



THE CONCEPT OF SOCIETAL AND SPATIAL MARGINALITY IN IBIS TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to present the concept of marginality and represent it with the dealing of Amitav Ghosh's 'Ibis' trilogy including Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke and Flood of Fire. The vulnerable condition is experienced by individuals or communal due to unequal or inequitable social, economic, political, cultural and geographical condition or proximity. Marginality is determined by these socio-spatial structures that explore in the trilogy. The characters from the novels are experienced 'displaced persons' both individual and communal level in dominant hegemonic society. The purpose of this study is to investigate the marginality, its disadvantage and effect on the development of human beings with the analysis of the novels from Ibis trilogy. Societal marginality originated from social construction markers as age, gender, class, caste, religion, ethnicity and culture which derived from fundamentalism obsession. That is already existed in Indian society. Spatial marginality comes with the colonial enlightenment in Eastern countries. This marginality is based upon geographical scale which makes Eastern countries especially I concern about India as marginal territory.

Key word:- Societal, spatial, vulnerable, marginality

INTRODUCTION

Marginality the term is applied to "an involuntary position and condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological and biophysical systems, that prevent them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice,

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preventing the development of capabilities and eventually causing extreme poverty” (Joachim von Braun and Franz W. Gatzweiler, 2014).

In the Ibis trilogy (2015) includes Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke and Flood of fire, Amitav Ghosh has interested in dealing with individual experience of life as he is social anthropologist. A well defined concept of marginality highlighting with each characters life. Marginality can be found in two forms or scales: societal marginality and spatial marginality. Vulnerability comes from discriminated social stagnation derived from the basis of age, gender, class, caste, religion, and culture. It also derived from economic and political state of any individual or communal position. ‘The physical location and distance’ determines that spatial marginality hence geographical scale is a cause of the vulnerability.

There are many famous works and authors in Indian literature that are expositors of the marginality in Indian society. The leading author is Mulk Raj Anand from his novels coolie and Untouchable deals with the social marginality, the same theme focuses in the Salman Rushdie’s novel Midnight’s Children. Vulnerable feelings due to colour and race discrimination can be found in Tony Morrison’s work Beloved, and Chinua Achebe’s novel Things Fall Apart. Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Aphra Benn’s novel Oroonoko deals with the racial consciousness and search for identity. In the literary work Ibis trilogy I try to explore how Amitav Ghosh deals with the conception of marginality and what is his marginal indicators that exposes in the novels.

Ghosh’s dealing with marginality

There are two types of marginality that are analysed through the study. Social factors that deal with the vulnerability of an individual or communal comes within the dire of societal marginality and location or geographical factor of vulnerability to marginality is spatial marginality.

Societal Marginality

Vulnerability factors as caste, class, race, ethnicity, gender, economical and political discrimination is a result of societal marginality. “Social exclusion deprives people of choices and opportunities to escape from poverty and denies them a voice to claim their right” (Thorat et al. 2005). The discrimination made by the dimension of gender is a worldwide persistent problem. The fundamentalist draws a marginal line for women and they have to live within that dimension. Due to the limitations of economic, political, religious, and educational encompasses ‘she’ is determined as inferior and having least rights to live life. The portrayal of Deeti in the Sea of Poppoes lives withn the domestic chores and is subjected with the physical abuses as rape at her wedding night by her brother in law Chandan Singh.

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After widowhood in fear of her violation as Chandan Singh offers her, “Your husband and I are brothers after all, of the same flesh and blood. Where is the shame? Why should you waste your looks and your youth on a man who cannot enjoy them? [...] If you keep me happy, you will be well looked after” (157 SOP). Therefore she decides to be a ‘sati’. Chandan Singh sees women only in a sexual framework.

The economic dependence on male, dowry, illiteracy, early marriage, sacrifice her life for the male obsession, single carrier of religious spectrum, padada system, poverty and physical-material mortification are reasons of her experience of vulnerability that stamped her marginal position in society. Other female characters such as Champa, Ratna, Dukhnee, Sarju and even educated women Shireen and French girl Paulette are experiencing the same abuses and peripheral situations. The society is influenced by the non visual underlined consideration as “female is inferior in society than male” or women do not need the same rights that male possessed that’s why she always becomes a slave in society.

Like other farmers Deeti and her family are badly affected by colonial subjection economically that they don't grow wheat, cereal and pulses due to the force of colonialism. They only allow poppy forming for the opium as a lucrative global export trade in nineteenth century preindependent India. Economic harassment causes many farmers to be labour as Karl Marx utters capitalist exploitation. Spivak states “the figure of the woman disappears (...) into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third world woman caught between tradition and modernization” (162). Poverty is thus the result of vulnerability of Indian people that’s why the period recognizes for the mass migration of indentured labour.

Marginality of women not only existed in Indian society but uncivilized European society, women also suffering from the dame domination. Although she is literate and modern in sence, she undergoes many limitations. Orphan girl Paulette is educated French girl, lives under the care of Mr. Burnham. She is suffered from the physical molestation by her caretaker. She wants to spare from the hypocrisy of European and urges for a simple natural life. She possesses a dream to be a gardener or botanist in Mauritius, her mother's motherland. To fulfil the dream she urges second mate Zachery to take her in Ibis crew for Mauritius. But the ‘superiority’ of male denies her to join the ship because “... a schooner’s no place for a woman” (254) and “[...] “Woman” at sea, for fear of bad luck” (255 SOP). Educated Paulette hardly had beared a marginal statement that “... A ship’s no place for a woman” (361 SOP). ‘Woman’ probably is a figuration or object for man pleasure European people are not aloof from the ill mentality as Captain Chillingworth comments on Paulette in insulting manner, “- a bag of bones that can neither bear a burden nor warm a bed?” (361 SOP) The other major European lady Mrs. Catherine Burnham has placed some vulnerable factors that make her marginal in colonized European society. She could not marry the person whom she loves most, her marriage decision was taken by her father. Though a woman takes



education it doesn't mean that she is able to make her own decision. She doesn't take part in commercial discussion. She is limited only from the manner and fashion in the modern age.

Shireen, a leading female character from Flood of Fire, is well educated and the most charming person and takes her own decision. But she remains isolated after widowhood, no one discusses with her in some important issues and no value for her advice. Nevertheless she wants to go China for the reparation of her husband's wealth, her brothers seem panicked from the decision and utters, "But what will people say...? A woman of your age ... a widow ... travelling alone?" (216 FOF). For male there is no need to assert society for issues like travelling abroad or remarriage but for female society's assertion is compulsory otherwise the action creates much crisis and dishonour.

Marginalized groups are those who are "...oppressed and exploited on the cultural, political, social and religious grounds" the concept is defined by Julian Wolfreys. 'Untouchability' a result of irrespective social stagnation on caste basis is prominent factor of vulnerability. The plot reveals the nineteenth century pre-independent India. Untouchability suffering is the worst condition that has been practiced in India from the last many centuries. They have restricted to live life as human being. Kalua, a oxdriver belong to lower caste Chamar, who is considered as untouchable by orthodoxy rule makers. He lives outside of the main village in small dark cottage. Although he is a strong boxer face terrible violence by power dominant upper class Zamindars. He can communicate with his passenger by hiding his face on the opposite side because untouchables' faces are considered as bad omen for the upper class. He gets punishment of death as he marries with upper Rajput widow. Thus Ghosh retrieves the marginal factors that Indian people undergo with it.

Dividation between 'supreme' and 'inferior' on the basis of caste, class is not only in India but European society divided between class or race factor as 'black' and 'white'. Black people suffer from the horror of subjugation. Zachary Reid hides his real identity as 'Black' to acquire a considerable position in society and enhance opportunity. While recognise his 'blackness' a white racist tries to murder him. The marginal condition of European society can be seen through Mr. Robin Chinnery, Captain Neville Mee and Ah Fatt who are mixed racial and consider as lower to have equality in the society.

These marginal group are 'under below' in economic position. Sukhadeo Thorat (2014) asserts that "Social exclusion" is particularly considered as "socioeconomic exclusion" that affects the group which "are denied access to rights or economic and social participation in society"(205). Intervention of Capitalism and modernism leads to social transformation that has affected both marginalized women and men. Marginals pertain to the rejection of their own cultures Ghosh provides useful insights on the question of identity and makes marginals form acceptance by others. Expansion of markets and structural economic changes enhance



the marginal group that rejects the religious legalization of untouchability and poverty, struggles form the self identity. This peripheral journey towards the centre is an indispensable thematic interpretation of Amitav Ghosh in the trilogy. Deeti creates peace and harmony among all indentured labourers though they came from different caste, class, and region. This identity erase and new relationship established among them as 'jahaj -bhai' and 'jahaj - Bahen' (356 SOP). Unity among them seems dangerous to dominant indigenous elite like subedar Bhyro Singh. Joachim von Braun and Franz W. Gatzweiler (2014) stated that "Marginality is a multidimensional and inter-disciplinary concept intergrating poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion".

Spatial Marginality

The spatial form of marginality depends on 'distance-decay functions' that propagates unequal developments in geographical periphery. It can be described as "sharp qualitative and quantitative breads in physical and social environments as one traverse from the centre of a typical modern and technologically sophisticated". The mega spatial scale of analysis describes or differentiate between 'the core economically developed countries' and 'peripheral countries'. In these scene Western countries such as England, America etc. are considered as core or 'centre of development' on the opposite Eastern countries as Asiatic countries like India are periphery. The relation between periphery and core is put forth by modernization and civilization that is inherently inequitable of undeveloped countries.

Colonial power ruled over India and grabbed political and economic activity that caused Indian's vulnerable to marginality. In River of Smoke Ghosh pertains to the impact of enlightenment on Indian people that they jumped into the most profitable business of the period is opium. Gaining economic stability, profit and position among merchant in Canton business sphere Mr. Bahram Modi acquired a membership in the committee of Chambers because of most senior merchant from India. Though 'the opium that is traded here (China) comes almost entirely from Hindustan" (201 ROS). And Bahram's voice carries great weight; he feels the experience of isolation because of his belonging of territorial vulnerability. This territorial vulnerability can be found in other Indian merchants who do business in China under hegemonic power. They are faced abuses as 'niggar' or 'Monkeys' by Europeans. They intitively are kept aloof from the announcement of the seizure of land in Hong Kong. Bahram's loses is greater than the other European and Co- Hong merchants while seizure of opium by Chinese authority in opium crisis. Territorial marginality is explored when Zadig Bey said to Bahram, "... you are not an American or an Englishman [...] If the Chamber had to surrender you or Dent, who do you think they would pick?" (494 ROS) The spatial vulnerability is suggested by Neel in meeting with Campton and Chang Lou-si that he asserts, "The Chamber will save Dent by giving up Bahramji instead. Dent will slip out of your grasp" (485 ROS). Further he asserts, "It is his (Bahram) misfortune that he comes from a



land where it is impossible even for the very best men to be true to themselves” (485 ROS). Though Bahram is economically well off but unfortunate because of his belonging to the ‘undeveloped land’ as India that the factor of marginalization.

Location as vulnerability factor is analysed through the characterisation of Kesri, Deeti’s elder brother. He serves as havildar in ranking in East India Company and goes to China as balmteer’ in first opium China war 1848. He experienced disgrassness and discrimination due to his belonging of ‘undeveloped’ and ‘exclusionary zone’ such as India. Indian soldiers are paid with less salary, provided with inferior weapons, treated in different places while getting injured in war and they can not put camp in their selected place. Thus they are always treated with insulting manner by British. Thus the geographical factor of vulnerability plays major role in Amitav Ghosh Ibis trilogy.

Postcolonial dealing with Marginality

Treatment to marginality in Post-colonial stance concerns profoundly on self / other dividation, race, gender and power as key concepts. A postcolonial oeuvre concerns a nuanced stance by giving voice to the marginals and focuses on their individual recognition rather than explore the oppressive views of dominant imperialism. In this respect Ghosh novels trace themes of self identity, social alienation, othering, hybridity, power hegemony and language.

Focussing on the ‘othering’ the term involves between two scales – the ‘exotic other’ and the ‘Demonic other’. Demonic othering possessed the divide line between ‘us’ (for imperialistic) and ‘other’ (for uncivilized or savage). The treatment of others is represented as inferior, of the oppressed or marginalized people. Ghosh in his literary works explore the factors of vulnerability of ‘other’ that are not like ‘us’. The divide line between the two is made on social, political, economic and geographical factors. Ghosh doesn’t allow himself to engage with the marginal position but he conscentixes marginals for assertion, protest and mobilization. It emphasises on dynamic change taking place in Indian society.

Race and ethnicity makes struggles between superior and inferior for omnipresent power. Ghosh trilogy enhances the inferior or Black people towards communal identities and urges for their political and social significance. Developments of the cultural integrity can be made hybridity and mimicry between both colonizer and colonized is explored in the work that is a major concept of the postcolonial discourse. This hybridity articulates when ‘subaltern has spoken’.

Woman oppresses under double marginality is studied by postcolonial gender discourse. Rise of the woman resistance to hegemony power or male centrism is disclosed coherently, it is a



role of patriarchy or imperialism that keeps women strategically excluded, Gayatri Spivak (2016) called it 'double gendered subaltern'. Bhyro Singh, Hukam Singh, and Zhugroo are elite person who performs power hegemony against the women. Jhugroo thinks women have no right to education and when he knew that Paulette read in a book about there are no snakes in Mauritius he laughed satirical and retorted "The bitch is lying. How would a woman know what's written in a book?" (390 SOP). He also tries to make superiority over Deeti and other women from the Ibis. Bhyro Singh is uncle of Deeti's husband; he serves as Subedar in British army in India and possessed an elite position. He represents a follower of orthodoxy and dominant hegemony groups that performs supremacy of masculine power. He is hearted by the leadership of Deeti on Ibis' crew and her remarriage with an untouchable Kalua. Therefore he punished Kalua and tried to humiliate her. Elite persons like Bhyro Singh are tools of Western dominance that they are restricted to follow rules of the authority. Thus Deeti and other females of the Third World like India are considered as double marginals, who are victimized by both the patriarchy and imperialism. Indian women are lived under slavery of slaves.

Drastic change in women characters like Deeti, Shireen, Paulette and other minor female characters can be found as they break their 'voicelessness' and try to make their voice to be heard. Deeti performs leadership on ship and brings equality, fraternity and liberty among indentured labourers. Paulette succeeded to acquire a new job as botanist in Hong Kong, and Shireen seems a wealthiest woman in China and acquired an admirable position among merchants. Deeti and Shireen perform inter caste-interreligious marriage after widowhood; they are able to take their own decision and reject unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Thus in consciousness of the new avenues brings radical development in the marginal groups.

CONCLUSION

The imperial power and ethnocentrism are major factors to vulnerability to marginality of Indian people as well as patriarchy is the major source in creating woman marginality. In the influence of Globalization human outlook over caste, colour and creed has changed but still it is unable to bring complete social, economic equality among all classes. In the nineteenth century colonial enlightenment began to overlap Asian countries; that is the reason for geographical vulnerability, as a result of their marginality. Rapid industrialisation and globalisation has quite changed Easterns mercantile although they remain away from the equality for resources and development. Gender is an insidious factor of vulnerability. Women were always subjugated under patriarchal society and colonial violence. She is subjected to gender discrimination and ignored as well as excluded both in Western and Eastern society. New avenues make them to raise voice against humiliation and toil for their



acceptance and development. Thus Amitav Ghosh explores gender equality in the proposed novels.

Marginality is multidimensional and multi causal belongs to various sections of society including untouchables, Black American, mix racials, Pariah and females. Postcolonial treatment to marginality is not only to describe their suffering and pain but focusses on their empowerment and struggle to access resources. Amitav Ghosh urges for their acceptance in society by giving them equal resources and opportunity. The trilogy draws around the societal and spatial marginalization and consequential thrash for betterment.

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