

Postmodern Narrative theory: Historiographic metafiction treatment of Amitav Ghosh in his non-fictions.

S.Ponkarthikeyan, M.A., B.Ed., (SET-2012)

Guest Lecturer,

Dept. of English,

M.R.Govt.Arts College,

Mannargudi- 614001.

“Literature is a mirror in which we can see the reflection of life. This is true in the sense that a poet or writer in composing his literary work is very often inspired and influenced by some of his own experiences and social surroundings” – A.G.Xavier.

Literature

Literature is a discipline of study which works as other disciplines like history, science, philosophy and sociology. Like History, Literature records the lifestyle of people, it could be verified like statements in Science, it imbibes realism like philosophy, it is of relationship bondage like sociology. India has a variety of literature with distinctive uniqueness pertaining to each state. In particular, Indian Writing in English is a lingua franca to the Indian people which connects all the people on a single platform. Literature is taught through poems, prose works, dramas, novels and literary criticism. Novel has the opportunity to visualize society, lifestyle, people of the real World. Eighteenth century onwards, English novel starts its travel in the shape of epistolary novel, sort of narrative in the form of letters. Later, it changed to a narrative form like omniscient narrative, first person narrative, second person narrative, third person narrative, stream of conscious, absurd narrative, liner and non-linear narrative.

Narrative has developed its zenith in postmodernism era. Postmodernism is an improvement form of modernism. Ian Buchanan's *Dictionary of Literary of Critical Theory* explains that “Modernism is an artistic movement, encompassing all the arts from architecture to arts and crafts, film and literature, that began in the latter part of the 19th century and finished in the middle of the 20th century”. Postmodernism is a contrasted term, rejection of conventional system and emerging version of modernism. In postmodernism, narratives play a vital role in generally in the readers' World. Narratives are different types in the literature:

- Biblical narratives
- Blending tenses
- Homodiegetic narrative and Hetrodiegetic narrative
- Omniscient narrative
- Postmodern narrative

Postmodern narrative has irony, intertextuality, parody, metafiction, maximalism, minimalism, Magical realism and Historiographic metafiction. Using postmodern techniques Indian English fiction has a variety of writers like Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth

Arunthadi Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran desai, Ashwin Sanghi, Amish Tripathi etc.

Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghosh scored a special place in Indian English fiction .His fiction chronologically list are *The Circle of Reason (1986)*, *The Shadow lines (1988)*, *The Calcutta Chromosome (1995)*, *The Glass Palace (2000)*, *The Hungry Tide (2004)* , *Sea of Poppies (2008)*, *River of Smoke (2011)*, *The Flood of Fire (2015)*. His non-fiction are *In An Antique Land (1992)*, *Dancing in Cambodia and large in Burma (1998)*, *Countdown (1999)*, *The Imam and the Indian (2002)* and *The Great Derangement Climate Change and the Unthinkable (2016)*.

Linda Hutcheon works are *A Poetics of Postmodernism :History, Theory, Fiction*, *The Politics of Fiction*, *Narcissistic Narrative: the metafictional Paradox: The teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, *The Canadian Postmodern: A study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, *Splitting Images:Contemporary Canadian Ironies,Operas: Desire, Disease, Death*. She is a Canadian literary theorist who coined the term *Historiographic metafiction*. She explains Historiographic metafiction, “ It often points out to the fact by using the paratextual conventions of historiography to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations” (122-123). It is a kind of postmodern novel which rejects focusing on re-writing history with self-conscious way. The term is used for works of fiction which combine the literary device of metafiction with historical fiction. It differentiated between ‘events’ and ‘facts’. The characteristics of historiographic metafiction

(i). Claiming truth in the form of ‘*Verisimilitude*’

(ii). Enquire the relation of fiction and history

(iii). Differentiate the reader on the social issues and exploitation

The nature of historiographic metafiction are (i). Conscious self-reflexivity and concern with history, (ii). Ask question on metafiction and context of history, (iii). Rewriting and reconnect history with fiction.

The Great Derangement and climate change Unthinkable (2016)

David Archer has conveyed that we might have earned money much today but we have to pay as our life for exploiting everything. Human might have escaped from justice, equality and human made so called eco-friendly products. Non- human or animals have no place to escape. The Great Derangement in our lives and our choices are enframed in a pattern of history that looks to leave us nowhere to turn but towards our self-annihilation. The complexity of the history of the carbon economy is not to diminish the argument for global justice for global warming. If we enter into the argument, we might have recognized that how deeply we are in the Great Derangement. Climate change is entirely the products of the total exploitation of human actions over time. He narrates and instructs the reader that understand the ecological system which is corrupted by the human being. Verisimilude mode of narration explains that the reality and truth behind in the environmental pollution.

“Money flows toward short term gain and toward the over-exploitation of unregulated common resources. These tendencies are like the invisible hand of fate, guiding the hero in a Greek tragedy toward his in evitable doom”. (149)

-David Archer , the geologist .

The Imam and the Indian (2002)

Amitav Ghosh’s non-fiction *The Imam and The Indian other prose pieces* is a collection of essays on various topics in different settings. In *The Ghat of the only World* tells that Amitav Ghosh’s friend Agha Ali Shahid’s life in America. Essay begins with the death bed time of Ali Shahid whose pain of brain tumor and cancer. His carrier life opens a lecturer at Hindu College, Delhi University. Amitav Ghosh and Ali Shahid become acquaintance and after settling in America both are close friends. Their conversation travels on history, culture, social concern and integration of universal brotherhood. One day Amitav Ghosh has met Ali Shahid in his residence at Brooklyn . Shahid’s talk diverts in Bengali food which is introduced by his friends of West Bengal. He consciously talks on Indian diversity system.

Amitav Ghosh uses historiographic metafiction in the form of question, is a tool for awakening the mind of reader on Hindu, Muslim issue in India. Amitav Ghosh purposely makes a reader's opinion on Hindu, Muslim issues of Kashmir and Babur Masjid demolition in India. In America, Amitav Ghosh and his friend Shahid tells that they lead a happy life and enjoy the privilege of citizen. But Hindu and Muslim problem is created by Politicians. Now this issue is also in the unstoppable issue of India. This self-reflexive question provokes the reader to think over the issue of Hindu-Muslim problems in India. Shahid blurts

This dividing of the country, the divisions between people- Hindu, Muslim, Muslim, Hindu- You cant't imagine, how much I hate it. It makes me sick. What I say is : why can't be happy with the cuisines and the clothes and the music and all these wonderful things? (346).

He treats Hindu-Muslim controversies in another prose *Empire and Soul: A review of the Baburnama*, is an autobiography piece of Zahiruddin Mohammad Babur (1483-1530). Amitav Ghosh keenly decodes Babur's mind which witnesses in this prose clearly. Historiographic metafiction's trait begins in the beginning page of the prose itself that,

Babur was Pizarro and Cervantes. What made him pen immense book?(It numbered 382 folio pages in the original.) And how on earth did he find the time? Between the moment that he gained his first kingdom, at the age of twelve. And his death, thirty-five years later, there seems scarcely to have been a quiet day in Babur's life (88).

Reader's nerve quickly shifting to history of Babur, detailed history of temple, Babur masjid demolition in 1992 and its origin of demolition of religion building in India in chronological order. Amitav Ghosh points out that an organized Indian extremist Hindus have demolished down a sixteenth century mosque in the city of Ayodhya. This incident is creating a feud between Hindu and Muslim and shattered Indian constitution system. The history of Babur Mosque has not given in *Baburnama* too. The reason for demolition of Babur mosque is that mosque situates the Lord Rama ruling place in the epic Ramayana. Thereafter Indian political history changes constitution of India in a perplexed way. "In his autobiography Babur repeatedly announces his intention of destroying Hindu temples and images".

Count down (1999)

Amitav Ghosh's non-fiction *Countdown* elaborates the first nuclear test of India on May 11, 1998 at Pokaran. He analyses the impacts of five tests on Pokaran on field and media created scenario field. Moreover, he has travelled with former Defence Minister where he learns that the truth behind in the Pokran nuclear test. Indian former Prime Minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee who proclaims that

nuclear test in India is a pride moment of every citizen of India in his independence speech of Delhi's Red Fort. But Amitav Ghosh picks out the reality on nuclear test in an anthropological way. Opposite party Politicians oppose the nuclear test in Pokaran but the test is successfully completed by the scientists of ISRO in Pokaran. On that time onwards, Pokaran issue has been discussing in various media since 1998.

Nuclear test in Pokaran has many positive notes that Indian economy and status of Army power raises among the other countries. Nuclearist countries want to sign treaties with India and portraying India as a World's powerful status. Amitav Ghosh shares his own point through in a self-reflexive way.

In New Delhi many people talked to me about how nuclear weapons would help India achieve 'great power', I'd been surprised by the depth of emotion that was invested in that curiously archaic phrase 'great power'. What would it mean, I'd asked myself, to the lives of working journalists,, salaried technocrats and so on if India achieved 'great power status'? what were the images that were evoked by this tag?(07)

Amitav Ghosh enquires village people about the real effects of Pokaran test in the villages Pokaran and Bikaner. Manohar Joshi , a Pokaran grow up villager of thirty-six who reveals the chronological order of nuclear test of India. The first nuclear test is started in the district of Pokaran, Mrs Indra Gandhi has headed as a Prime Minister of India in 1974. People of Pokaran have never faced any incurable illness, cancer and strange skin diseases. After 1974 test, people have the cancer symptoms, scratching their skin all the time and haven't had enough money to buy pills too. If it would happen in Kashmir or Bihar, they would protest certainly . But in Rajasthan people are submissive. At the time of nuclear test of 1998, has led a great cloud of dust and black smoke shooting skywards in the distance.

'After the test', said the clerk, 'the Prime Minister said he'd been to Pokaran and nothing had happened, there was no radioactivity. But how long was he here?. Radioactivity doesn't work in minutes.(05)

Radioactivity has been affecting Khetoloi people since 1974, which causes cancer, inexplicable skin rashes, radioactivity grass, tumors and deformed born animals. Government has achieved their requirement through Pokaran test, to sign treaties with the nuclearist countries and they would get 'World's powerful country icon'.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh's use of Historiographic metafiction has a reason which is to make reader aware, provoke thought on past history and make him verify the truth in fiction. The directions of the non-fiction are to use LED bulbs, concentrate on solar energy, ban plastic, never use nuclear weapons even for testing, plant green in our environment, control usage of carbon footprint and forget the past tragedy of community crisis and live universal brotherhood life. In order to save planet and our life, the only way is to go green. If people would do all the above in their life, they might save the lives of the next generation.

Works cited :

- Abrams, M.H and Geoffrey Halt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary terms*, Cengage Publications, 2015.
- Albritton Jonson, Fredrick, *The Origins of Cornucopianism:A Preliminary Genealogy*, Critical Historical Studies, Spring 2014 page 151.
- Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary Of Literary Terms*, Oxford University Press,2008.
- Buchanan, Ian. *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Ghosh,Amitav . *The Count Down*, New Delhi, Ravi Dayal, 2002.
- Ghosh,Amitav . *The Great Derangement Climate Change Unthinkable*, New Delhi, Penguin 2016.
- Ghosh,Amitav . *The Imam and Prose pieces*, New Delhi, Ravi Dayal, 2008.
- Hutcheon ,Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism : History, Theory,Fiction*, Routledge press,1988.
- Marshall, George , *Don't Even Think about It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate change*, New York: Bloomsbury 204. 95.