

Joy T.T. “Indianness in Indian Writing in English: A Study of Amitav Ghosh’s Novels.” Thesis. Research and Postgraduate Department of English, ST. Thomas’ College, Thrissur (Autonomous), University of Calicut, 2021.

conditions under which individuals are invited to engage with each other in ways that respect potentially intractable differences, and Arjun's inability ever to escape from his own biases reminds readers that such conditions are rarely, if ever, met (77).

### **Significance of this research**

This research has been an attempt to define the term 'Indianness' and its various implications from different perspectives. It is admitted in the beginning of the introductory chapter that the term cannot be conceptualized into a single definition. Comparing to other countries India's socio-cultural heritage, racial problems, religious differences, language diversity, issues connected with rural and urban backgrounds, etc. are more complex and complicated. Therefore it is seen that there are a large number of interpretations to the term 'Indianness'. It is reflected in almost all the genres of Indian writing in English. As it reflects the religious beliefs, practices, philosophy of the common people, love and married life, food habits, dress code, family life and the lifestyle of an average Indian, the writers need a wide canvass to describe what they see around themselves. Indianness has been analysed in Indian English poetry, prose, short story, drama and novel. In this thesis more importance has been given to novels in Indian English.

The study of Indianness in Indian Writing in English is significant or useful not only to Indians but to people all over the world. This research has analysed the various aspects of Indianess in Indian Writing in English related with social, political, historical, economic, religious, geographical and cultural aspects of people living in India and abroad. It is true that some of our problems are connected with living in India. At the same time, a few others are common to humanity and in that sense they are universal. Several Indian English writers are highly skilful in focusing the diverse problems and suggesting solutions to them directly and

indirectly through their works. It is a fact that historians and critics, especially belonging to western culture, view Indian way of living as an inferior one comparing to other world cultures. They do not try to find out the merits and achievements of our civilization. This research is not an attempt to glorify the Indian culture and civilization. On the contrary, it reviews the diverse elements in the Indian way of thinking and living. Though Ghosh plays a neutral role in his narrative, he doesn't overlook the evil aspects of our social life. He suggests possible solutions to those defects using sublime imagination. Whereas he highlights the greatness of family life in India and it is an integral part of our culture.

### **Observations made in this research**

After examining the meaning of the term Indianness, it studies briefly the evolution of Indian writing in English. This study identifies the beginning of the Indian writing in English, observes the charges against Indian English literature and points out its significance in the literary scene all over the world. As this research has chosen fiction for detailed study, it analyses closely the three stages in the growth and development of Indian English fiction. In order to find out and compare the various elements of Indianness, Amitav Ghosh has been selected as an ideal novelist for an in-depth study. His novels cover almost all traits of Indian way of thinking and living. The introductory chapter concludes with brief summaries of his six selected novels: *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*.

The second chapter analyses the different aspects of Indianness connected with the social conditions in India. It highlights how the caste system and untouchability have influenced negatively the goodness of our ancient civilization. The novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Ruth Praver Jhabwala and Arundhati Roy had raised their voice against these inhuman practices prevailed in our society through their works. This research

admits that these two age-old social evils cannot be rooted out completely even in his post independent era. They still continue in our society in one form or another.

Having made a general evaluation regarding the caste system and untouchability in Indian social scenario, this research estimates how Ghosh reacts to these things. He narrates a few real scenes taken place based on caste system during the 19th century in the first few chapters of his novel *Sea of Poppies*. Though he has depicted the scenes in a remote village of Bihar, we painfully realise that these are not isolated things in north India. The upper caste Hindus regarded the untouchables as equal to animals. The three landlords in Ghazipur village humiliated Kalua, an untouchable, at first mating him with a well-known prostitute and later they forced him to mate with a large black mare. Even in the schooner *Ibis* the upper caste Hindus followed the same system that prevailed on the land. The colonial people didn't find anything wrong in pursuing such callous things even in their ship.

Along with caste system and untouchability, another cruel aspect of our social system is the miserable plight borne by Hindu widows. For a long time, they were forced to perform sati. Due to the strong interference of religious reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. this cruel system was almost eliminated. But the physical situation for a widow to lead a free life has not been improved. She has to be tonsured and forbidden from remarriage. She cannot put on dress as she likes but she has to wear only white dress always. The white sari is not meant to give her any respect but to discriminate her as 'cursed' widow in the community. Widowhood in Hinduism has been analysed and estimated how Ghosh has reacted to such practices prevailing in India. Under this subtitle it has been scrutinized whether Ghosh has risen to the level of a reformer as a writer.

Having analysed caste system, untouchability and widowhood in Hinduism, the other two important aspects like love and marriage in India are examined and compared them in the novels of Ghosh. It has to be started with observing man – woman relationship in Indian society. Most of the communities in India are patriarchal by nature and therefore major decisions in family are always taken by men. It is true that after independence the fate of women has been improved a lot due to a general progressive vision of the society. The widespread education among girls, the right to universal franchise, employment opportunities for women, etc. have helped women in securing and enjoying more freedom in family and society. The writers have depicted well the changes taken place in man-woman relationship associated with love and marriage in their works. Ghosh has presented a variety of love affairs and married life in his novels. While we evaluate the affairs and married life of his characters, it seems that he stands for a new cosmopolitan society irrespective of caste, region, religion, nation, etc. This new vision in writing makes him a unique postcolonial writer.

In *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib a young Indian youth falls in love with May Price an English girl who was born and brought up in London. Similarly, Ila the young Indian girl gets attracted to Nick Price, an English boy. The difference in nationhood does not become a hindrance to their affairs. In *The Glass Palace* Rajkumar, the protagonist who is an Indian marries Dolly, a Burmese girl. Similarly the First Princess of the Burmese Royal family gets married with Mohan Sawant who is an Indian and coachman at Ratnagiri. The Second Princess eloped with a Burmese commoner and hid herself in the Residency. Neel, the son of Rajkumar and Dolly, was born and brought up in Burma but he married Manju, the sister of Arjun, who was a typical Calcutta girl. Matthew, the only son of Saya John, falls in love with an American lady namely Elsa Hoffman. In *Sea of Poppies* Kalua, an untouchable rescues Deeti, an upper class Rajaputhra woman, from her funeral pyre and later marries her.

Ghosh always dreams of a new world where all youth can love and marry whoever he or she likes. The other social elements like region, religion, language, caste, financial status, nobility, etc. should not be obstacles to free love. We regretfully realize that love and marriage in Indian social conditions are often degraded to the level of a kind of trade agreement. At times marriage is arranged not for the merging of two minds, hearts and bodies but for protecting the family's prestige and good will. Ghosh always upholds the ideals of divine love and in this sense, he can be called as the 'prophet of love' to the 21st century.

The other factors connected with Indian social conditions like male domination in the society and status of women in the Indian family and society are also discussed in general and how they are reflected in Ghosh's novels. In addition to this, a few more peculiarities of Indian people are pointed out in this chapter: for example, Indian women's love for jewellery, importance of Hindi film songs, centrality of cricket in Indian psyche, etc.

The important historical and political events in pre and post independent India are discussed briefly and how Indian English writers have presented those incidents in their works. In this section the contrast in the attitude of the earlier writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, etc. and post independent writers like Khushwant Singh, Amitav Ghosh, etc. towards Gandhism and the Partition is highlighted. In *The Glass Palace* Uma Dey the freedom activist, explains the basis of the difference in opinion between Gandhi and Subhash Candra Bose in supporting and opposing the British Empire during the Second World War. Ghosh deals with these historical and political facts in an excellent way connecting them with his fictional characters. In this chapter it is found out how Ghosh has designed his plot and linked it with history. He has admitted in one of his interviews that *The Glass Palace* is based on the military career of his father and uncle's life as a trader in Burma.

In Chapter III the religious and economic aspects of Indian society are highlighted and it is seen that Ghosh gives more importance to economic aspects of Indians in his novels. This chapter also deals with the different economic conditions of India, how the colonial rulers have exploited India's agricultural sector for making huge profits by compelling them to change to poppy cultivation. They discouraged all types of farming connected with food items. It was the beginning of food problem in India. Besides, they started different types of factories all over India and attracted people from rural areas to work in those factories for low wages. In addition to low wages, the working conditions in those huge factories are quite pathetic. The Ghazipur Opium Factory in *Sea of Poppies* substantiates Ghosh's argument.

The colonial people needed cheap labour for their plantations in Malay and other British colonies. They arranged agents to recruit poor people by giving attractive offers and to reach them in Calcutta. From there they were transported to their colonies. Rajkumar Raha in *The Glass Palace* and Nob Kissin Baboo in *Sea of Poppies* are good examples for such recruiting agents. This type of recruitment has helped much Rajkumar to become a timber merchant in Burma later. Till the advent of the British in Burma the teaks in their forests have remained evergreen. Soon they identified the worth of the teak, cut them off in large numbers and shipped them to London. The timber yards in the forests have become a common sight during this period.

Similarly they observed that the Burmese people were using the strong and obedient elephants only as symbols for power and glory, especially in palaces and other places of worship. Soon they trained mahouts for dragging logs by elephants to the nearby ports in order to ship them out. Besides they taught the coolies to drag logs through rivers to the ports. In Malay they found that its soil and climate are really suitable for the cultivation of rubber. They called it rhetorically as 'money plant'. They discouraged all other crops in Malay and started rubber plantations everywhere. Ghosh has done a brilliant task in revealing all these

ruthless activities through his fictional plot and characters. It is a shocking discovery that the colonial people have exploited land, forests, nature, rivers, animals in addition to human beings.

The chapter IV analyses the different geographical features of india. The background of rivers and seas in Indian English novels are analysed in general and how Ghosh has depicted them in his novels. He has described the speciality of Bengal tide in *Sea of Poppies* and suggests that it is a strange phenomenon. He explains the important places like Madras, Ratnagiri, Calcutta, etc. with minute details.

The chapter V is an assessment on type characters in Indian English novels. It is also elucidated that Ghosh has produced a few stereotype characters like his predecessors. Chapter VI is an exclusive view on Indian English. Ghosh has contributed much to Indian English and it is discussed in detail how he is different from other English writers. Comparing to other Indian English writers, he has commendable fluency and vocabulary in English language. He has shown great confidence in a foreign language and proved his talent brilliantly.

### **Scope of this research**

This research work can open up new approaches towards the study of Indianness in Indian Writing in English. Indianness being a vast and complex term, it is not possible to include all elements related with it in a single project. As India is one of the ancient civilizations of the world, the study of Indianness should have been started with elaborate analysis of the essence of our *vedas* and *puranas*. They still influence considerably the present life of people in India. In this research Indianness is analysed from a general point of view. In this project as a case study for Indianness, six novels of Amitav Ghosh have been selected. The other writers have done meritorious service to present Indianness in their works. The observations and conclusions made in this research on behalf of Indianness and



its depiction in Ghosh's novels will pave the way for further researches in the same sphere. Such findings will be helpful to correct the degraded impression and attitude of writers, historians and critics, especially of Western culture and civilization. This research will be highly useful for students community to analyse and review the books prescribed in Indian Writing in English. It has clearly explained the diverse Indian elements connected with social, political, historical, religious, economic, geographical and cultural aspects. It has also studied in detail great works of other eminent writers.

Finally, it seems that this project has done maximum justice in analysing the different characteristics of Indianness in Indian Writing in English. It has assessed the contribution of the leading writers in each aspect and pointed out how they are reflected in Ghosh's novels. The themes of his novels are varied and strategies to present ideas in each work are also different. There is no exaggeration in saying that Ghosh has made unique contribution to Indian writing in English and he can make further if he maintains his talent more intelligently and cunningly. This project can be concluded with the general comment on India and Indianness: "India is a nation state but Indianness is a not a homogeneous term".