

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

Globalization, Multiculturalism and Eco-perspectives in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

Shailesh Sharma

Research Scholar

Department of English and MEL

University of Allahabad,

Allahabad, U.P. India

DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2019.4.2.08

Abstract

This paper presents the study of globalization, multiculturalism, ecological and environmental perspectives in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000). The novel represents globalization, multiculturalism and eco-perspectives in inter-connected ways. This paper strives to find out these inter-connected aspects of globalization, multiculturalism, ecological and environmental concerns in the novel. Globalization and multiculturalism have central place while eco-concerns and environmental aspects are peripheral, in the novel. Therefore the objective of the paper is also an appeal to provide the centre-role for ecological and environmental concerns in the texts; along with economic development, countries must give importance to ecological and environmental aspects to save the human race and multi-cultural societies.

Keywords- Globalization, Multiculturalism, Ecocriticism, Humanity, Ethnicity

It has been overtly accepted that Ghosh's novels essentially deal with post-colonial, anthropological and historical experiences. This paper provides radical global, cultural and ecological paradigms for the study of Ghosh's novels. *The Glass Palace* has global settings and deals with multi-cultural societies. The stories of the novel go beyond geographical boundaries and reach in various countries without any restrictions; as Burma, Britain, America, Malaya, Bengal, Ratnagiri, China, Japan, and Thailand have participated much in development of cross-borders themes. Every single country has its own distinguished culture which differs from that of another country. Through globalization these multi-cultural societies have come to inter-connect with one another and further extended the formation of multi-cultural societies. Today globalization has made it mandatory for every culture to ponder the devastating effects of ecological imbalance and environmental degradation upon the very existence of individual culture. Multi-cultural and environmental concerns are the chief characteristics of the novel, it has ecological and environmental perspectives in portraying the natural beauty as its various settings; forests, greenery, landscapes, mountains, rivers, rifts as well as beauty of night, morning, evening and climate.

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

Globalization has shrunk the whole universe to a global village, where a culture and its particular cultural identity confront with various cultural differences and different cultural identities; globalization, includes all the differences as a whole to create multiculturalism and global-culture identity. Multiculturalism and global-culture identity are consequences of globalization. Through the process of globalization, cultural differences have come to interact and communicate with one another to form multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is cultural diversity in a particular society, group and country. Multiculturalism at one side has a global identity while at the other side it has the individual identities of various cultures, therefore global village as a colourful dome is decorated with cultural mosaic of various colours, which results as multiculturalism.

Amitav Ghosh is a prolific novelist. Ghosh's novels have gained international fame for their cross-borders and cross-cultural aspects. Ghosh's novels present abundance evidences for study of multiculturalism, globalization, environmental concerns and catastrophic effects of colonialism in the context of social, political, cultural, economic and anthropological developments. *The Glass Palace* is one of them; the novel is set in various geographical boundaries and deals with historical, political, economic, and religious events and movements of the particular period (Second World War). The novel makes a colourful portrait of cultural diversity generated by different combinations of various colours of cultures as of Burma, Bengal, Malaya, Britain, America, China, and Singapore through various characters in the novel who are representatives of particular society and culture; as Ma Cho (half Indian/half Chinese), Saya John (Chinese, who has accepted Christianity), Matthew (lives in Singapore later shifts to U.S.A., after marriage in U.S.A., comes to live in Burma with his father), Rajkumar (belongs to Chittagong, comes to Mandalay, travels to Ratnagiri and establishes his business in Burma) Uma (wife of an Indian Civil Service officer, who after the death of her husband, Beni Prasad Dey, travels to Europe and America) Elsa Hoffman (American, wife of Matthew, comes to live in Burma), Dolly (attendant of Queen of Burma, who has delicacy of Royal culture), Rajkumar and Dolly's sons Neeladhri and Dinanath, in short respectively Neel and Dinu (both have two names one Indian and one Burmese). The novel presents a study of multifarious effects of globalisation, industrialisation and colonialism on society, culture, environment and economic development. It clarifies that globalisation has led to the industrialisation and consequently it has changed the demographic patterns and caused ecological imbalance. Imbalance in demographic structure has enforced people to over-exploitation of natural resources which has inevitably envisaged devastating effects of ecological and environmental pollution in form of climate change and global-warming. The novel demonstrates the process of de-forestation as harmful effect of development of industrialisation. The novel depicts problems of migration and displacement of population and individual not only in the form of labourers who seek jobs in various regions by themselves but also in form of colonised people who have been compelled by the colonisers to leave the native place and to live in exile. The King of Burma has also been exiled in India, the King thinks on his way to exile;

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

the King raised his glasses to his eyes and spotted several Indian faces along the waterfront. What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such numbers from one place to another-emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movements-people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile? (Ghosh 43-44)

Multicultural perspectives of the novel laid in the personalities of the characters and their beliefs, ideas, behaviours and orientations of their cultural practices, ideas and beliefs in a particular social context and cultural occasion. Saya John is a specimen of multi-cultural personality. He belongs to China, and has accepted Christianity, lives in Burma and speaks multi-language as well as Burmese and Indian languages. The novel presents severe reality of colonisation and industrialisation in simmering fears of people to loss their own identities as well as security, while globalisation is providing a global-cultural identity to the cultures through diminishing and demoralising the faulty social and cultural practices, customs and beliefs, and enhancing the dignity of inter-personal relationships to form a unique global-culture, and including various cultures, it is expanding the scope to create multi-cultural society. In the novel, Rajkumar gets confluence of various cultures through the numerous representatives of different cultures in Mandalay and says,

the number of foreigners living in Mandalay was not insubstantial-there were envoys and missionaries from Europe; traders and merchants of Greek, Armenian, Chinese and Indian origin; labourers and boatmen from Bengal, Malaya and the Coromandel coast ;white-clothed astrologers from Manipur ;businessmen from Gujarat-an assortment of people he had never seen before he came here''. (Ghosh16)

Inside the palace of the King of Burma, we perceive cultural diversity; as the Queen's female attendants mostly teenagers belong to different regions, cultures and religions-``some of them were from Christian families, some from Buddhist''. (Ghosh 20)

Globalisation has made it easy and liberal for people to visit different regions which have different cultures-through the confrontation with foreign cultures; they not only learn many new cultural practices and behaviours but in turn also influence the native cultures of that particular country, place or region-which increase their knowledge of life-style and behaviour. The culture of Mandalay has been affected by, ``the foreigners who thronged the public places: Englishmen, Cooringhees, Tamils, Americans, Malays, Bengalis, and Chines''. (Ghosh 49) Rajkumar learn many cultural practices of European society. Saya John meets with U Ba Kyaw, an English planter in Maymyo, who will ``teach Rajkumar many things, like how to eat at a European table with a knife and fork''.(Ghosh 131) European (Western) ways of dressing and makeup have influenced much the indigenous culture and life-styles as we get in Uma's sense of dressing, "Indian official had made up a new way of wearing a sari, with odds and ends borrowed from European costume-a petticoat, a blouse. She'd heard that women all over India were adopting the new style."(Ghosh 105)

Uma goes to Europe and U.S.A, through her letters written to Dolly, we find the socio-cultural differences which she faces in these countries. Through her visit to America, Canada,

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

and New York; she comes in touch with revolutionary personalities and members of Indian National Freedom Movements and Indian National League. She becomes an active political figure in politics of India and Indian Freedom Movements. Further we find the mixture of the two cultural beliefs to form the one multi-cultural personality of society and family; when Rajkumar calls two astrologers one from Burma and another from India to give a Burmese and an Indian name to his both the sons, Neel and Dinu.(Ghosh195)

In 'The Wedding' section of the novel, the wedding of Neel provides an occasion for amalgamation of various cultures and formation of multiculturalism through vibrantly presentation of Indian culture; 'unity in diversity', "usually they were 'brothers' but at the times they were also much more, even the 'First True Indians'. 'Look at us'-they would say, - 'Punjabis, Bengalis, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. Where else in India would you come across a group...region and religion don't matter...'" (Ghosh 278)

Apart from the lives of common people, also through the dealings of army and military at the global levels where soldiers go beyond one nation to another, cross many national boundaries and become expose to different cultures and environments; in such conditions multiculturalism and globalization come to take place in military services;

Most of Arjun and Hardy's classmates from the Military Academy had already been sent abroad. Some were serving in North Africa, some in Eritrea, and some in East Malaya, Hong Kong and Singapore...The British and Dutch were reinforcing their defences throughout the East-in Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, Java, Sumatra. (Ghosh 314-15)

The novel deals with environmental and ecological aspects in multifarious ways. Through roving from one place to another and voyages by the seas, oceans and rivers, the novel presents the vivid descriptions of multiculturalism and environmental concerns of the novelist. Ghosh is fascinated with the oceans, seas and rivers and also with the geographical, socio-cultural and environmental diversity of the places of Burma, Rangoon and Ratnagiri. The novelist has made efforts to produce the indigenous names of regional things to provide the real alive effects of that cultural and environmental diversity. We get the indigenous names of dishes, dresses and clothing's, names of religious and naturally beautiful places, festivals, ceremonies, social and religious rituals, rivers, mountains, plants, flowers and various kinds river-boats as 'the Chines junks and Arab dhows, Chittagong sampans and American clippers and British ships-of the line, that were to be seen on the Rangoon river'.'. (Ghosh 49)

Environmental and ecological perspectives are twisted in manifolds in the dealings with the natural phenomenon in different ways; as vividly descriptions of forests, trees, plants, herbs, flora and fauna of the 'teak' and 'rubber' plantation and beauty of greenery, landscapes, mountains, rivers, oceans, and in demonstration of archeologically importance of the mansion of the King of Burma;

the road ended at a stream. A ribbon of water was flowing down the face of a tilted sheet of rock, its surface braided with tiny ripples. On the far side, the mountain

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

climbed steeply upwards, blanketed in a dense tangle of forest...the sight was as evocative as any she'd ever seen: the crumbling red stone juxtaposed against the tangled greenery of the jungle, with the mountain rising serenely above, a halo of cloud around its peak. Dinu was absorbed in photographing the ruins, moving round the structures as fast as his foot would let him...and 'shrines', either Hindu or Buddhist shrines...(Ghosh 228-29)

The novel shows its concerns with environmental, ecological, archaeological and cultural perspectives which have central roles not only in the lives and existence of human beings but also in the whole biological organism's existence and survival.

Matthew and Uma were exploring the natural beauty and joy in the teak and rubber plantation site 'Morningside' and they were fascinated with the beauty of sunrise, jungle, birds, trees, mountains, landscapes and slopes;

it was first light now and dawn was descending on the peak of Gunung Jerai. This was the one time of the day when the mountain's heights were always visible, unclouded, by the haze that rose later from the heated plain. On the slopes above them, the jungle was coming slowly to the life, with flocks of birds rising from the forest canopy, and unseen troops of monkeys sailing through the tree-tops, leaving wakes of tossing leaves. (Ghosh 232)

Environmental, ecological and cultural diversity is the settings of the novel and through the description of the cultural monuments and sculptures; it emphasises on maintaining the balance between bio-diversity and cultural-diversity and enforces to preserve the cultural and monumental sculptures which are embodiments of the existence and development of human civilisations and cultures.

Dinu has a liking for photography and accepts it as his career. Through his endeavour to explore the natural beauty and scenarios in the forests, we experience the first hand joy of walking, staggering, stumbling, wandering and roving in deep forests and watching flora and fauna, greenery and magical charm of serenity and tranquillity of the forests. He is charmed by the structure of monumental sculpture-a kind of pyramid;

"he was awed by the serene beauty of the place: the colours of the moss-covered chandis were even more vivid than he remembered; the vistas in the background even more sweeping...and found himself confronted with yet another ruin, built of laterite, was roughly octagonal and shaped like a stepped pyramid or ziggurat...a massive square stone, with a rectangular opening carved in the centre...a puddle of rain water trapped inside. The pool had the even shape and metallic glint of an antique mirror...a ten foot square platform made of laterite blocks-apparently the foundation of a small shrine. (Ghosh 334-35)

Through Dinu and his photography, Ghosh has captured the natural beauty in camera to show the pictures to his readers and the readers find untouched and fresh images of the natural beauty;

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

In the distance, the sun has swelled to fill the mouth of the bay, growing ever larger as it dipped towards the horizon. The sand was copper-coloured and it slipped beneath the water at gentle incline. Coconut palms grew thick along the edge of the beach, their trunks leaning thirstily into the wind. Along the line where the sand changed into soil there was a densely accumulation of grass and shells and dried seaweed. (Ghosh 493)

As to conclude, this paper has made praiseworthy efforts to show the globalization, multiculturalism and environmental perspectives in Amite Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace*. In the novel, globalization has caused to create the multiculturalism through amalgamation of various cultures at one place and one region. Globalization has enforced the countries-through making them aware of the climate change, global warming and ozone depletion and catastrophic effects of these phenomena -to concern about the environmental and ecological conservation. Nature and environment are indispensable parts of human lives and indistinguishably involve in day to day life and without these, bio-organisms can't survive for a momentum the Earth. For this sake the novel has made efforts to show an urge for conservation of environmental and ecological diversity to make lives better, smooth, peaceful and prosperous.

Works Cited

- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. London: Harper Collins, 2000. Print.
- . *Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Brinda Bose. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2005. Print.
- . *A Critical Companion*. Ed. Tabish Khair. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. Print.
- . *The Glass Palace*. Delhi: Ravi Dayal and Permanent Black, 2000. Print.
- Gupta, Manas Ranjan and Dutta, Priya Brata. "Skilled-Unskilled Wage Inequality, Growth of Skilled Labour and Development Policies". *Journal of Globalization and Development* 5.1(2004)103-128. Print.
- Ocampo, Jose Antonio. "Rethinking Global Economic and Social Governance", *Journal of Globalization and Development* 1.1(2010) n. p. Web. 01 Jan 2010.