



THE GLASS PALACE: A STORY OF MARGINAL VOICES

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ABSTRACT

India is a legendary country and its freedom movement is the most realistic event which influenced the literary writers and social reformers. Amitav Ghosh is deeply attached to the welfare of the downtrodden, helpless, and impoverished people found in society. He is undoubtedly the most conscious literary artist placing the forgotten characters at the centre of his fictions. In his novels he has blended history and fiction with his idea and philosophy that increase the interest of his readers bringing together literature, tradition, education, struggle, human sacrifices for the cause of nation. In this paper an attempt is made to show how the novelist is sympathetic and solicitous towards the subaltern and marginal characters. The present novel The Glass Palace traces the lost, suppressed, forgotten histories that have been wiped out from the memories of the people. The sacrifices of marginal figures have left inerasable impact on Amitav Ghosh. He re-narrates the lives of fictional characters with the real historical personalities, real places and events.

INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh has taken enormous troubles to accentuate the problems of subalterns, marginality, social discrimination based on caste, creed, color, religion, gender, and culture. India is a renowned country. People of different caste, ethnicity and religion are living in harmony. But the problems of untouchability, superstitions, demonic traditions, gender discrimination, and female foeticide are left unsolved. India is a legendary country and its freedom movement is the most realistic event. In 1947, India achieved independence. But departure of the British colonizers left the inerasable influence on the Indian historians and scholars. The literary artists, social reformers and the historiographer have played significant roles in all the national revolutions of the world. Amitav Ghosh has blended history and fiction with his vision and philosophy. His novels deal with pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial India. He often combines legends of history in his novels which increase the interest



of his readers bringing together the literature, tradition, colonialism, migration, dislocation, and culture for social reformation.

Ghosh, the author of nine fictions and four non-fictional works, occupies an important place in the history of Indian English novels. His non-fictional writing is also significant as it includes India's nuclear policy, history, entrepreneurship, war, Egyptian culture, literature etc. He is greatly influenced by the educational, traditional, cultural, political, religious and economic background of post independent India. His novels are enriched with variety of themes. He is aware of the social frame in the post modern-era. He is deeply attached to the welfare of the downtrodden, helpless, and impoverished people found in society. He gives voice to the unnoticed voices. He is extensively esteemed for his works in which he has shown his concerns for the downtrodden people of Indian society. His sympathetic attitude towards the subaltern and marginal is remarkable. The problems of migration, homelessness, exploitation, poverty, employment, and education of the underprivileged in the country are explored in his novels.

The Glass Palace is the most excellent novel of Amitav Ghosh in which he blends history with fiction. The novel depicts the epic story of three generations Rajkumar Raha, Uma Dey and Saya John. These three significant families and their kin relatives move here and there to form their real identities in the massive world. The novelist has painted the character of Rajkumar who struggles for survival in the hostile world. It is also notable that the novel begins with him, an orphan boy of eleven year old. As the Shampán he works on needs to be repaired. So he moves to Burma. One of the reasons of his displacement is poverty and unemployment. Haplessly he wanders in Mandalay in search of job to earn his livelihood. Before moving to abroad he was living at Chittagon, a diffident and undeveloped village where his father die of sickness and also starvation cause death of several villagers. Rajkumar gets a job of cleaning utensils at the food-stall ran by Ma Cho, half Indian and half Chinese business woman. But he is paid wages on conditions. Ma Cho tells him that it is "All right. Get to work but remember you're not getting much more than three meals and a place to sleep" (GP 6). But Rajkumar does not get disheartened by this kind of coarse language.

Amitav Ghosh has been admired and hugely respected Indian writer for his creative achievement and sublime attitude towards the development of women. He has provided such a kind of liberty to women to move to the world of recognition. In the novel *The Glass Palace* the character Uma struggles for survival in the hostile world. She is married to Beni Prasad Dey, a Bengali intellectual from Calcutta. Beni Prasad Dey joins his duty as a collector of Ratnagiri in 1905. He instills the idea that the British ways are the most excellent and always serves under the impression of British colonials. Uma, who looks like an Indian in appearance, is simple and devoted. She plays a major role to unite Dolly and Rajkumar. We also come to know that her life does not go on smoothly. She suffers a lot of difficulties in her family life. Uma finds the collector to be inconvenient. As a result she gets dejected



and disappointed. There was a great difference between Uma and her husband though they belong to the same nation, India. The collector was a foreign educated Bengali eminent scholar, who wants everything in unconventional way which was exactly opposite to Uma. The couple lacks mutual understanding in family life. It is also true that the bond of love between them was feeble. Even if they resided under one roof for several years, they fail to understand each other. She represents Indian traditional woman who is simple, virtuous and devotional girl. But her husband desires to have only mental and intellectual connection with her. There was no emotional and genuine love relationship between them. As a result Uma finds herself to be lonely and detached in all the communal meetings of the collector. Even before death of the collector Uma leaves him alone. The collector cannot tolerate her departure and finally commits suicide by drowning into the sea water. The situation enforces her to wear white sari as a way of life of Indian widow woman. It was a social custom and way of life to follow such obligation in the country. It clearly indicates that she is a sufferer. She becomes the victim of the oppressive traditional way and the Indian patriarchal system. She is married to the collector in her early age. She finds neither joy nor her husband convenient after her marriage. They had differences on the basis of adaptation of the culture. Her husband is very much fascinated by the colonial culture and Uma represents the Indian life.

It is through the character of Uma Amitav Ghosh observes the sacrifices of the Indian freedom fighters. She represents every inspired patriot who gave their precious contribution in achieving independence for India. The historical epic novel *The Glass Palace* reveals Uma's life, her new thinking and keen participation in Indian independence movement. In the novel she is presented as a representative of new era, liberty and gender equality. She is granted freedom to move to abroad. As a result she visits several countries. It is true that Uma is free to lead her life in her own style in European countries. She dedicates her whole life after the death of her husband to the service for nation. Shubha Tiwari says:

“With the Collectors death Uma's life takes an upward swing. She becomes a globetrotter, a freedom fighter and a sort of celebrity in her own right. Expect for a passing remark that she mourned her husband's death for fifty years, there is hardly any real feel of her sorrow.”

Uma is much impressed by the personality like Mrs. Kadambari Dutt, Cousin of the well-known poetess Toru Dutt. The freedom of Mrs. Dutt, who puts put on a European skirt makes Uma think of herself and her country. The conditions like the way of living, liberty, woman equality, security, travelling freedom, unmolested environment in abroad become important to influence Uma very much. She is very much impressed by her way of life, and freedom to earn her livelihood. Her experiences and meetings with other women in alien countries make her realize capacity of women like herself. While living in New York Uma's work and business is reflected through the words of Elsa, wife of Matthew John



“I went to the states for a holiday and we met in New York. Uma had moved into an apartment of her own, she'd taken a job, as a publisher's proof-reader. But she was doing other things too; she seemed to keep herself very busy.”
(GP 197-198)

Similarly, she opposes the dual policies of the white colonizers who make use of the Indian soldiers in the name of freedom and development. The British colonizers depose the Burmese king Thebaw and exile him in India. They defend their side that they have freed the Burmese people from the unkind rules of their king. It was their power politics and plans. First they banish the King and then exploit all the possible resources like gemstones, woods, minerals, coals in the colonized countries and ultimately people for their benefits. Their exploiting strategy is beyond the understanding of common man. Two third of the British soldiers were the Indian sepoys who invade Burma. Uma is aware of the fact that unless and until the British Indian soldiers are made to understand their supports and deeds, India would not able to achieve independence. Her active participation in freedom movement is unmatched contribution in Indian freedom movement. In 1942, Uma becomes an active member of the Quit India Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. She makes her mind to fight against the tyrant and diplomatic British rulers. We also come to know that Uma and other several Indian supporters were imprisoned in the country. Mahatma Gandhi wakes up the nation with the help of thousands of masses and finally forced the British colonizers to leave India. Thus, Gandhiji and his followers achieve the independence for India in 1947.

Uma is an awakened spirit and obsessed by the ideas of freedom to her country. Her observation is very true that the white colonizers are not developers but exploiters. The colonial cruelties are exposed through the war, exile of the emperors and divide and rule policy. She knows that unless and until the British Indian soldiers are made to realize their supports and deeds, India would not achieve independence. The aim of Amitav Ghosh is very clear. He wants to appreciate the marginalized and subaltern figures those who sacrificed the lives in Indian independent movement. In the novel Ghosh has explicated the marginality through the medium of his character Uma.

Arjun, Hardayal Singh, and Ilongo are also the historically unimportant figures presented in the novel. Arjun, nephew of Uma joins the British Indian Army. In the beginning he gets fascinated by the white culture, way of living and speaking. He starts to imitate like the whites and behaves like them. When he comes to know that his masters are nothing but invaders, exploiters, and segregators who rule over himself and the nation with the help of treacherous plans. With the passing of time Arjun realizes that there is no gain in supporting the British rulers. He becomes conscious about his irremediable and inexcusable act. This was a great change in mind of Indians who supported the colonials. But they realize their mistake and make their minds to fight against the whites for freedom. Subsequently; Arjun



becomes an active member of Indian National Army. The greed of the colonial rulers seems to be unending. He fights for the cause of his own country. It was a great change in ideology of Arjun who dies while fighting for independence for India. Arjun confesses, “We rebelled against an empire that that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible stain which has tainted all of u. we cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves” (GP 518). Hardayal Singh and Ilongo also fight for India’s independence. It is tried to motive those who join the Indian National Army through the medium of Arjun, a mouthpiece of Amitav Ghosh. Amitav Ghosh wants to appreciate the unforgettable work of the army’s supporters and their sacrifices. He wants to convey that the Indian National Army is responsible in real sense for Indian freedom. Amitav Ghosh has displayed the significant role of these characters in achieving freedom for India. In spite of their remarkable participation in Indian independence movement they do not appear in the pages of history. Though India achieved freedom yet the internal problems are left unsolved. Amitav Ghosh traces the subaltern, marginal, lost, suppressed and forgotten histories that have been wiped out from the memories of the people. Amitav Ghosh re-narrates the lives of fictional characters with the real people and events. In the novel *The Glass Palace* Ghosh introduces the real historical figures King Thebaw and queen Supayalat, the British invasion of Burma, Indian National Army, the eviction of Thebaw and Supayalat first in Madras and then in Ratnagiri. The story of historical characters appears fictionalized because it is blended with the lives of the invented characters and their stories.

CONCLUSION:-

Ghosh is connected to the lives of the impoverished people of the colonized countries. He acknowledges that the reformation of the society from the evils like caste system, discrimination based on gender, ill-treatment of women, child marriages, poverty, exploitation, demonic tradition etc. is must. Through his novels Ghosh’s humanistic approach gives voice to the forgotten and humble characters. He depicts their subalternity and instills power in their lives so as to create proper stand to justify their side. The characters of Uma, Arjun, Hardayal Singh, Ilongo, the King Thebaw, queen Supayalat, in *The Glass Palace* are the best example of it. Amitav Ghosh is a research scholar who collects raw material for his works to intermingle history with fiction. His novels exhibit his creative research skills and idea in blending history and fiction with his vision and philosophy. It is his sense of humanism which helps to entirely eradicate untouchability, poverty, gender discrimination and the traditional oppressive system. He wants to free the entire world from commotion of caste, gender, race religion and geographical boundaries which are hurdles in the way of human development. It is also shown that how the sacrifices of the marginal characters are remained unknown in the pages of history.



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