



DR. Ishwar Shran
Srivastava

Thematic Concerns In The Novels Of Amitav Ghosh

Assist.Prof.- Jagatpur PG College Varanasi (U.P.) India

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Abstract: *Amitav Ghosh has been brought up in highly unconventional cultural and social diversity as his father, being in British Army used to move from a place to place – in Burma and erstwhile India under British Rule especially in eastern territories of India. Impact of social events as well as military environment in his family has a deep imprint on the mind of Amitav Ghosh and that is well revealed in themes of his novels. Mostly the writers construct the fiction from what he has acquired from the social as well as political situation. Apart from this, extensive study of history, sociology and anthropology has enriched Ghosh's mind so far as intellectual and ideology are concerned. The writer's analysis of the material which may be informative chaotic or social as well as political nuisance creates the novels keeping certain thematic occupation in the centre. The thematic consideration and analysis of problems of common man with ordinary prudence and their existence is the core of five novels under study. The themes in five novels under study vary in many folds. However certain thematic aspects of life are figuring in all the five novels of Amitav Ghosh.*

Key Words: unconventional, cultural, social diversity, especially, territories, military environment .

Amitav Ghosh an anthropologists and contemporary Indian English writer, has endeavored to create new thematic elements in his novels where the reader or critic is left to exercise his mind and intellect to find out what is the true meaning of nationalism, cultural and cross religious, clashes, different religious, faith and belief and migration of people taking place out of political ideologies and system of ruling changing from time to time.

Amitav Ghosh rightly stresses how the violence and clashes arising from political and communal differences, assumes an added significance for the middle class people of society. It embodies in the fiction of Ghosh and it is invariably and passionately concerned with very existence of man, their loss of identity, rootlessness and aloneness, which constitute the causes of agony and anguish for the man. Ghosh writes:

“You know, if you look at the pictures at home, all that pictures of dead people – in Assam, the north east, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura – people shot by terrorists, and separatists and army and police, you will find somewhere believed it all, that single word: everyone is doing it to be free”¹

This is central idea of the novel *The Shadow Lines*. Communal violence inter-linked with political as well as religious freedom is the leading theme of *The Shadow Lines*. The novel has implied meaning of violence and political freedom for the common man of middle class families of the civilized society. “Amitav Ghosh's novels throws light on themes like nationalism, communal violence, and helplessness of middle class people for compulsory migration from home and helpless to take education and so on. Why Alu's School of Reason fails? Many were interested in weaving and sewing machine rather than in education in *The Circle of Reason*.”

Ghosh's preoccupation of problems of uprooted middle class families has been eminently shown in the art of novel. The analysis of five novels under study demonstrates how Ghosh advocates the cause of dispossessed and how the unnecessary misery, hardship and unhappiness are caused by communal frenzy and violence uncontrollable by political machinery in power. Ghosh goes on to show that in modern world how the Hippocratic religion and



resultant exploitation and violence by organized militant fundamentalists play vital and fatal roles in the lives of men and women in the society. And political solution of these problems by re-demarcation of national boundaries based on political fallacy is neither a solution at grass root level nor it soothes the problems of dislocated families.

Homelessness and mass dislocation as a result of war – Second World War – and agony of the people are another issue discussed and developed in form of novel – The Glass Palace. The novel exposes fatal condition of thousands of people – mostly Indian migrated from Burma to Calcutta on account of Japanese invasion on Burma in 1942. The invasion created Chaotic and critical condition of the people, on the face of Japanese fighting against British. The people of Burma were confronted in critical condition as to which side they should – British or Japanese. In either side people feared extermination from either British or Japanese. No choice was left over but to flee from their-own homeland. Such precarious condition is exposed in the novel artfully by Ghosh. Pico Iyer rightly comments:

“In some ways the two themes that have animated Ghosh’s writing from beginning –his interest in the lives of middle class Indian families and his concern for the world’s afflicted – come together as the very people who once tried in Burma (including he suggests – his ancestors) suddenly turn into dispossessed. Refugees themselves, struggling across rivers and mountains, wheeling the elderly in carts and often dying along the way.” 2

The theme of existential challenges, migration chaotic state of situation, involving loss of lives of human beings, especially middle class families mostly Indians and Asians spread out in many countries has remained in center in the five novels under study.

The theme in The Circle of Reason (1986) is quite novice and it deviates from the theme of traditional Indian writing on social customs and religious as well as political confrontation in particular family or section of the society. The novel exposes the meaning of unhappy events in the society faced by the middle class families thriving to progress by economic uplift or even by migration. Ghosh writes through the character of Zindi:

“But let something happen outside, and that is the end, there is nothing I can do? Why because I can give them food, I can give them roof, but I can’t give them work..... the house is almost empty now and work is gone..... Where can I go?” 3

Zindi is worried about the migrant. Ghosh has presented a powerful character like Zindi, who plans a shop for the migrant, but does not succeed. The cause and problems of migrated people mostly middle class families for the work, for the bright future and existence are narrated in the novel. The characters in the novel move from one place to another for better work and for better future. The character Rakesh with Alu migrates from India to Al-Ghazira for better prospects. Bala Kothandaraman in his article Circular Reasoning: Amitav Ghosh’s Rhetoric comments:

The different locals are small over-crowded places with refugee’s population adding socio-cultural dimension as well as economic and political problems.” The post colonial situation and modern man’s problems of alienation, migration and existential crisis in life of ordinary unprivileged class of the society is explored through the fiction. The themes of rootlessness migration, feelings of displaced are extensively narrated in deep sense and corner



of human heart. While exploring the themes migration of small group, the problem of individual is exposed rather than the problems of group as a whole.

Another significant theme in the novel is education. The Circle of Reason is novel of thought and reason inclusive three philosophical elements of Indian philosophy from where titles are derived and explored in the context of ordinary men and women's views of life.

SATVA- reason Rajas – passion and Tamas – Death. Man's these stages of life is explained creating the characters like a doctor, a professor, a scientist, a businessmen, a weaver, a merchant, a lawyer and above all house wives, such housewives facing the existential challenges and problems to earn money to maintain life. Does Ghosh try to suggest a question? Does philosophical values end where power of money begin? is a question of argumentation. Ulka Joshi in her article comments:

“The concept of reason is very much western and it is associated with many traits like the power to think rationally, scientific way of discriminating between right and wrong, a state minus superstition. Progressive attitude and civilized way of life. The writer without making any loud announcements brings together Indian and western elements.” 5

Ghosh as a literary personality exemplifies the fact the literature – novel should be aimed at finding out solution for the common routine problems of people which includes middle class men and women in the society of different culture and faith and he projects the historical events in comparing with post colonial situation and put forth the life of men and women struggling for existence for work, for wages, for money, for home, ultimately for better life. The themes of The Circle of Reason are different in many ways from traditional themes of novels of earlier times. The novel apart from other theme comments on the theme of educational system constituted for training for getting jobs. Ghosh questions the system of education that makes a man a near machine for certain function. Through the character of Gopal and Balram, Ghosh says:

“Well, Gopal said, you must explain to Alu that if he does not go to school he will never be able to get a job. What, Balram looked at him in stunned arrangement. How could I say that it would be wrong; it would be immoral children go to school for their first glimpse into the life of the mind. Not for jobs, if I thought my teaching is nothing but the means of finding jobs, I would stop teaching tomorrow” 6

Here Ghosh goes on to assert the rationality through the reason as a base for schooling and cautions the educationalists that through monotonous repetition for information in school, silence the student on their natural question to live, to face the challenges of life. Ghosh tries to stress the need for rational method for imparting education and profess, that the reason is basic tool for getting education, and that monotonous exchange of information should not hamper the impulsive curiosity of student (a man) about life and training. This is further substantiated in the novel as:

“After much careful thought Balram had



**decided to name one the Department of
Pure Reason and the other the Department
of Practical Reason: a meeting of the two
great forms of human thought.” 7**

Balram’s school of Reason is not succeeded as the story goes on. Here Ghosh takes no sides but simply puts further the ideas before the eader or the society. In this context, Alok Kumar and Madhusudan Prasad comments:

**“The Circle of Reason is about the
insufficiency of ‘Reason’ as the ordering
principle of the human universe.**
