Abstract

The term ‘Post – colonial’ is resonant will all the ambiguity and complexity of the many different cultural experiences. It implicates all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact. Post- Colonial critics and theorists should consider the full implications of restricting the meaning of the term to after colonialism or after-independence. All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt to subtle forms of neo-colonial domination; and independence has not solved this problem. The development of new elites within independent societies is often buttressed by neo-colonial institutions. The development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations, the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous people in settler-invader societies – all these testify to the fact that post – colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. This does not imply that post–colonial practices are seamless and homogenous but indicates the impossibility of dealing with any part of the colonial process without considering its antecedents and consequences. This thesis makes a study of Amitav Ghosh’s novels and tries to unveil the real face of Indian people in their true colours. It explores the psychological, sociological, economical and cultural problems portrayed in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. Novels The Circle of Reason (1986), The Shadow Lines (1988), Countdown (1999), The Glass palace (2000), The Hungry Tide (2005), Sea of Poppies (2008), In an Antique Land (1993), The Calcutta Chromosome (1995) Colonialism was usually a brutal force employed by one country to exploit another community/country in order to obtain economic wealth. Colonialism most commonly was the abuse and exploitation of the wealth and labour of the native people.
There are three chapters apart from introduction and conclusion. In the **Introduction**, the concept post-colonialism is introduced to the reader. It follows a brief history of Postcolonial theory. The second part of this deals with a detailed study of South Asian writers’ contribution to Postcolonial literature.

The first chapter is entitled **Transnational Characters**. These characters transcend their national boundaries and yet retain the ethos and mores of their nation/country. The first of this section deals with various aspects of identities in *The Shadow Lines* (1988). The development and growth of Tha’mma’s character encapsulate the futility and meaninglessness of political freedom which was otherwise supposed to usher in an era of peace and prosperity for all. During the days of her childhood and youth, she had her sympathies with all those who were fighting for the cause of freedom. In fact, she too wanted to earn a small portion of the glory enjoyed by some of her classmate ‘terrorists’ by running secret errands for them or even cooking for them and washing their clothes. The aim was to be associated with such group of persons, actively involved in fighting for a ‘pious cause’. The city of Dhaka was Tha’mma’s place of birth, now her nationality is Indian as she lives in Calcutta. As a young girl, she had thought of fighting for freedom in East Bengal. But those very same people for whom she had been willing to lay down her life are enemies now in 1964. Feeling of nationalism had after all motivated the fight against the British in Khulma. The second section deals with Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* (2000). Dolly’s son Dinu, one of the survivors in these vast intertwined families runs a modest photo studio in Burma, The Glass Palace is where the young people stifled by military dictatorship of the present day Burma gather to open their minds to discuss books, pictures and ideas. The symbolism of the title is not laboured
and it is hard to miss. In the 19th century, Britain was expanding its commercial interest, especially in its colonies; India in particular had become not just a continent to exploit and rule, but a source of raw military muscle. With the end of slavery in the empire in 1833, thousands of poor indentured Indian labourers were recruited to work in Burma, Fiji, the Caribbean and Africa on plantation, in docks, mills and railroads, while others were conscripted in the Glass Palace called “Vast Garrison’.

The third section deals with Amitav Ghosh’s *In an Antique Land* (1993), which tells the story of two Indians in Egypt - Abraham Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant originally from Tunisia who came to India around A.D.1130 and Amitav Ghosh who went there to trace the story of Bomma in 1980. Ben Yiju, who lived in India for seventeen years, married a Nair woman and an Indian slave Bomma, a native of Tulunad. Bomma was with his master when he went back to Egypt during the later years of his life. The other Indian was Amitav Ghosh whose search that lasted more than ten years began in a small village, two hours south of Alexandria. His guides in the village were his neighbor-Abu Ali, his landlords, Khmes the Rat, the beady eyed local wit, his adversary the Imam, Zaghloul the weaver and quick Nabeel whose personal fate left him stranded in Baghdad during the outbreak of the Gulf war. Rightly, these characters are not confined to a single nation or state, but operate within several of them.

The Second Chapter is entitled *Transitional Characters*. The transitional characters are always caught between two different eras or two different worlds. They usher in transition by their resolve to change with times. The first section of *The Hungry Tide* (2005), deals with Kanai who is someone from modern India. His world keeps moving so fast. He is rich and is continuously in search of money. Yet,
Kanai cannot forget that there is this other India, represented by Fokir. It is always at the back of his mind. It is true of most Indians; even the Indians who drive fast cars and go to nightclubs remember and know that there is this other world out there, a world of poverty and privation. This often has a very good effect on their conscience. One remarkable example is the Indian information technology company Infosys; its founders have been exemplary in putting money into river development projects, among others. Piya and Fokir are part of the experience. Many people who live in the Sunderbans, in some sense, are content with the life that the Sunderbans offer them.

In the second section, *The Sea of Poppies* (2008) begins with the story of Deeti, a simple, pious lady, caring mother and an efficient housewife. Married to Hukum Singh, a crippled worker in the Ghazipur opium factory, the unfortunate Deeti figures out that on her wedding night, she was drugged with opium by her mother-in-law, so that her brother-in-law could rape her and consummate the marriage in place of her infertile husband. This brother-in-law is the real father of Deeti’s daughter Kabutri. When her husband dies, Deeti sends Kabutri to stay with relatives. Deeti looks almost certain to meet her doom when she is forced to consider Sati (immolation on her husband’s funeral pyre) as the only option in the face of threat of more rapes by the brother-in-law, but then Kalua, the ox man and untouchable from the neighbouring village, comes to her rescue. The couple flees and unites. This union is not acceptable to the high caste villagers. In order to escape her in-laws, Deeti and Kalua become indentured servants on a schooner named *Ibis*. Zachary Reid, an American sailor born to a quadroon mother and white father, receives a lot of attention. He has been on the *Ibis* since the schooner started her arduous journey, and hopes to die with it. He maintains that in his lifetime he has never seen a more
admirable article than the *Ibis* and it is no less than a mother to him, supporting him in his dark hours and rejoicing with him in his happiness. With the support of the head of the lascars, Serang Ali, he becomes the second in command of the ship, when it was refitted to carry indentured labourers to the island of Mareech or Mauritius instead of the tradable opium. Neel Rattan Halder, a wealthy rajah ruling over the zamindary of Rakshali for centuries, is confronted by Mr. Burnham with the need to sell off his estates in order to pay for the debt he had incurred when trading opium with China at the height of the opium trade. But now that the opium trade has come to a standstill, as a result of the resistance shown by the Chinese authorities, he is left with no money to clear his loan. When Mr. Burnham proposes to settle the loan for Halder’s zamindary, Halder refuses the deal as the zamindary is his family’s ancestral property and selling it would mean turning his back on his many dependents living in his household and zamindary. He is tried for forgery, but it is a sham trial orchestrated by Burnham and his cronies. The court punishes him by sentencing him to work as an indentured labourer for seven years in Mauritius. It is there he meets Ah Fatt, a half Chinese, half Parsi opium addict from Canton, his sole companion in prison since the two will eventually be transported together on the *Ibis*.

The Third Chapter is entitled **Transgressive Characters**. Transgressive nature is found in literary characters who feel confined by the norms and expectations of society and try to break free of those confines in unusual or illicit ways. As they rebel against the basic norms of society, the characters of transgressive fiction may seem mentally ill, anti-social or nihilistic. The genre deals extensively with taboo subject matters such as drugs, sexual activities, incest, paedophilia and crime. The first part deals with Amitav Ghosh’s novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986).
Balaram is attracted to science that apparently reasons out the relationship between the inner life and external phenomena. It is the omniscient narrator who comments that the head of Bhudep Roy, the most powerful man in the village, has swelling over the areas of the skull which Balaram has identified as signifying vanity and greed. Balaram’s careful measurement and calculation of Alu’s skull and the proportion of a loom exactly corresponds with the boy’s phenomenal talent as a weaver. Lending this pseudo-science the reason of mathematics, the narrator resists any easy distinction between the tradition of western reason and the mystic Eastern tradition.

The other prose work *Countdown* (1999) deals with the mastermind behind India’s nuclear policies K.Subrahmanyam, a civilian defence affairs expert. He says nuclear weapon is the currency of global power. Nuclear weapon is not a military weapon. Their logic is that of international politics. The international system of security has been progressively brought under a global order that provides for the hegemony of the five nuclear weapon powers. India wants to be a player and not an object of this global nuclear order.’ (13) Chandan Mitra, a historian with Oxford doctorate is a character in the novel. In his article entitled “Explosion of Self Esteem”, published after the nuclear test of 11 May, 1999 writes that the bomb is the global currency of our self-esteem. The two hundred years of colonialism robbed us of our self-esteem. We do not have national pride like the British, the French, the Germans and the Americans have. Our achievement, our worth and talent are always negated and denied. Mahatma Gandhi’s freedom movement was to rebuild our sense of self-esteem. Today the best way to instil a sense of national pride the bomb seems to be as good an answer as any. Chandan is not the only Indian who regards the test as a
self assertion but the people in general think that the test would help India gain more respect from the world community.

The other novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) deals with the story of Antar, a lonely, low level, over worked Egyptian data analyst and Murugan, his Indian colleague. Murugan has a strange theory about Ronald Ross, the Nobel Laureate who discovered how mosquitoes transmit malaria. Murugan’s disappearance in Kolkatta on the “World Mosquito Day’, August, 20, 1995 creates a furore. A year later Murugan is traced in New York city. Murugan’s ID card is discovered by Antar’s personal computer, Ava. Antar decides to investigate Murugan’s disappearance and his theory that Ross was a pawn in someone else’s malaria research project. Murugan meets Urmila Roy, a journalist struggling with conflicting demand of career and family. She investigates a military hospital in Secunderabad in 1895 where Ross was said to have begun his malaria research.

The **Conclusion** summarizes the findings of previous chapters and highlights the post colonial identities and chapter wise characterization and gives suggestions for future research. All these characters have their identities clearly framed by the writer. However, as the stories progress the characters themselves construct their own identities based on their proclivity for a way of life, personal belief system, values and even ideologies.