displacement, revolution, emigration, dislocation, loss of identity, Colonial, Culture, Opium, Suffering, Women ,gender discrimination.

Introduction:

Amitav Ghosh's fiction portrays the two images of women: women as a life-giver, sustainer and continuer of the race as against women in search of an identity. In the tradition of Raja Rao and others he creates woman with an imaginative grace. Ghosh's major women characters get rid of their dependency needs, break the pattern of sexuality and sensuality and take their place as whole human beings freely and equally along with men. These are women who have lived a life of fulfillment and achieved dignity through their actions. They imparted stability to society and gave civilization itself continuity. Ghosh develops women who are strong, who can express themselves, do things, travel, come to their own decisions and live independently. They are out of the purposive control of men. They pursue ideals,

which they as individuals value. They are symbols of growth, progress and forward movement.

In **The Shadow Lines** Tha'mma is a very important character. She is the grandmother of the narrator. Richa Dewani writes about in her book Amitav Ghosh: A Biographical Study:-

“In her fierce moral standards, Spartan outlook of life, intolerance of any nonsensereal and imagined, she is as real as any patriarch or matriarch worth the name” (Dewani 15).

Tha'mma had known the terrorist movement among the nationalists in Bengal.

In Amitav Ghosh's novel **The Shadow Lines** focuses on the postcolonial women and their identity. This notion is focused through the character of grandmother, **Tha'mma and Ila**; they are both strong and active by representing their identity of their own and propagate in any situation possible. Through **The Shadow Lines** women characters are represented as courageous as men since they fight the challenges of widowhood, poverty injustice, in this novel Tha'mma's character was as a great revolutionary, and strong nationalist feeling.

The grandmother is an anti-imperialist, who is a refugee and yet an extreme patriot. While Ila is mentioned as rootless because of her diasporic nature and cocksure colonialist ascendancy. By separating from their birth place, the characters in this novel **The Shadow Lines** depicts the transformation of their lives by narrating the colonial history of their past. The grandmother has been displaced by the communal tension through the crux of the “Partition of Bengal.” The artificiality of national frontiers and the inter-connectedness of the separate places and experiences have been notified in this novel. The representation of post-colonial women in this novel has been analyzed through anti-imperialism, national and international experience and cultural choice. Comparing to the male characters in this novel, female characters are very active and prominent.

At the time of Independence, due to the Bengal's partition between India and Pakistan, the lives of the narrator's family has been changed drastically. The people in the country have the mindset that the borders between the countries are represented as “shadow lines.” The narrator's grandmother Tha'mma and his cousin Ila are representing the post-colonial women characters in this novel.

Tha'mma is used to travel a lot before India's Independence, travelling has been easy then. She has been used to travel from Burma to Calcutta and Dhaka. Along with her life, everything has been changed after Independence. She has to fill the form to go to her birthplace Dhaka, which seems to be a shocking experience to her. By the post-colonial situation she has experienced thrust when the feeling of rootlessness is a paroxysm to her.

The idea of the grandmother about the creation of Britain which she finds as an inappropriateness of Indian migration and Ila's living here is reflected through the words spoken to her grandson, It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone lives there have earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood.

With an anti-imperialistic view she has dreamt of an Indian-state by the antagonistic logic. She wants her nation-state to be modern and national necessity of good citizenship. She has wondered to know about the border between India and East Pakistan while she flies via plane to visit Dhaka.

An 'unrooted' post-colonial woman of the twentieth century diaspora was the narrator's cousin Ila. Unlike the narrator's grandmother, Ila is a cosmopolitan living a settled life in England willingly. In contrast to the narrator and other characters in the novel, she has lived through her senses. She lives in her present intensely, yet the narrator and his uncle Tridib, has their memories and imagination procreate in a permanent and concrete world. Ila created her own place in this world. She marries an Englishman, gets a job and a house of her own in London because "she wanted to be free." In this freedom there is no inner voice but mere rootlessness. With the asymmetrical emotional relationships of the cultural dislocations and of maladjustments, Ila represents the post-colonial woman with the possessed conflicted idiom and desire to live in a foreign country.

As a representative of modern middle-class woman, the grandmother tells her story being the reflection of her morality and duty to family and to nation-state. Oscillating between her 'Indian' and 'London' selves, Ila who wanted freedom in a foreign country across the border betrays her dilemma, "I wish it were like that... You see, you've never understood, you've always been taken in by the way I used to talk, when we were in college, I only talked like that to shock you, and because you seemed to expect it of me somehow.

In this postcolonial and post-modern world, the wandering cosmopolitan in this novel *The Shadow Lines* are the characters representing their post-colonial women identity. The partition of the country and the rootlessness has been the key concepts in this novel, because of which the women characters in this novel has suffered in their lives and they were not able to make the choice of their own to live in their place wherever they wish to. Both Ila and the grandmother are homeless and unrooted, active women in their lives in their own way of choice of Independence. In the world of artificial, detached and cultural boundaries, the post-colonial situations urge them to find their own identity. The grandmother's identity is based on her morality and faith for her nation and family, while Ila's identity is focused on rootlessness.

Amitav Ghosh's novel, ***The Glass Palace*** is the most excellent in which he blends history with fiction. In this novel Ghosh explains how the three generations of women show their uniqueness among men. Ma Cho, Dolly and Uma were first generation women characters. At the beginning these characters were dependent on men but later self dependent and at the last they improved in herself and proved superior than men. These women show progress of her family and society.

The Glass Palace is epical in scope covering of three countries like India, Burma and Malaya, encompassing a whole century in turbulent times. It is an intricate novel where the narrative spans over three the generations. He portrays women characters and the cultural complexities and feminine consciousness through family relationships. This novel depicts about the epic story of three generations Rajkumar Raha, Uma Dey and Saya John. These three significant families and their kin relatives move there and here to form their real identities in the massive world.

Amitav Ghosh weaves the character of Queen Supayalat from the history of Burma. She was the daughter of King Mindon Min and Queen of Alenandaw and the last queen of Burma who reigned in Mandalay (1878–1885). She was married to her half-brother, Thebaw, the last king of the Konbaung dynasty. She was considered as vindictive, unforgiving and an imperious woman. She never regarded herself beholden to the British as she believed that they robbed her of her kingdom with all the wealth and riches therein. She stands against the powerful British Empire even after her exile. She becomes popular for planning and massacring eighty-ninety potential heirs to the throne of Burma. She is vicious and frivolous. Her quest to follow traditions gives her the strength to defy the mighty British. Queen Supayalat stands as a strong character throughout ***The Glass Palace***.

She displays her superiority by stubbornly not allowing Dolly into The Outram House after she marries Rajkumar. On her orders Sawant closes the main gates. After Sawant impregnants the first princess, she wants to get her daughter married to Sawant, much to the embarrassment of District Collector Dey. She tells "Collector-sahib, you keep yourself so well informed.

The role of Ma Cho reveals the struggle of a single woman through men. Ma Cho as woman being shows that her struggle id superior than men. She had no her family except her small food-stall so she leads her life alone. Ma Cho stands as a preserver of cultural and spiritual essence. Her character gives the strength of leading and way of life. As women being she was superior to men. Her life was self dependently this novel portrays women as a life giver both Dolly and Uma Dey. Dolly is protagonist character of novel her entire generation is mentioned in the novel. Dolly gives birth of Dinu and Neel. Dolly a nine- year old girl, she is looking after the younger princess transported along with them. Gradually from a child

character she grows into an attractive young girl and sensitive. Her mind and body expand. Dolly was hurt, emotionally confused and by a psychological transference identifies herself with the first princess and says she is waiting for the baby's arrival. Another character Uma, wife of District Collector Dey, restless and intelligent, strikes up a close, unlikely friendship with Dolly. But Uma coaxes Dolly to marry with Rajkumar. In the end Dolly agrees to do so as Rajkumar loves her and marriage being a sacrament in the Hindu context is the only suitable career open to a woman. She also sees it as a security for her orphan life and help to economically. Dolly nurses Dinu, a sensitive photographer, when he needs to help during his illness, perceiving her role as a mother more important than that of a wife. But the suffering of Dinu changed her attitude and she feels 'I couldn't go back to the life I'd led before'.

Dolly was a representative woman character personification of the spirit of endurance and acceptance. Her weakness was her source of strength. She stands for courage, honour, hope, values, compassion, believe and sacrifice. Her tenacity of spirit lifts the other women characters. There is the feeling that the traditional emphasis on feminine virtues such as obedience, humility and patience only encourage women characters to give in to their oppression. Dolly shows that a woman can fulfill herself in a loving and harmonious relationship with men and women. Uma Dey, the Madame collector, is attractive, charming, fashionable, lively and self-possessed. Uma Dey becomes an elegant hostess, a mere adjunct to the collector. She is a "role-filler" in the novel.

In the novel *The Glass Palace* the character of Uma struggles for survival in the hostile world. She married to Beni Prasad Dey, a Bengali intellectual man from Kolkata. Beni Prasad Dey joins his duty as a collector of Ratnagiri in 1905 and he never given freedom to his wife to do achievement regarding to women. Uma, who looks like an Indian in appearance, is simple and devoted for women and poor people. She plays a major role to unite Dolly and Rajkumar and completed marriage them.

We also come to know that her life does not go on smoothly her life was didactic and supportive of society. Uma suffers a lot of difficulties in her family life. There was a great difference between Uma and her husband, Beni Prasad Dey though they belong to the same nation, India. The collector, her husband was a foreign educated Bengali eminent scholar, who wants everything in unconventional way which was exactly opposite to Uma. The couple had lacks of mutual understanding in family life. Even if they resided under one roof for several years, they fail to understand each other couple life. She represents Indian traditional woman who is simple, virtuous and devotional girl, who was always ready as a revolutionary character and her husband desires to have only mental and intellectual connection with her, and he had not emotional and genuine love relationship between them. Uma finds herself to be lonely and detached in all the communal meetings of the collector. Even before death of

Uma's husband, Uma leaves him alone. The collector cannot tolerate her departure and finally commmits suicide by drowning into the sea water, because he was narrow minded man who likes only his personal benefits. The situation enforces her to wear white sari as a way of Indian widow woman's life. It was a social custom and way of life to follow such obligation in India. It clearly indicates that Uma was a sufferer. Uma becomes the victim of the oppressive traditional way and exploited by the Indian patriarchal system. She married to her husband, a collector in her early age. She finds neither joy nor her husband convenient after her marriage, she oppressed by her husband. They had differences on the basis of culture's adaptation. Her husband is very much fascinated by the colonial culture and Uma represents the Indian culture and life.

It is through the character of Uma, Amitav Ghosh observes the sacrifices of the Indian freedom fighters and she was a good social activist with the revolutionary and patriotism. She represents every inspired patriot who gave their precious contribution in achieving independence for India and she was ideal for freedom fighters of India. She granted freedom as a result Uma visits several countries for awareness of women. Shubha Tiwari says about her:

“With the Collectors death Uma's life takes an upward swing. She becomes a globetrotter, a freedom fighter and a sort of celebrity in her own right. Except for a passing remark that she mourned her husband's death for fifty years, there is hardly any real feel of her sorrow.” (Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study, 99)

It is true that Uma is free to lead her life in her own style in European countries. She dedicates her whole life after became widow to do service of nation.

Uma is an awakened spirit and obsessed by the ideas of freedom, nationalist, revolution to her country. Her observation was true that the white colonizers were not developers but exploiters and oppressors. The aim of Amitav Ghosh is very clear he wants to appreciate the marginalized and subaltern figures those who sacrificed the lives in Indian independent movement. Anshuman A. Mondal writes about this book:

‘In this novel, Ghosh continues to engage directly with colonialism and its aftermath. It attempts to represent the human dimension of living through the violent upheavals brought about by the rise and fall of the British Empire, whilst tracing some of Burma's own current political problems back to the period of dislocation and defeat’. (Mondal. 16)

In the novel Ghosh has explicated the marginality through his character Uma.

In the next novel *The Hungry Tide* is a prophetic novel of remarkable insight, beauty, and humanity and is a remarkable book, a whirlwind work of the imagination, as epic in its scope and ambition as Amitav Ghosh's previous, widely-acclaimed novels. In this

novel the author shuttles the scrupulous research that allows a mixture of fiction and fact to the extent that they stand undifferentiated. Touching upon various topics from refugees, freedom and war, to life in the Sunderbans, the absence of language in communication, development, women trafficking and much more, he takes the reader through a whirlwind of events and emotions.

The novel presents women's distinct experience through the characters of Nilima and Kusum on one hand, and Piyali Roy, an American scientist, and Moyna Mondal on the other hand. All the options between motherhood and man less life style are portrayed. Nilima, Kusum represent yester years whereas Piyali, Moyna belong to the current tide. Kusum, a tribal woman, "a muse" in Nirmal's words, exercises a captivating grip on the narration. She felt as an outsider on maid land. Tide country's nostalgic past called her back, and she goes to Morichjhapi with her son Fokir joining the refugees of Bangladesh, who become the cause of her life. This concept of self as potentially unified with a place and an aspiration for psychic unity with the needy becomes her hub of freedom. This self-assertion leads Kusum to the tide country and makes her stretch a helping hand to refugees and tribals. She asks for Nilima's help to safeguard her people through her "Union". Nilima refuses, as she cannot go against the government. The equivocal voices of these refugees allow for the deconstruction of historical and ideological categories. Kusum reveals that women neither are naturally submissive nor uncomplaining, nor incapable of protest at the strictures of the society.

Nilima Mashima of Lusibari belonged to an aristocratic family with a good educational background. The reforms of William Bentick and Raja Ram Mohan Roy for the cause of women, the spread of English higher education and the western individualistic ideals prepared the ground for women to play active roles outside their limited family circle. The novel is a captivating read with fearful instances of a tidal country dictated in line with superstitious beliefs, the poverty of the islanders and the effort made by an entrepreneur like Nilima lead the path of such illiterate island dwellers from their subjugated existence to a healthy, educated and liberated livelihood. Nilima at a point says,

I am not capable of dealing with the whole world's problems. For me the challenge of making a few little things a little better in one small place is enough. That place for me is Lusibari. (Ghosh HT 387)

Unlike her idealistic dreamy husband, she remains within possible and practicable limits. In the process she is stern and strict. Yet she reveals her deep love, though suffering immense pain at his incongruous behaviour.

Piyali Roy belongs to the present generation. She is a Cetologist researching marine animals, a rare profession for women. She comes to Sunderbans to study the *Orcaella brevirostris*, or the Irrawaddy dolphin. Her tenacious spirit to explore the penetrating secrets

of nature extends her stay in India. Despite changes in the norms and variations in taste acquired with the impact of western culture, she remains essentially Indian in sensibility. Modernity provides the new women a reformulated society based on a discourse of rights. Piyali Roy abandoned emotional language for the pure objective discourse of science. She is aware of her vulnerable condition as a scientist. The massive storm brings death and erases her long held notions. It also reveals the concern Fokir, the illiterate simple untrained fisherman saves her with his basic instincts. Piya stumbles upon her life's work and acquires a taste for high ambition by researching the mammals. To Piya, her life through her career, home is where the Oracella are. Piyali's ceaseless quest for a credible meaning ends up in Sunderbans.

Moyna Mondal stands in the novel as a woman with self-respect. In addition she is a woman with soaring aspirations, unlikely for a tribal woman. As a tribal, possessing basic things and living life with dignity itself is problematic. The term itself, in her case, indicates the utopian vision of society.

These women, Nilima and Kusum, Piya and Moyna shared a commonality of experience. It was their desire for continuous reaffirmation that made them strong. They never lose their faith in the essential grandeur of their existence.

In Sea of Poppies he has tried to show how women can be empowered so that they may become independent in the future. In ***Sea of Poppies*** the status of women in the pre-independent Indian society is portrayed through the life of Deeti. Women in ancient India were held in high respect. During the Vedic Period, they enjoyed equal status and rights with men. The practices of polygamy, purdah system, dowry and sati which came into being during the medieval period deteriorated the status of women in the society.

His novel is based on historical background of colonialism, of cultivation of opium in India to fulfill demand of opium in China and migration of indentured labours to Mauritius for working in plantations. It is in this context story vivid picture of plight of women during colonial rule is represented in the novel. The suffering of a woman in Zamindar family and an agriculturist is nonetheless similar.

Opium effects life of all women characters directly or indirectly in the novel. There are many female characters in this novel like. The character of Paulette daughter of a French botanist living in Calcutta, she respects Indian culture like French. Some minor women characters in the novel like Sarju, Heeru, Munniah and others, who travel on board as indentured labours on Ibis from Calcutta to Mauritius. But here I will discuss briefly main woman character Deeti.

There story presents a vivid picture of subjugation of women. Through the character of Taramony, life of a widow is described and how they were sent to Brindavan to live a life of

suffering and hardship. Deeti, one of the leading female characters in the novel and it is around her that novel revolves. Ghosh has represented women from every section of Indian society. This novel investigates the construction of identity and the nature of the self. The leading character Deeti tries to transform her all the internal and external forces that shape her identity mainly her historical background, her family ties and at last her memories. She put at margin due to exploitation, migration and colonialism. She tried to travel from the margin to the centre and changes her identity from Deeti to Addi.

The position of upper class women is not very different than woman of lower class. Women in the novel suffer from gender discrimination, class and caste structure. Ghosh has dealt with spiritual love between god and a devotee. Through the character of Paulette he tries to show development of a child irrespective of discrimination results in respect for all culture whether it is European or Indian.

She is saved by Kalua, an untouchable from a society which is ruled by patriarchal laws. Kalua saves her from the burning pyre and jumps in the river Ganga. She sends her daughter to her brother home because she feels that Kabutari will be safe there. She discards discrimination and marries Kalua as her second husband. She had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma; she had paid the price stars had demanded of her, and was free now to create a new destiny as she willed with whom she choose and she knew it was with Kalua that this life would be lived, until another death claimed the body that he had torn from the flames.

After her rebirth she sheds meekness and weakness possessed by her as Deeti. She becomes confident and independent to take decisions about her future. Her marriage with Kalua can be seen as perfect in terms of understanding between them because before taking any decision Kalua consults Deeti and protects her from every danger. Here entry on the board of Ibis is symbolic because she enters the ship in gunghata as a new bride with people around her. Her change of name to Aditi while registering her name in migration list shows her search for identity because till now she was known as Kabutari-ki-ma. ...it was on her lips to identify herself as Kabutari-ki-ma, name by which she been known ever since her daughter's birth –her proper given name was the first to come to mind, since it had been used by anyone it was good as any. Aditi, she said softly, I am Aditi.

She becomes leader of grimityas on Ibis. She is called bhaugi by men and women on the ship because she possesses the solution of their problems. She is confident and ready to fight for anyone in trouble. As it is said

“That women be free to define themselves, instead of having their identity defined for them time and again, by their culture and their men” (Susan Faludi 82).

Ghosh has tried to show that socio political changes bring drastic changes in women to come out of their sufferings.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh's fiction portrays women of different levels. Each character is created with an imaginative grace and few characters negotiate with their milieu to conclude at probable resolutions. Thus Amitav Ghosh presents his women characters as revolutionaries, and nationalist. They have become revolutionaries in their respective spheres and fields. Women having self-determination become synonymous with self-control and purity. Few characters break from their traditional pattern of sexuality and sensuality to get rid of their dependency status. They live life on their own terms and attain dignity. Ghosh has created many strong women characters with growth, progress and individuality rather than supporting the tradition of patriarchal exploitation. Amitav Ghosh acknowledges that the reformation of the society from the evils like caste system, discrimination based on gender, ill-treatment of women, child marriages, poverty, exploitations, demonic tradition etc.

Through his novels Ghosh's humanistic approach gives voice to the forgotten and humble women characters. He wants to free the entire world from commotion of caste, race, gender, religion, untouchability, and geographical boundaries which are hurdles in the way of human development. It is also shown that how the sacrifices of the marginal characters and women characters are remained unknown in the pages of history.

Ghosh has also tried to depict sufferings women from all sections of Indian society during the nineteenth century. He has dealt with social problems like sati, rape by brother of the groom in the name of marriage to conceal impotency of groom. The misery and isolation of widowhood with reference to women of Brahman family in Calcutta who are send to Brindavan. Ghosh gives us a ray of hope that if women get support from their male counterparts as in the case of Deeti who is supported by Kalua. They can be empowered to become independent and can become leader as Deeti in the novel. They are more than equal to men in the novel of Amitav Ghosh. He has tried to depict women's search for identity and their right to live a life of freedom and dignity. In his novel women are strong, they travel and take decisions to live an independent life. They are not controlled by men. They are individuals with freedom and progress.

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