



HYBRIDITY OF CULTURE AND RACE IN GHOSH'S THE GLASS PALACE

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Abstract

The present paper intends to study of hybridity of culture and race in the postmodern world through Amitav Ghosh's novel The Glass Palace. The novel is a saga of many families, their lives and their connection with each other. The story of Rajkumar, an Indian orphan is transported to Burma by accident. It mainly focus on perception of women also throws the light on man-woman relationship between Rajkumar-Dolly, Beni Prasad-Uma, Dinu- Alison. This is the true picture of Indian marriages. The couple lives together for decades without really knowing each other, without actually sharing innermost thoughts and without genuinely loving each other. Marriage becomes a matter of habit, a taken for granted ritual of life. The racial hybridity is clear through the relationship between queen Supayalat's (a Burmese Queen) daughter and Marathi coachman Sawant and through their marriage. Saya John's character also reveals this type of racial hybridity. Ghosh comments on the Indian caste-system through Uma and Dolly's conversation. It depicts the modern relations which are not based on true love. Rajkumar's children reflect the hybridity of nation and culture.

Key Words: Culture, racial hybridity, language.

Now days, we are living the modern and changing world in which nothing is stable. Every border has been mixed and these changes and mixtures give a new concept like 'hybridity' have come into being. Hybrids are considered as inferior races, weak and second rate persons. Hybridity is an every-day reality that we encounter in an increasingly multi-ethnic and pluralistic society. Hybridity is a mixture of groups or cultures where one gives the compliments to the other and formed new one group. It means a mixture of culture, religion and nation. Many inter-religion ad inter-caste relations and marriages have taken place.

Hybridity leads to the return to cultural purity. It is a subversion of the dominant force. Homi Bhabha points out the fix identity are the necessity for a cultural exchange. It is a cross cultural aspect where different cultures and the interaction of people from different regions and cultures take place. According to Bhabha hybridity is a creation of a new cultural forms and realities resulting from colonial encounter. It is the offspring of humans of different races and different species. It is a process of interaction And translation how cultures come close ad become one. As we know that we are living in a world of change where nothing is stable, permanent and borders have been mixed. Hybridity allows new combinations, new relationships and new mixtures of disparate people and ideas. It is well known phenomenon in Amitav Ghosh's novels where he explores the identity of man.

In *The Glass Palace*, he expresses the hybridity through characters who adapt to the mixture of culture. The novel deals with hybridity due to colonialism and its effects on human lives. The novel traces the criss-crossing fortunes of two families across Burma, India and Malaya and underscores Burma's multicultural aspect. The novel is a saga of many families and connected with each other and connected with each other and connected with their lives and with cultures.

Rajkumar Raha, a Bengali by origin immigrants to Rangoon. He is an Indian transported to Burma by accident. He is a leading protagonist in the novel and true multicultural and hybrid personality. Being an orphan he creates his own relationship with people who belong to different caste, religion, race, culture, nationality, and language. He works in a tea stall of a matronly lady Ma Cho who is half-Indian a half Chinese. He feels some inferior complex when Ma Cho laughs at him as he is black Indian. She also wanted to do with him but "Abruptly, she pushed him away, with a yelp of disgust. What am I doing with this boy, this child, this half-wit kalaa? Elbowing him aside she clambered up her ladder and vanished into

her room” (Tiwari 90). He gets first physical sensation through Ma Cho but she resists herself well in time.

He falls in love with Dolly, one of the attendants of Queen Supalayay. Dolly is loyal to the kings’ family. She is totally dependent upon the Royal family. Sex in her life is very risky for her to maintain her sanity. Her natural choice is Sawant but she caught up by the first princess is also growing into woman so she snatches him and become a pregnant. The first daughter of King belongs to higher class and Sawant from the middle class their illegal relationship which loses the sense of class and decency is deeply violated. This is a fine incident which gave birth to hybridity. In the universe no race is pure. The saga of human weaknesses gives birth to the hybridity. Every life is the mixing of DNA combinations and permutations. Mohanbhai Sawant and the first Princess’s child is product of hybrid culture.

Rajkumar gains name and fame in Rangoon which is not possible in India. Saya John helps to Rajkumar to meet to Dolly and finally they married. Dolly tells her past relationship with Sawant to clarify her tragic incident in life. But he accepts all the problems and woos Dolly and finally married with her. Rajkumar marries Dolly and became hybrid couple. Deenu and Neel are two sons born to Dolly and Rajkumar. The feeling in the mind of Dolly and the natives, who leave their homeland and live in another nation, gave birth to the hybridized culture, language and religion. He tried to imitate Saya John’s fashionable trend of European clothes. He wanted to live lavish life like British people and everyday he was trying to imitate them. It shows that a pride about the British culture has been depicted in the mind of the British. Being a Kalaa, he was foreign in alien land. He inhabits borderless space beyond the barriers of race, class and nation. He is influenced by the hybrid nature of the colonized subaltern policy where he evolves himself into businessman.

Saya John is a Chinese Christianized in Malaya by Portuguese priests. He is a replica of a bred of hybridity. He uses Western clothes speak English walk like foreigner and also speak Hindustani and Burmese. His face looks like Chinese. He himself makes fun of present identity. When Saya John addresses Rajkumar in broken Hindustani, the boy asks him in Burmese, “How did you learn to speak an Indian language?” (TGP 10) Saya John replies that he got hybrid name, “They spoke many languages, these priests, and from the Goans I learnt a few Indian words” (TGP 10). Then he recalls how he became the hybrid when he worked in Singapore the Indian soldiers stationed there asked him: how is it that you,

who look Chinese and carry a Christian name, can speak our language?, and when he explained about this they would laugh and say, “ you are a dhobi ka kutta- a washerman’s dog— NA Ghar Ka Na Ghat Ka – you don’t belong anywhere, either by the water on the land, and I’d say, yes that is exactly what I am He laughed, with an infectious hilarity and Rajkumar Joinedin” (Tiwari 104).

Rajkumar’s children have been given two names, one Burmese and another Indian Sein Win and Neeladhari to the elder one and Dinanath to the younger one. It represents hybridized phenomenon, an image of multiculturalism has been presented in front of us. He has some illicit physical relationship with one of the workers forcibly and Ilango, his illegitimate son is the result of his extra-marital relationship. He expresses the idea of cultural differences and hybridization of different characters in the novels. Here we find the true picture of modern relations which are not based on true love. Dinu and Alison are soon parted forever because of the war. The relationship that might have bloomed and lasted a lifetime is ruptured by the tumult of war. Deenu is Burmese Indian and Alison is Burmese American. Deenu is Hindu-Buddhist in religion and Alison is Christian. Saya John’s son Mathew falls in love with an American girl Elsa though he is Burmese and belongs to different creed and race. Neel, Rajkumar’s elder son falls in love with Manju, Uma’s niece. He is half-Burmese from his mother Dolly side and Manju is a Bengali. Neel and Manju marry and blessed with baby girl named Jaya. Alison dies and Dinu starts a new life. He is old and mellow. He has been living a quiet married life with a well-known Burmese writer. Cultural hierarchies overlap in entwining of the high and low classes in spite of race, religion and class, in order to create new societies. Dinu has settled down in Rangoon and marries Burmese woman Ma Thin Thin Aye who is writer and university professor. The relationship of the Indo-Burmese Dinu photographs with Chinese-German American. Alison shows that no one is pure in the universe. These family ties come to full circle and the cultural differences are forgotten and the artificial borders are no more.

Amitav Ghosh through the novel shows the cultural ways of Bengali women i.e. safe guarding a precious ornament in the folds of the sari and a mother’s last blessings to her son – beche thako. He uses a number of words ek gaz, do gaz, teen gaz referring to land measure and gaaris, horis, basti, langot etc. for material goods. Through the protagonist Dolly Ghosh also comments on the Indian caste system. Dolly said to Uma: “Oh, you Indians, you’re all the same, all obsessed with your castes and your arranged marriages. In Burma when a woman likes a man, she is free to do what she wants” (TGP, 117-118).

Ghosh throws the light of impact of Western education and civilization on the novel. Arjun holds great fascination for the British customs and ways of life. He remarks to his friend: “Just look at us, Hardy-just look at us, what we are? We have learnt to dance the tango and we know how to eat roast beef with a knife and fork. The truth is that except for the color of our skin, most people in India wouldn’t even recognize us as Indians” (TGP 439). As a modern man he behaves like foreigner and forgets all the tradition, his past and embrace western habits of thought. Ghosh explores how nation creates a barrier not only for the people outside but also for natives who stay outside their traditional homelands. The migrants or natives, who leave their traditional homelands and stay in another nation, give birth to the hybridized culture. In the novel, Ghosh brings into light the process how Indian soldiers have been utilized by the British. The mind of the Indian soldiers has been tried to mould in accordance with their own way. Arjun’s mind has become biased by the British way of seeing the ‘other’. That’s why he comments:

Look at us –‘they would say, ‘- Punjabis, Marathas, Bengalis, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims. Where else in India would you come across a group such as ours – where region and religion don’t matter – where we can all drink together and beef and pork and think nothing of it? Arjun said, every meal at an officers’ mess was an adventure, a glorious infringement of taboos. They ate foods that none of them had ever touched at home: bacon, ham and sausages at breakfast; roast beef and pork chops for dinner. They drank whisky Arjun said that we’re the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, and we’re the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, and we’re the first Indians who’re not weighed down by the past. (TGP 278-279)

Arjun’s belief in the unity of their regiment proves to be a foil. Ghosh depicts the hybrid mentality of the Indian soldiers have been put down in a system where they have been bound to imitate Westerners.

Ghosh posits that each culture has been dominated by the colonial power and lifestyle which adapt new style of living. King Thebaw and Queen Supalayay are exiled from Rangoon to India like the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was exiled to Rangoon from Madras. The Burmese princess in India learns to adapt to Indian ways. It shows hybridity through the change of clothing styles:

In their early years in India, the princesses usually dressed in Burmese clothes aingyis and htameins. But as the years passed their garments changed. One day, no one quite remembered when, they appeared in saris—not expensive or sumptuous saris, but the simple green and red cottons of the district. They began

to wear their hair braided and oiled like Ratnagiri school girls; they learned to speak Marathi and Hindustani as fluently as any of the towns-folk—it was only with their parents that they spoke Burmese. (TGP 76-77)

Queen's daughters also mixed up with Marathi people and their child. They played together some games and share their foods. Princesses were so pleasant looking girls and interested in Indian market and enjoy Indian culture:

When they drove through the streets they neither averted their gaze nor looked away. There was a hunger in their eyes, a longing, as though they yearned to know what it was like to walk through the Jhinhinka bazaar, to dawdle at the shops and bargain for saris. They sat alert and upright, taking everything in, and occasionally asking questions of the coachman: Whose sari shop is that? What sort of mangoes are those on that tree? What kind of fish is that hanging in that stall over there? (TGP 77)

The Princesses were delighted to have the playmates which they had never in their own age before. They mixed up with new friends or playmates to enjoy the beauty of new culture with new friends. John uses normal traditional dressed as longyi but the colonial influence has changed his costume and changes his lifestyle so he begins to dress the European clothes. His transformation of European style of clothing is the sign of hybrid culture. He deals with different languages in his novels such as the native English language as second language is mixed with the mother tongue of the different characters.

In the novel, Ghosh shows hybrid relationship between Rajkumar and Uma at the end of the novel. They mix up together to enjoy the moment of life in the world. The characters are using Burmese, Hindustani language. People from India and Burma as well as Christians— a mixed culture are intermingled and used Hindustani, Burmese and English language. Ghosh applied hybrid language in his novels for different aspects. We find in this novel issue like gender relation, man-woman relationship, effect of English language and culture on Indian people, Indian concept of caste system and arrange marriage. Thus we can say that through this novel and its characters emphasis on the global issue of hybridity of race and culture. Ahdaf Soueif writes, “Ghosh is one of the most sympathetic post-colonial voices to be heard today. He looks at love and loyalty, and examines questions of Empire and responsibility, of tradition and modernity” (Mishra and Kumar 28).

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