

CULTURAL SYNCRETISM IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE FLOOD OF FIRE

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Abstract: The present paper exposes Imperial political, social and cultural norms highly affects reassertion of native cultural identity and vice-versa. The work marks with migration in colonialism effect for various reasons carries diasporic sensibility among characters. Thus different cultures as well as languages mix in some way and generate new form of language in influential mode which is necessary to predominant part of cultural syncretism theory. The understanding and relationship between two distinguished culture underlines the given importance to the humanistic values that the national, the cultural and lingual differences. Syncretism seen in dress manner, language, beliefs, people thinking way and other values tries to lighten in the article.

Key words – syncretism, migrant, social mobility, identity, hybridity, multilingual

INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh's 'Ibis' trilogy gained tremendous popularity in cosmopolitan world of literature. The first novel 'Sea of Poppies' 2008, shortlisted for the 2008 Booker Prize, while next 'The River of Smoke' 2011, made it to the long list of the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2011 and the last one and debut novel 'Flood of Fire' 2015, finalist of the Man Booker International Prize 2015 and received the Crossword Book Jury Award in Fiction in 2015. The Ibis trilogy deals with the trade of opium between India and China run by the East India Company extend tension between traders and Chinese authority which result of the First opium war. In the historical background author proposed the social and cultural environment of the middle nineteenth century by various characters which caught in the war tension. In this essay I argue that cultural syncretism is center to understand the proposed novel. How contemporary Indian cultural life has been highly influenced by colonialism and British Imperial capitalism exposes the study. The research deals with the importance of hybridity and syncretism in postcolonial and post-apartheid writing as ways of resisting dominant political and cultural discourses specifically it concerns the novel of 'Flood of fire'.

Ghosh interwove the ethics of multicultural representation and heterogeneity to understand the predominant theme of the novel. Trans-oceanic movements and settlements is carrying a central theme from 'sea of poppies' to the 'flood of fire', which conveys ethnicity conceptualization through the hybridizing movement. Although the narratives of cultural imperialism are addressed by hybridity theoretically and originally, Bhabha's work also comprehends with the cultural polo toes of the condition of being 'a migrant' in the contemporary metropolis. Disparate or mutually exclusive migrant's religious tradition of beliefs corporate with unrelated tradition makes 'multiculturalism' what Bhabha define it 'hybridity' or 'syncretism'. Which is definitely not solely associate with migrant populations or merely border of countries but it is applies contextually to the flow of cultures and their interactions. Creating a new multicultural identity is important aspect to the author and he find it to be one of his most necessary part as a writer, where contemporary Indian cultural life has been influenced by colonialism. Ghosh's characters play role from different religious, social, political and economic background. Migration of colonizers for identity under the domination of colonialism's epistemic violence is within the wider context of economic exploitation. Indianness reflects in their own culture, religion, social values, local custom, race, social mobility and economic acquisition, superstitious, religious rites, marriages and so on through the behavior and mental makeup. Pramod K. Nayar (2008) protest in his book, 'Postcolonial Literature' Identities appropriates through multiple specificities as, "... race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual preference, language, myth, history." A Widow woman belongs to Parsi reputed and advanced family from Bombay, Freddie from

Chinese boat woman and Indian Parsi merchant grows up on China river, Paulette from European parentile under the care of Indian woman, Mr. Zachery belongs from American man and his woman black servant, Jodu is a Muslim lascar, Capitalist and liberal English woman of Opium businessman, ten years old Raju travel for searching of his father Neel being as Khidmtgar with expeditionary force, Bihari Rajput sepoy serves in East India company all the personalities emblematically depicted into intercultural competence.

CULTURAL SYNCRETISM

In the 'Location of Culture', Bhabha attempts to provide a universal defining of hybridity as, "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, it's shifting forces and fixities ... the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal." (Bhabha, 1994, p.159) His term hybridity embraces colonial conditions of identity and cultural difference. Immigrates attempt to adapt to the new culture, with shakes their nostalgic past which became victims of tension and anxieties. This fiction, Ghosh argues, enshrines the enduring allure of his fellow Indian novelists like Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth who taught him at school. In order to examine the novel with its aforementioned concept, colonized and colonizer philosophical tradition is to be revealed and analyzed through as "race and poverty, age and gender, ethnicity and alienation" (Wagner, 1994, p.7). Kesri, a havildar serves for East India Company's army is physically and emotionally humiliated by both an Indian as well as company's imperial officers after his joining and represents military articulation. He always fears about to lost his *dharma*. Beside he has wife and child he used to visit red *bazar* to meet Gulabi. In *Akharas* different caste and sect participates in Nayanpur, his birth place, wrestlers bath, eat and wrestle together, Kesri seems as a 'congenial' but takes 'purificatory bath' in home. The news of Deeti's, his younger sister eloping with a lower caste fellow put into trouble. He is admitted as 'a pariah, an outcaste' by discriminate surrounding and leave him as 'a moving source of defilements' the situation of emotional isolation forces him to join troop and crosses 'the black water'. The act seems as outcaste, to remove the stain of overseas travels, his family held the *prayashchitta* ceremony. He is taken care under Kalua after injured. Kesri's mental makeup indicates through silent acceptance to the marriage of Deeti and lower caste Kalua. Colonialism requires contact, conflict and compromise of different groups one another within a spatial setting particularly, "Where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt cited in Yeoh 2000, p.162). Kesri who possess high moral values and social discrimination, is affected by colonial discourses his behavior and not much concern about caste to accept Kalua.

Author's woman characters refer as much strong as man and independent. Shireen travels China for claim and reparation on share. Though she follows custom and practices, other ritual of religion, she does not accept superiority of male. She takes decision in her own way and makes agree to other members of families beside her decision. Shireen Modi, a wife of late Mr. Bahram Moddie, is well educated and able to talk in English. She lives with her brother and their wives in Mistry mansion in Bombay. Her family is 'advanced' and they do not keep *purdah*. But in outdoor she takes her shawl as *ghunghta*. In her life she place great store of omens and auguries, so she often called 'superstitious' by her late husband. She is ready to go China for two purposes – one to claim and reparations and other is she wants to meet with Freddie Lee her late husband's illegitimate child. She makes plan with Mr. Karabedian (Zadig Bey). She regards, "... his (Zadig Bey) entry into her life was a sign ... to open a widow at the darkest hour of her life, to let a breath of air into the hushed gloom of her existence."(185) Decision cannot be easily accepted by her family, society and religion because, "- a widow, travelling alone!"(188) Shireen who had never travelled beyond Surat, determined to cross the sea. Business, finance and politics and finance seems little concern to her but suddenly seems absorbing interest she realize, "... the journey ahead would entail much more than just a change of location: in order to become a different person."(269) After her husband's death she adheres strictly to the rules of widowhood, wear only white saris but in the journey she ready to wear an 'English' cloths or dress. In her cabin she hang as usual the *toran*, "- an embroidered fringe of the kind that hung around the doorways of all Parsi homes."(269) As in Indian culture woman particularly wear sari in special occasion, Shireen also prefer sari on the eve of New Year party. Though she has faith on God, good and bad omen, she hardly had faith on the story of Freddie to talk with his late father after the death. In the era of mid-nineteenth century, reaction of colonialism, modernism and globalization and changing social norms affects the mental makeup of characters. The work propagate traditional stereotype image of Indian woman changes and explores freedom in contact of westerners. Shireen as traditional woman playing a role as wife

and mother dedicated feminine sensibility and modesty convert into a strong woman. She is dutiful by nature having soft corner for Mr. Zadig Bay who proposes her to marry, her acceptance know when she replies, “But no one can take my faith from me, can they? And maybe, in a few years, people will forget.”(523) The feeling of melancholic homelessness consciously reflects in the mind of characters and they trifling to get new identities under imperial triumphalism displaces the conventional dualities – of nature/culture or chaos / civilization. Staying in China she thinks about herself in optimism “new incarnation of herself.” In the context of colonial India, Shireen advocates upper in moral and social values. Depiction of the woman characters agree with what Grewal said, “The English memsahib [a European woman used in India] is seen as idle, useless, and too free in her associations with men ; the Indian nationalists construct the Indian woman, a reconstruction of middle-class Victorian woman, as the moral and spiritual opposite of the English woman. Many Indians, especially these with an English education, used Victorian values to suggest Indian women as morally and spiritually superior and thus the proper symbol of home.”(Grewal, 1996, p.25) Mrs. Burnham belongs to an imperial, liberal and sophisticated European woman, marks with showiness in behavior and much concern about immoral things. Author represents the European woman as what Stoler said, “Efforts to introduce white woman to many colonies emphasize racial division between the colonizer and the colonized and also stem from fears about miscegenation and degeneracy” (Stoler, 1996). Mrs. Burnham also doubt about her beloved having any relationship with ‘back woman’, even she is degenerated by Zachery the black in her ignorance. The character marks with its use of Indian language mix in English. It is noticeable that the western figure assimilated by an Indian culture.

Syncretism is a polarization between inferior and superior. Mr. Zachary Reid, a Baltimore seaman the son of a slave and her white master represents Ghosh’s heroic framework “... clean and virile in body ... and Christian in morals”.(7) The Ibis’s crew list recorded the name ‘Zachary Reid’, under the column of ‘race’ underline the word ‘black’. He fears about his real identity of ‘Black’ or mulattoes because of social inequality due to racial phenomena in European society which can be closed all the doors of his success. Francisco (1992) suggested that the racism is a component of the class domination process, both in a coercive level as in an intellectual and moral level of society. Further he claim that it is perceived as by the black, as by the mestizo and white in the economic and social levels. The white domination over black is therefore the result of social inequality. Hence syncretism can be seen as a result of the racist thought. Zachary aim to become as white British businessman. Ambitious and globetrotting affected Zachary and desiring for “I want to be rich... I want to have silk sheets and soft pillows and fine food... I want to live in ... Mr. Burnham’s world.”(258) Works as a *mystery* (craftsman) on a *budgerow* (a type of Indian boat) Zachary travel to china for discovery the greatest commercial opportunity which being him a rich and innumerable avenues for profit and most powerful man. Zachary facing a choice between his ideals and the lure of becoming what he desire. For him – Paulette and Mrs. Burnham represents the pole of his desires. Due to domination process in a coercive level is in an intellectual and moral level in society. His illicit relationship with Mrs. Burnham leads to a questioning of the defilement of moral values. His transformation underline as “...the effulgent emissary of a Gentoo deity...”(8) to the man of imperial capitalist who asserts, “I am man who wants more and more; a man who does not know the meaning of ‘enough’.”(582) and from, “... an ingenuous, good- natured boy, into a perfect embodiment of the kali-yuga.”(606) Author refers *kali-yuga* to modern, emperor and capitalist era of nineteenth century where new syncretic culture takes place instead of old traditional cultural values. Other mullato is Freddie (Ah Fatt) who grows up among the ‘boat people’ and like ‘outcaste’ in the eyes of Chinese people whose mother Chi-mei, a ‘Cantonese boat – woman’ may called as *dhobin*. He also belongs to inferior social ground in China. But he always dressed as European way and is addicted by opium. Silva (2000), analyzing the origin of racial inequalities, For him, “... the groups of people who identify themselves as black or mulattoes would already be subject to a process of subjection and inferiority.” Further she suggested that, “This brings up the processes of social exclusion that value the white people and their culture instead of the black people and their respective culture.”

Amitav Ghosh represents in his fiction world socio-cultural-political issues of the 19th century in Indian, European and China foreground. Their interaction makes them new identity which reveals from syncretic movement. The colonial condition forged a singular and antagonistic relationship between both the colonizers and colonized. Friendship reveal between an Indian Neel and his Chinese friend Compton, ‘a powerful sense of kinship’ between European Paulette and Chinese Freddie, emotionally attached Indian

Parsi widow Shireen and European woman Mrs. Burnham, strong bond between Bengali Kesri and European captain Mee, friendship tern in marriage between Indian parsi widow and Christian watch seller Zadig Bay, interaction between inferior black European Zachary and white European Mrs. Burnham though all characters belong from different cultures and religious stream release the development of syncretic tradition what Cunha says “the amalgamation of different doctrines or conceptions.”(1982, p.725) There is an interaction with conflict, co-operation and synthesis of different cultural, religious stream of colonizer and canonized or vice versa, what Bhabha defines, “.... Neither the one nor the other” (1994, p.37).

LINGUISTIC SYNCRETISM

Syncretism or Hybridization not only seen in culture, politic, race but also it affects in linguistic panorama. Study exposes the multi – cultural belongings as well as multi – lingual sectored scenario. Linguistic examples include pidgin and Creole languages as suggest “the multivocal language” of “multivocal narratives”. Present author in his the ‘Polyphony’ idea uses typical hybrid or pidgin variety which represent different belongings into the novel. Ghosh’s statement perceptively clear, “When a language spreads, it creates these contacts languages, which are basically pidgin languages. I’ve always had an interest in linguistics and particularly in pidgin languages – how people communicate without speaking the language as a first language.”(2009) Author used Bengali, Gujarati, pidgin, Hindi, Chinese and Anglo – Indian vocabulary attempt to respond to the multi – cultural awareness through vocal interpretation between characters. Capitalist British lady Mrs. Burnham artificially uses Anglo- Indian diction is much noticeable.

CONCLUSION

In a summing up, it is highlighting the significance of Bhabha’s concept of hybridization to understand the novel. It is significantly to put placed cultural syncretism in the central in thematically viewpoint. Zachary, Shireen, Mrs. Barnham, Neel and Kesri plays an important role with contradictory expressive modes of two, Indian and European culture flinging together which can be identify as cultural syncretism significantly. Author underlines the blurred borders between two nations, cultures, languages which create new form of multinational, multilingual and multicultural effect. Ghosh is well conscious about the changing scenario of the Indian pluralism and the cultural multiplicity which provide the underlying justifications for Bhabha’s concept of hybridization. His characters run towards continuous adaptation and alteration of identities to lead to the unification of the whole mankind under the collaborative oneness of geographical, cultural and lingual characteristics.

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