Tracing the Post Modern Elements in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh

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Both modern and postmodern literature represent a break from 19th century realism. But basically Post-modernism is a reaction against modernism. It gives voice to insecurities, disorientation and fragmentation. In character development, both modern and postmodern literature explore subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine inner states of consciousness, in many cases drawing on modernist examples in the "stream of consciousness" styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, or explorative poems like *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot. Post modernism is a reaction against the modernist and the 'Anti-modernist' tendencies which have psychological and intellectual impact. In America and France post modern literature emerged as a genre. Post modernist writers break away from all the rules and seek alternative principles of composition conforming to their content of existentialist thought.

Postmodern in Indian English literature explores fragmentariness in narrative- and character-construction in a different way from its British or American counterpart. In post modernism, there is a preoccupation with insecurities in the existence of humanity. The picture of life delineated by them accommodates meaninglessness, purposelessness and absurdity of human existence through the employment of devices such as Contradiction, Permutation, Discontinuity, Randomness, Excess, Short Circuit and so on. Post modernist literature manifests chaotic condition of the world. Post-modernism of Indian English literature is, however, different from that of England or Europe which rejects western values and beliefs as only a small part of the human experience and rejects such ideas, beliefs, culture and norms of the western. Amitav Ghosh as a practitioner of post modernism in novels focuses entirely on the colonialism’s impoverished, and usually non-white, victims. They are given the central position, not the white masters. Amitav Ghosh took nearly three and a half years to write the second book of his Ibis trilogy.

In Amitav Ghosh’s novels, there is a colourful array of seamen, convicts and labourers sailing forth in the hope of transforming their lives. Apparently it seems that the characters are his targets. The Brits whom he depicts are basically scheming, perverse and ruthless to a man, but Ghosh has portrayed them not as round characters who grow. They are largely caricatures. At the end of *The Sea of Poppies*, the clouds of war were seen 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. Symbolically, the novel thus ends amidst a raging storm, rocking the triple-masted schooner, the Ibis. In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh narrates the havoc caused by Japanese invasion in Burma and its effect on the Army officers and people. He creates a sense of dejection that deals with so much human tragedy, wars, deaths, devastation and dislocation. Ghosh penned the story of sacrifice. In *The Shadow Lines*, The rescue of May from Muslim mobs in the communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka is indeed a great sacrifice.

Amitav Ghosh expressed a developing awareness of the aspirations, defeats and disappointments of the colonized people. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh routes the debate on eco-environment and cultural issues through the intrusion of the West into East. The destruction of
traditional village life in *The Circle of Reason* is an allegory about the modernizing influx of western culture and the subsequent displacement of non-European peoples by imperialism. In *An Antique Land*, contemporary political tensions and communal rifts were delineated with the post modernist approach.

Postcolonial migration is yet another trait of postmodernism and it is a theme in *The Hungry Tide*, the ruthless suppression and massacre of East Pakistani refugees who had run away from the Dandakaranya refugee camps to Marichjhampi as they felt that the latter region would provide them with familiar environs and therefore a better life. In *Sea of Poppies*, the indentured labourers and convicts are transported to the island of Mauritius on the ship Ibis where they suffer a lot. In *The Glass Palace*, Burmese Royal family, after the exile, lives an uncomfortable life in India. Rajkumar who piles heap of amount in Burma is forced to leave his home and business due to Japanese invasion. He spent several weeks in Guangzhou and learnt some Cantonese to depict the background of the novel which is set in Fanquit town. Most of the action occurs in Guangzhou. Like the *Sea of Poppies*, the novel which deals with opium trade in China is also not a single linear. Like Lawrence Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet*, the relationship between *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* is a ‘tangential one’ as Amitav Ghosh himself describes it. The mash-up of fact and fiction works, coalescing into a narrative shaped by cataclysmic historical events but inflected with small-scale personal drama beautifully works here in the novel.

Fredric Jameson referred to ‘the spatialization of culture under the pressure of organised Capitalism’ in going analyse ‘post modernism’. Amitav Ghosh used different physical spaces in the setting of the novel. The post modern dimension is expanded by placing his novels in a globalised cultural space of the modern times. In the plot and the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* we get the post modern text in which the spatialization may be traced. Historically, all the constructs in the novel are the outcome of either globalization or British colonialism. We may discover in them the large shadows looming, the shadows of various mechanisms of global capitalism. Tridib in the novel from the very beginning is an incarnation of longing. His alienation is intellectual in nature. But we cannot ignore the class alienation. Time bound and issue bound spaces reinforce the rhetoric of empowering which adds to the structural spaces in the novel. The decentralization of the narration continues as independent market organisms which make it post-structural. The images and spaces do not imply static images and ideas. Various interpretations of the same constructed image is possible thus opening up he broad vistas of ‘signifier’ and the signified. The character of Ila for a more concrete example, may be taken as signifying an young girl brought up in an upwardly and socially mobile bureaucratic family. Various events and non-events are attached to it. Then there are the subaltern characteristics of the novel, particularly reflected in the colonial elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. The crisis of human expectations and desires, and ultimate human failures and frailty gives us the basic constructs of the novel.

Amitav Ghosh as a practitioner of post modernism in novels focuses entirely on the colonialism’s impoverished, and usually non-white, victims. They are given the central position, not the white masters. *The Hungry Tide* is far more an epic than the simple struggle of ‘man versus beast’. The different issues in the novel—East West encounter, the expatriate sense, eco-friendly outlook are all seen from the angle of psycho dynamics of women. As a post modern novel, *The Hungry Tide*
Tide is characterized by the presence of many narrative voices and delivers indeterminacy. Each
of the voices functions and speaks from certain subjective positions giving little scope for
unifying grand narratives. Post modernism privileges the local over the universal, differences
rather than similarities, resistance rather than conformity, the temporal and a state of flux rather
than permanence and stability and hybridity rather than purity. Incredibility towards meta
narratives, mercantilisation of knowledge, anti-foundationalism, language games, narrativity,
invocation of the sublime, sweltness, hyper reality, simulation, notion of seduction, self –
absorption, indifference, identity, professionalism etc. are some of the behavioural concepts
around which post modernism builds up. In the character of Piya a sense of fragmentation sets
her aloof from the feeling of passion. Piya feels self contented that nothing happened between
Fokir and herself. Neelima’s life seems to be extended between the ebb and tide of Repression
and Projection.

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