



Predicaments in the Wake of Transnationalism and Migration in Amitav Ghosh's Novels

Prof. Gautam Banerjee,
Department of English,
MMH College, Ghaziabad

Ajay, Research Scholar,
Department of English,
MMH College, Ghaziabad

Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh is renowned for his elaborated research on social anthropology and history, brings into foreground, the accounts of the nameless marginals and the marginalized individuals, groups and communities in his vast fictional canvas. Transnationalism and migration are key concepts in post colonial socio historical and literary discourse. Amitav Ghosh addresses zealously the subjects of culture, transnationalism and alienation in his novels in *The Hungry Tide and Sea of Poppies* and many others. No doubt, Amitav Ghosh has made a mark for himself in exploring new phases of life and fiction. Almost all of his novels contain the traces of transnationalism, diaspora, displacement, and alienation. His writings are a culmination of all his influences and exposures in life. Be it a historical novel, a travelogue, a science fiction or a collection of essays, his repertoire is immense. His innovative craftsman enriches the fiction as a genre. This research paper explores the dimensions of cultural displacements in the novels of Amitav Ghosh novels particularly in *The Hungry Tide*.

Keywords: Migration, Transnationalism, Diaspora, Culture, Alienation

Amitav Ghosh is one of the leading novelists who depicts the psychological and cultural impact of transgressing the borders and the cultural shifts pertaining to migration. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, published in 2004, pen downs the fascinating and picturesque description of enormous island group 'Sundarbans', means 'the beautiful forest'. *The Hungry Tide* revolves around number of historical events and delineates major themes like alienation, transnationalism, diaspora, human settlements, natural calamities, loss of identity, hybridization, the conflict between present and past. Transnationalists always has proclivity to reach destinations that give them the feeling of their homeland, as places of displacement soon become an alienated domain of mechanical material

supplies. But there are multiple engagements still which persuade, motivate, and transport them, resulting in various forms, such as cultural, lexical and geographical adding facets to the experience of exile.

“Dislocation, after all, is the condition of post-modernity to which we have all responded with excitement as well as fear, both reactions perfectly justifiable in the contemporary contexts of our lives” (Bose 2005)

Piya is an enlightened environmentalist who is sensitive to the cultural and material interests of the locals, and she pays due respect to the intimate local knowledge of the fishermen in accomplishing her cetological project. In this regard she puts in the last part of the novel, "And for myself, I know that I don't want to do the kind of work that places the burden of conservation on those who can least afford it. If I was to take on a project here, I'd want it to be done in consultation with the fishermen who live in these parts" (397). She further flabbergasted to comprehend the fate of these stateless people, “Was it possible, even, that in Morichjhapi had been planted the seeds of what might become if not a Dalit nation, then at least a safe haven, a true freedom for the country's most oppressed?” (HT, pp. 190-191).

The Hungry Tide oscillates between the point of views of Piya, an Indian-American cytologist from Seattle, and Kanai, a prosperous owner of a translation business in New Delhi, on a travel to meet his widowed aunt Nilima, and there he reads the stories in the journal left by his late uncle, Nirmal. Reading stories, he finds his family history about a peasant's family and about the agonies and conflict between the government and the settlers of Morichjhapi. These are the inter-textual elements. Kanai becomes a translator and interpreter to Piya when Piya meets Fokir and he becomes her guide. As he is illiterate so they cannot communicate with each other. Kanai became her translator and interpreter as he was multilingual and knows six languages. In this regard, when migrants move from places of their origin to destinations, many things may happen simultaneously. In this journey, these migrants carry over the language(s), cultural/social practices, values, ideologies, habits, belief systems and many more with them too (sometimes, shockingly) unfamiliar territories. In these new locations, they encounter almost everything new and unfamiliar, whether it is language or socio-cultural practices. After a span of time, these migrants, as Homi K. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* and Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (135-37) suggest, find themselves in a state in which they have to adopt the host country's linguistic and socio-cultural practices, largely, in a creolized and hybridized forms in the process of transculturation.

As Vijaya Mishra notes, “All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way. Diasporas refer to people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated

identities as indicated on their passport”. Ghosh depicts the painful situation of the refugees in which the police imposed a terrible siege: “The siege went on for many days and we were powerless to affect the outcome. All we heard were rumours: that despite careful rationing, food had run out and the settlers had been reduced to eating grass. The police had destroyed the tube wells and there was no potable water left; the settlers were drinking from puddles and ponds and an epidemic of cholera had broken out”. (201). Ghosh’s scheme of depicting the consequences of homelessness has been beautifully examined by Saswat S. Das in his work, “Home and Homelessness in *The Hungry Tide*: A Discourse Unmade”: Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* flips the theoretical underpinnings of the postmodern debate. His purpose is not merely to deconstruct the binary that holds home and homelessness as counterpoints, but to unite them as parts of an integrated whole. In deconstruction, elements rarely add up into a united, comprehensive whole. Rather, an artistic creation exposed to deconstructive strategy stands as a house divided against itself. Ghosh works by a method that can be called deconstructive, but then his ostensible objective is to create an independent discourse, where terms such as home and homelessness can have meaning only when they are seen as containing each other, not as independent entities, locked in an eternal battle to game access into recent discursive fields. (p. 179) Talking about the value of home Das further contends: Home is where one lives and this can be anywhere in the world. Homelessness by this token is a state of enlightenment, containing all the suppressed desires of home, a route into dialectics that feeds on a realization that it is necessary for one to have a home first, in order to lose it. The ephemeral home of the river dolphins stands as the perpetual backdrop against which. *The Hungry Tide* writes its mythical story. At the end of it all, *The Hungry Tide* swallows up both ‘homes. (p.180)

The statelessness of the people was really exhibited when they were a little shaken when they go to Kusum’s thatch-roofed dwelling. It was clear that she too was under strain. She explained that in recent weeks the government had been stepping up the pressure on the settlers: policemen and officials had visited and offered inducements for them to leave. When these proved ineffective, they made threats. Although the settlers were unmoved in their resolve, a kind of nervousness had set in: no one knew what was going to happen next (p. 187). The following paragraph of *The Hungry Tide* further showcases their agonies:

“Now, at close quarters, she saw in the dancing light of the flame, that the man's spear-point was stained with blood and that there were bits of black-and-gold fur stuck between the splinters. Suddenly it was as if she could see the animal cowering inside the pen, recoiling from the bamboo spears, licking the wounds that had been gouged into its flesh. There was another roar and this was matched a moment later by the voices of the crowd, screaming, in a kind of maddened bloodlust,

Maar! Maar! ... She could hear the flames crackling in the distance and she smelled the reek of burning fur and flesh. (294-95).

To conclude, the novel raises the issue of statelessness and its consequences in the context of the India-Bangladesh refugee crisis in the Tide country. Ghosh, through this novel, asserts that whether Indian or Bangladeshi, these refugees, who are made as invalid illegitimate and vulnerable, are not different from those so-called genuine citizens of India. They should be treated as human beings. His appeal is evident when Ghosh creates Nirmal as his spokesperson in which Nirmal appeals to have mercy on those human beings whose fault is that they are human beings and not animals. Had they been animals, they would not have been rendered so vulnerable. The policemen are hunting to detain them. There was nothing to eat for the refugees who are reduced to eating grass. Although they had to learn survival skills from the tide, the cyclone, flood, water, and of course, the Bengal tiger, the greatest enemy for them is not the tiger, tide, or cyclone but another human being. The worst part of their life was not the hunger or the thirst, but it was to sit there helpless and listen to the policemen making their announcements, to hear them say that their lives existence, were worth less than dirt or dust. This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it but not for the humans.

References:

- Appadurai, Arjun. 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy', *Public Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1990
- *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. The University of Minnesota Press, 2005. Public World, www.upress.umn.edu. Accessed 14 Jan. 2018.
- Cheuse, Alan. *Rev. of Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide*. Washington D.C., 2005
- Deutschmann, E. *Mapping the Transnational World*. Princeton UP., 2021
- Das, S. S. Home and homelessness in the Hungry Tide: A Discourse Unmade", vol.50, no.5, sept
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. Thomson Press, 2006
- Gordon, A. J. *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement*. Routledge, 2006.