



SUBALTERN FACTUAL TRIAL IN THE NARRATIVES OF AMITAV GHOSH

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ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh is a proclaimed author of the books he wrote addressing issues concerning oppressed class of the Indian Society. He has expressed his sympathy towards the downtrodden people in his major novels. The issues they face regarding migration, alienation, existential dread in life of the oppressed class of the one can explore by reading his novels. Amitav Ghosh in a different way has expressed his concerns as a voice of, their sacrifices the challenges they face in life which go un noticed in there cords of history. In his writings he made the subaltern the main character thus by providing them a center stage to express their problems and raise their voice against those who try to oppress them. The main purpose of this paper is to study major novels of Amitav Ghosh and to highlight his perception concerning the downtrodden people of Indian society. For this paper the novels that have been selected for study are –“*The Calcutta Chromosomes, The Glass Palace, The Circle of Reason, The Sea of Poppies and The Circle of Reason*”. In his novels he has realistically outlined the struggles and pathetic life the unprivileged. Amitav Ghosh’s In his novels has exposed the evil faces of poverty, exploitation, suppression, homelessness.

Keywords: Amitav Ghosh,
Subaltern, center, struggle, voice.

Introduction

The themes of Amitav Ghosh are taken from real life events and history. Stories inspired from the lives of common man, who have suffered the most because of these political crisis or historical upheavals are the subject of his novels. The main characters of his novels are taken from them arginalized sphere of the society. He provides center stage to his characters, and also replies regarding the dilemma of the post-colonial intelligentsia also provide them the opportunity to express themselves. Ghosh himself takes up the role of the narrator in case the character does not

wants to be the representative, but permits the subaltern group to represent themselves by providing them stage [1].

Ghosh, in his novels tries to provide space for the voiceless, subaltern, silenced, unrecorded or the ones who are neglected by history and who are suppressed by the oppressive forces of their society. Ghosh in his interview with Hawley accorded “The philosophies of the subaltern studies group have greatly influenced me. I think, I share some of the apprehensions of the Subaltern Studies group as I am from the



same background as most of the members of the group” . “Ghosh expresses an abiding interest towards the silenced and marginalized individuals. He also mentions that his main interest lays in histories and predicaments, people and their lives.” “ Ghosh has also negotiated with the challenge to improve and represent the stories of subalterns in an integrated way.” Because of his negotiation skill he has attempted to amalgamate this subject and raised his concerns related to the issues. In order to incorporate the discourse of subaltern writings, he employed two methods. In his writings, firstly the central stage has been occupied by both fiction and nonfiction characters of this marginalized group. Secondly, the issues and issues portrayed represent the issues faced by the subaltern – class.” As per John Hawley: “Ghosh roots are in journalism and his academic writing investigation and analysis, reveal she has connections with the subaltern class” [2].

II. CONCEPT OF SUBALTERN

It is important to go through the concept of subalternity and the views of different thinkers before we analyse his novels from this perspective. In the view of post-colonial, from the concept of self and other, the concept of subalternity originated. To mute the other, self-constructed these binaries and hierarchies. In order to preserve and establish the dominance over the other also to mute the other these are constructed. This concept of other is universal and considerable matter in which the self asserts to be superior and main and under the concept of other rest come. In accordance with the context, the term other which is highly complex and relative changes its significance. In the sphere of life self-attempts to subdue and

sideline the other from the main stream of life and they as marginalized they are treated. With respect to the growth and development of the society their contribution is nil [3].

A prominent scholar of post-colonialism Said identified a European cultural tradition of – “Orientalism”. In his book “orientalism “In the theory of identifying he has mentioned that East is other and with respect to west as self. Said emphasized constructing a binary – division in between the Occident and the orient. Said mentioned that west considers itself as superior the central source of learning and knowledge whereas on the other hand East is represented as other as a place of illiteracy, ignorance and superstition. The orient occurs as ignorant, static and cut-off from the progress of history of the west. East, does not even has the ability to represent themselves and therefore west being the superior has to take upon the responsibilities of representing orients, Other in the form of literary- text.

The marginalized group is others who are suppressed and are silenced for years by the various evil forces. The term, subalternity is used to highlight the dilemma of those who are all ocated in the human society as “secondary” or “sub”. The term Subaltern is devoted to the who are from lower strata of the society or marginalized group. In the essay “On the Margins of History”, the term subaltern was mentioned by Antonio Gramsci that is associated with that group or people who are suppressed by the prejudiced ruling social classes. People from subaltern classes such as workers or woman, farmers are denied access to hegemonic power. As claimed by Gramsci, that the history of the subaltern classes is equally complicated to that of the dominant



classes, though history of the latter is in general officially accepted. Since the subaltern group is prejudiced under the practices of ruling classes even if they try to dissent thus their history is in general episodic and fragmented. Since they have no power to represent themselves they are given less opportunity to access the authorities of social, cultural, and political institutions [4].

As Foucault stated -those who exercise power, for them History stops to be the forte. Thus, the elite will become the writer of history as they have the power to change history. Till now the history written was biased and partial. As in this kind of history, the true picture of the member of lower strata of society is not portrayed. As per their own perception the ruling class has constructed the other and controls these institutions. The elite group, the west, the powerful do not have the capability to create history as the events or incidents are perceived by them. True – history should not be restricted to superior group, it should also cover the history of the common people. Thus, history should be impartial and unbiased. For instance, in a war the entire credit should not be given only to the Emperor and the higher officials but also to the soldiers and the people from marginalized group who fought and contributed on behalf of the king and lost their lives as to win a war it requires joint efforts [5].

III. SUBALTERN STUDIES GROUP

Under the discipline subaltern studies the history of subaltern group is studied. Subaltern Studies is referred to as -History from below. The study of subaltern group has not evolved all of a sudden. In the year 1982, Ranajit Guha initiated a group of scholars from South Asian

Britain mainly Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee for the publication of the book titled-Subaltern Studies. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Edward Said, Sudipta Kabiraj, Ranajit Guha, David Hadriman, Gayatri Chakrabarty are few eminent writers of subaltern studies. The main focus of the group of subaltern studies was on the concept of subaltern and the various aspects of subordination as a subject matter to study. All the way through the succeeding volumes the studies of concept of subalternity went through various shifts. In this concept, there was a gradual change, deviation in the theories and interest in the essays of the subsequent volumes are well reflected. New form and substance to subalternity were given by the new contributors. The group of Subaltern studies outlined the complications that arise from composition of sub-ordination and its wide range of concerns regarding history, economic, policy, politics of subalternity and with the ideologies, obstructed attitudes and belief systems in short the culture that informs the circumstances. In other terms we can define subaltern studies as an attempt that gives opportunity to the people to express themselves within the envious pages of history of the elites and by doing so they can speak for or to make themselves heard, the ones who are truly oppressed. Initiatives have been taken to develop a new writing trend under the discipline of subaltern studies [6].

Subalterns have been given the opportunity to become noticeable to the world. All through the history, their pains and sufferings have been portrayed. Within the works of writings various writers have tried to express their grief and condition. Subaltern Studies Group scholars have attempted to fill up the historical



gaps, which have been written by the west or the elites by streamlining, distinguishing, identifying and recuperating the stories of the oppressed, non – elite and marginalized class people. The perspective of other has been incorporated in order to comprehend them. The approach taken to assimilate perception is needed till the time history will represent the opinions of self which is on basis of their understanding of other. Therefore, we can use the subaltern as an umbrella term that becomes a voice of all those are underprivileged and marginalized. The term subaltern is referred to that group of people who are suppressed that is the lower strata of life, or women who for years have been intimidated. Subaltern so means to be disregarded, neglected, overlooked and to treat without being concerned and indifference.

IV. SUBALTERN STUDIES & AMITAV GHOSH

Amitav Ghosh in his contemporary writings truly unveils the implications and manifestations of the term “subaltern “. In two ways we need to study the issue of subaltern in his works: firstly pretentiously exercising the concept of subaltern, as stated by the Subaltern Study Group that it is a kind of parallel exercise that even at the time of colonialism existed but was never looked into. He in his works spoke about the alternative practices and histories of the people. Second subaltern is an approach that represents the marginalized class as their speaking ability has been muted off and allows them to express their grief and conditions. As per Telwani, “most of his characters are inspired from real life stories “In almost all of his works themosaic of the characters is characterized by subalternity [7].

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is one of the renowned critics of subaltern who secritical statement Is appropriate “do the subaltern have the ability to talk?” recommended that silence is the chief attribute of subaltern -identity. Amitav Ghosh adhered to his notion that yes the subaltern can speak in contrary to concept by Spivak that subaltern cannot speak“if they are given the opportunity and a stage to express themselves”. Ghosh chooses his subaltern characters inspired from real life in his works and stories. We get to look into the lives of the marginalized their struggles, issues they face through their perspective [8].

The Circle of Reason, is his first novel, in this almost all the characters be it Zindi-al-Aiffaha, Alu, Shombhu, Haji Fahmy, Zaghoul, Debnath, Rakhai, Toru Debi, Rajan, Jeevanbhai Patel all belong to the lower strata of the society and form the subaltern group. In this book he has portrayed the struggles and issues these characters face in their respective lives has been penned down. It should be noted that way before Ghosh became involved with the Subaltern Studies Group his novel was published. Still, it shows that the author is curious and concern for the marginalized class [9].

In his novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* he by providing an agency has tried to expand the reach the Subaltern Studies Group. Though Lakhan and Mangala belong from the subaltern class, they help Ronald Ross in his discovery. IN the research of malaria, their scientific approach contradicted but the information they provided though scattered but was enough for Ross to lead the direction of his discovery towards success. Therefore the power provided by the agency helped in establishing its



discourse. Subalterns have their mechanism that prevents them from getting eradicated. Here in this context, Mangala and Lakhan achieved the position as knowledge manipulators. Ghosh has attempted to eliminate the gap between the eastern and western, formulated a plot in such a way that the subaltern helped in directing the scientific research towards the final discovery. The issue of Subaltern agency as an essential element has been highlighted by Tabish Khair with reference to *The Calcutta Chromosome*. He said “The plot is such nicely intricate that it insists on lucidity and agency of the subaltern in between the west and In diait also dismisses arbitrary and essentialist dichotomies “ According to Khair, agency helps the subaltern to gain back their ability to speak In the history of narration, “for history can be found plotting human agency and experiences. “ As mentioned by Telwani that in the *Hungry Tide* Amitav Ghosh has described about the out caste Dalit refugees living in sunderban forests from Bangladesh. The *Hungry Tide* is a response to the issues related to political and social faced by the marginalized section of the society. The post partition such as movement of the refugees from East Bengal to West Bengal that happened in the year 1979 at Morchijhapi has been demarcated and unfurled in the novel. As mentioned by Sushil Sarkar that people who belonged from the subaltern classes were forced to move out and settle somewhere else. The incident of Morchijhapi occurred when the refugees were struggling to survive. When the supplies of food and water were cut down they were forced to flee from the island. The incidents of Morchijhapi and the silence towards it incited Nirmal who is are revolutionary to write about that happened so

that through Kanai history will know about it. Kusum’s murder was brutally repressed by the government forces as a Marxist. Nirmal believed that by reapproachment we can bring people of all classes the subaltern, the elite, the other and the self together by removing all the class barriers. The Morchijhapi incident where subaltern were brutally treated with violence ascribed to the in discernibility of the lower and oppressed class. Instances such as the massacre, death of Kusum’s father when the tiger attacked, and Fokir’s vulnerability to the officials of the state depicted the dilemma of the marginalized people and subaltern. Homi Bhabha while defining subaltern groups laid emphasis on the importance of relation of social power. As per his opinion about subalternity, indefining majority of the group there is need of presence of the oppressed minority groups. The Subaltern social group was in a position to overthrow those who had the authority and the hegemonic power. In *The Hungry Tide* this can be well embodied by Kusum’s. Kusum gave vision to Nirmal to feel to see the sufferings of the refugees who migrated to Morchijhapi. This is evident that the subaltern or the oppressed wants to be heard as they have been muted. For Nirmal, the agony of the refugees became representative of the entire subaltern community who are without dwelling. It became a cry not only for them but on behalf of be wildered humankind. Who are we truly? Where do we belong? As per B. K Sharma, “the major concern of Ghosh is to universalize subaltern history in this novel”. The subaltern heroes are there all heroes who resented against the evil forces and adversities and rose to the status of real creators of history.



The Glass palace story revolves around three generations and the several other characters in the story whose positions keeps on changing with respect to time and space in the society. An example of how the ruling class can move to poverty was when the king went to exile. Whereas position of RAJ Kumar moved to center of power from the subaltern and subjugated. Dolly, Mo Chao, Arjun, Kishan Singh in The Glass Palace mirror is the various other subaltern characters the author has interest upon. Ghosh pondered that how powerful the British Empire was that it changed the lives of million Indian citizens.,, What vast, what incompressible power, to move people in such numbers from one place to another be it kings, emperors, government, policemen, farmers, soldiers, coolies. Why? So furious this movement was that it moved people to pull rickshaws and to sit blind in exile? Another aspect of Indian history was discovered in this novel. Under the British army the history of Indian army has been totally overlooked in the conversation of colonial – past with respect to what it meant for who had joined the army of the British. As the characters Arjun Hardyas per the convenience of space and time changed their class and agency. The novel has covered the time span right from the colonialism to the time of neocolonialism. How ironical it is that to see that subalterns (sub-ordinate officer) like Arjun was serving the British army neither to defend nor to expand the territory of India. They were just simply assisting the British to expand their colonies swiftly. The issue of Identity, subalternity, colonialism and belongingness, Amitav Ghosh has risen by portraying the character of Arjun He has also pointed out that Indian they were responsible

for exploitation of people and place. The novel The Glass Palace is fascinating because it lets everyone the Orient or the colonized or the subaltern the voice to speak. From the perspective of a subordinate the Glass Palace contemplates about the effects of history on the lives of individuals. It has equally laid emphasis on the lives of socially, politically, economically and historically insignificant characters. AS stated by Telwani, Sea of Poppies another novel by Amitav Ghosh, unfolded the events of northern colonized India, on the eve when the Chinese ports were attacked by the British known as the opium war. Here Ghosh has portrayed a mosaic of subaltern characters belonging from various corners of the planet such as the passengers, sailors, marines for the ibis, a slaving schooner, convicts, criminals, coolies, girmitis; indentured labour these characters are made to experience ship board mutiny jails, sati, kidnapping, criminal justice, wretched life as of a dog. The sea of poppies has also been successful in apprehending the series of events that not only that depicted how powerful the British Empire was and how it had successfully immersed itself in various classes and communities of the Indian society and also its role in doubling the position of subaltern. The protagonist Deepti has been portrayed as a subjugated woman of the Indian society from 19th century. Through her character he has made us realize the hurdles and sacrifices a woman goes through such as widow remarriage, sati system, safety of a woman within a family. Women from the doubly marginalized class face these issues. In the name of tradition in sea of poppies the character and people like hawaldar in the story and real life are given the chance to harass and



oppress the people from lower strata of the society. Kalua's story is also note worthy. Indians beat Kalua terribly his crime was that the married from the upper caste and class. Thus we state this incident against imperialism that subverts the British proclaim of social reformation in India. This also speaks on behalf of doubly subaltern people whose stories have not been written neglected people who are belong from the lower strata of the colonized society. In this novel, there are several characters, Whose position kept on shifting. Here we can refer king knee land his family as center of power as they were once and the society turned as marginalized on the ship. We can also quote how life of Deepti changed with regard to subaltern from once being a wife of a man from high caste to now a victim by marrying Kalua.

Ghosh in his stories purposely portrays characters and write stories inspired from the subaltern class. We from the point of view of these characters can keep and presume what these people go through or issues in their real life. B.K Sharma in his book has described, "as Ghosh at a personal level is associated with subaltern class, he has done a deep research on subaltern studies and has recovered the characters of the masters who have the hegemonic power and their slaves grieving and crying under the weights of oppression, be it by the British power or the by the upper castes". [10].

V. CONCLUSION

Thus we can conclude by saying that the term subaltern generates following points: the inquiry on how it originated, to find out their identities and customs from where they

basically belong, enmeshing of cultural identities, an absorbing play of center and margins, complications of the very play and shifting from the centre, a demonstration on the fact that yes the subaltern can speak for themselves if given the opportunity or either by making them speak their own stories or write about them inspired from real incidents and characters. Therefore, his writings are a demonstration of connotations and expressions of the term -subaltern in contemporary writings.

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