

The Practice of Polyphonic Technique in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh is one of the popular names in the modern-day literature. The Indian-born novelist has come out with extensive range of fiction in the genus of history. His novels shed light on how the South-East Asian populace deals with the identity predicament at different echelons. The art of telling a tale is a 'narrative' which came into practice long before it got its name. A narrative takes its form as and when we start articulating our feelings and thoughts. The concept of Bakhtin ascertains 'polyphony' as an imperative feature of the novel. It has forbidden the monologist form of the traditional novel. Voice, variety, viewpoint, and philosophy of social worlds are the objects of the author's knowledge. These are very much subservient to the artistic vision where the opinion of the author is always considered the final. For Bakhtin, the foremost principle for a novel is to be polyphonic – the freedom and independence of the characters within the range of the author.

The literary works of Amitav Ghosh are polyphonic in nature. He deliberates his characters independently and breaks himself from imposing ideological control over them. Different characters in the novel who also act as narrators accomplish their roles through their distinctive linguistic expressions. This leads to the discovery of 'heteroglossia' in the novel. The bibliophile can witness the changes in their language with respect to the social, cultural and economic status. Ghosh, through his novels experiments with the hierarchy and the regular closure, but chooses open-endings and incompleteness which are considered as the real features of polyphonic novels. By allowing the readers to understand the closure in their own manner, he leaves his philosophical tensions unresolved. Hence, the paper makes an attempt to explore how Amitav Ghosh has presented the polyphonic technique from a new perspective in *The Glass Palace* (2000) and *The Hungry Tide* (2004).

Keywords: Polyphonic, The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide, Story, Narration, Independent.

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh is one of the acclaimed writers in Indian English literature. His parents migrated from Eastern Bengal to Calcutta before the partition of 1947. The symbol of 'refugee' has sustained to sway his novels *The Glass Palace* (2000) and *The Hungry Tide* (2004). The other refugees have been less forcibly displaced as students, migrants, travelers, and researchers. In practicality, these issues inhabit his works and constitute his central characters. His early childhood with his parents in Iran, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh has helped him to attain his sensibilities. These voyages helped him to emerge as a writer, as he is enthusiastic to inspect the world from the viewpoint of the displaced. He imagines the 'movement' central to the human experience and also as a prospective realization of the lives of those people often considered as 'settled' such as farmers. Many of his works pose a task to the supposition that human history is one of the 'settled' inhabitants and 'stable' philosophies.

The city of Kolkata wields an authoritative effect on Ghosh's literary resourcefulness. Its manifestation is noticeable, when the upper and middle sections of Bengali society emerged in the nineteenth century under colonial regulation. The folk of Kolkata constitutes Bengal's cultural, political, and intellectual choice even though at its inferior level the economic position of many Bhadrakol families is repeatedly perilous. This class position regulates in many ways the three-dimensional knowledge of Kolkata, making an imaginative geography of the city that associates definite localities with certain classes. Therefore, if travel is a key element of Ghosh's consciousness on the importance of universe in human involvement, he gives his appreciation to the fact that the

universe is shaped warmly by the particular ways in which it is fictional. It determines his inspection of the spaces, created culturally like the nation- states and the borders which define the folk.

The term 'technique' is extracted from the Greek root word 'techniko,' which means an art. The use of any technique in literary fiction comprises all that goes into the creation of a novel. In general, technique embraces all that the novelist uses for narrating his tale in a vivid manner. The skill of telling a tale is a 'narrative' which came into presence long before it got its appellation. It comes to us so obviously that we flinch expressing our approaches through language. As we begin expressing our feelings and thoughts, a narrative takes form. It is a talent that benefits the story teller to narrate a tale realistically in a creative manner, to make a tale operative and stimulating for a reader to comprehend properly.

A narrative is seen in the method of spoken, written or imagined form. It has more points of assessment to characterize the observers. The tales are told by 'a narrator' whom the spectators can perceive or listen. It is a kind of method which has characters, a time, a setting, and a problem. It attempts to answer or to get a clarification for it. Bed time tales are the best instances of short stories and novels are the instances of long stories. The scripts written for movies and plays are instances of narrative inscription.

It is ubiquitous and its attendance can be felt to its being the oldest method of communication. The existence of narrative is universal and is found in every part of the world. Roland Barthes writes in a quite interesting way:

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances- as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. (An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative, 237-272)

One can define that the different narrative techniques act as the basis for imaginative writing. A writer attempts to bring out his opinions and feelings through his works. By writing, he articulates his inner voice more clearly and convincingly before his readers. Paul Ricoeur writes: "The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character" (Rutledge Critical Thinkers, 72).

The words of Paul Ricoeur shows that the temperament of the storyteller is recognized to be his or her best in his or her manner of narrating a tale. The temperament of a narrator is discovered through the tale brought out by any person in the postcolonial context. The postcolonial reproach is a practice of analyzing different texts created in countries that were beneath the regulation of European Colonial Controls at some points in the past. After the independence, people who were demoted to the margin by the colonizing west and termed as uncivilized and barbaric started coming back to the centre. The techniques espoused by the postcolonial writers were numerous. Unraveling diverse narratives by polyphony, restoring native wisdom, revitalizing the rich inheritance of the past were some of the approaches used by the authors to generate national uniqueness.

Just like literature, the concept of history can also be re-assembled. Re-interpreting mythologies and folklores is predominant among authors in order to make the readers trust that they belong to some local place. The traditional style of monologist description followed by the European writers is substituted by polyphonic narration having manifold speeches of narrators. The postmodern propensity of leaving the all-knowing author has become noticeable in the novels of this old-fashioned. Giving power upon the disagreement that no one knows the inner voice or the minds of the others, the ever present narrator who imagines to know everything gives way to polyphonic or multi-voiced stories.

The novelist Ghosh began to take an established view of Indian reality and handled themes with clarity and sureness. He has experimented with new methods to express exceptional ideas. Narrative techniques of different type are complexly merged into the feel of his novels. He discovers the concepts articulated by the Russian philosopher and criticizer Mikhail Bakhtin in his novels. A polyphonic manuscript is a collection of multiple voices and its perception is permitted off an authorial regulator and heteroglossia is assumed as the social assortment of speech. This technique is used to analyze the fictional works of Amitav Ghosh from the postcolonial approach.

Directly or indirectly, every narrator has got his or her own form of the story. Hereafter, there is no demand of an actual story. The exploration for truth is an incessant development involving re-building and re-narration of stories. The novelist deploys manifold voices of multiple narrators, which is a feature of polyphonic novels. Story narrating is an attached portion of human life. It is occupied with the ideals of the story teller and the linguistic means in which the tale is told. These ideals vary from person to person making the story heteroglossic. This kind of narration cheers the novel as it is an assembly of narrated stories. In India, the spoken custom of narrating a story enthused Ghosh to approve the polyphonic method in his novels and he effectively did that.

The notion of Bakhtin recognizes polyphony as a substantial feature of the novel and he disallows the monologist procedure of the traditional novel in which the characters' voices, lookout, philosophy and the diversity of social worlds are all objects of the author's information. So, they are subordinated to the creative project where the voice of the author is confirmed to be the last word. For 'Bakhtin movement', the first criteria for a novel to be polyphonic are the self-determination and individuality of characters freed from the firm mechanism of the writer.

The novels of Amitav Ghosh are polyphonic in nature because he makes his characters a sovereign and stops himself from imposing philosophical control over them. Diverse characters who act as narrators achieve their roles in the novel in their exclusive linguistic registers ensuing in the arrival of heteroglossia in the novel. The reader can notice changes in their vernacular according to the social, cultural and economic position. Thus, change and variety exist when each and every character institute his or her uniqueness by their exceptional method of narration in the novels.

The influence of colonialism on the social, cultural, and political lives of the people of the colonized country is observed by Ghosh from the perspective of a marginalized Indian through the novel *The Glass Palace*. The novelist Ghosh has tried to analyze the history when Burma was seized and annexed as a part of British India. The pessimism that he embraced within him towards the British colonizers is articulated throughout the novel.

In Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, Jaya's son Rajkumar is the speaker of the story. He has associated many sub-narratives with different characters to make it a complete one. The childhood recollection of the charming and the most affectionate prospect that he has ever witnessed- the interconnected dentures of his great aunt Uma and his great grandfather, endured in his memory for a long time. While he mellowed, his longing to find out more about the relationship between Uma and Rajkumar, amplified. He agrees to know the history of the family and write down their record in the technique of a novel.

The Glass Palace deals with the ancient events and opens with the British capture of Burma to the British India in November 1885. Till the Burmese fought for democracy under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, the image of democracy and the endeavors of the Military Junta surface the fight by keeping her under house arrest in 1996. The family history of the Rahas with Rajkumar as the head and the history of the three generations of the family are found in *The Glass Palace*.

The speaker throws light on Rajkumar's fight with life when he was an orphan. When he was only eleven years old, he was emanated from Chittagong with his mother to discharge themselves

from the controls of a killer excitement. But he lost his mother who was the only ray of hope and basis of his life.

Her final words, “Stay alive, Beche Thako. Rajkumar, live my Prince hold on to your life,” (The Glass Palace, 14) enthused him to change on in life with sureness. The rise and fall of Rajkumar forms the basis of the novel. Many other stories have been finally interlaced into the surface of the novel making practice of polyphony and heteroglossia. The much wanted independence given to the characters brands it as a polyphonic novel. The diversity of languages that the characters in the novel employ, permit heteroglossia to occupy an important role. The language that the orphan Rajkumar practices is totally altered from the adult Rajkumar. As a child of eleven, he revealed great development, when he advanced a half-Indian and half-Burmese food-stall proprietor for a job. Though she was irritated, being good at heart, she enquired him about his parents and he simply answered that they were no more.

Rajkumar's short and traditional answer was powerful enough to inspire sympathy in Ma Cho and he decided to work in her food-stall for nourishment and accommodation. Their relations reinforced and he got many elements about the Glass Palace of Burma from her. Frequently, she reproached Rajkumar in the following manner, “Now you get back to work or I'll your black face in hot oil...” (The Glass Palace, 10)

Actually, it is Ma Cho who exerts control and her words replicate the behavior of the influential against their assistants. Her language is characteristic of the working class ethos. Unaffected by deficiency and orphan-hood, he familiarizes himself to the altering situation and becomes an effectual teak trader. In his trade, he appeals himself in conveying indentured laborers to work in the plantations. Being a sub-contractor in the teak trade, he copied the colonizer in desolating teak forest and utilized elephants for pulling logs. Ecological humiliation due to the extreme mis-treatment of nature is pointed out by Ghosh when he mentions about the dishonest ways in which Rajkumar made money through deforestation. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin perceive:

Ecological imperialism radically altered the entire ecology of the invaded lands in ways that necessarily disadvantaged indigenous people and annihilated or endangered the native fauna and flora on which their cultures and their very life depended. (The Empire Writes Back, 1989)

In analyzing the splendor of Dolly, Ghosh makes use of polyphony. Her loveliness, when imitated through 'multiple voices' becomes all the more stimulating. In Rajkumar's variety, she seemed to be beautiful beyond acceptance. He says: She was like the palace itself, a thing of glass, inside which you could see everything your imagination was capable. (The Glass Palace, 144)

Execution of an idea through multiple voices is an approach that Ghosh effectively makes practice in his novels. The novelist Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* describes through the viewpoint of Kanai, Piya, Nirmal, Nilima, Kusum, Fokir, Moyna and Horen. A nameless fictional narrator functions like a critic and connects the missing links in the novel. The major geographical area is limited to the Sunderbans, though orientations have been made to places like America and Kolkata. There is a misunderstanding of past, present and future in the description.

The real structure of the novel changes its track from the traditional monologic approach of narration by allowing the narrative a type of autonomy to possess the perspectives of different narrators which Ghosh does by projecting different ideologies through the mouth of these narrators. Through Kanai Dutt, he cautions us of the predisposition of the Bay of Bengal to vicious tempests. His perspectives, on the terror of risk that the fauna and flora face today, and the imminent ecological adversities, are discovered through the scientist Piyali Roy. Ghosh's anxiety of the expelled subaltern incomers in the Morichjhapi Islands is articulated through the fictional personalities like Nirmal and Kusum. The narration of Kusum to Nirmal and Horen disclose the insensitive and unconcerned way in which the subalterns are stressed by the opulent middle-class. The subaltern womenfolk are particularly overloaded, in the beginning by patriarchy and then by the government servants.

In his representation of the cruel destruction of the Morichjhapi uprising by the Bengal government, Ghosh disgorges hatred against the administration which is not concerned about the good and comfort of the subaltern incomers of the current country. His works are the record of the modern-day world, which advantage the upcoming cohort of bookworms. The universal glitches and experiments are accessible through the concept and practice of polyphony. The significant independence of different personalities is vital in polyphonic novel and they are allowed to fast their ideas. The polyphonic description method that Ghosh employs in his novels allows him to shed light on the flaws that are dominant in the civilization.

The character Piyali Roy is involved in her research effort on the threatened marine creatures. She was mesmerized to witness the dismaying cruelty revealed by human being towards a violent, but silent animal, a tiger, when it arrived into the human environment. The villagers caught it and buried it alive. Kanai defended the act of burning the animal and says:

“Piya you have to understand - that the animal has been preying on this village for years. It has killed two people and any number of cows and goats. This is an animal, Kanai, Piya said, You can't take revenge on an animal.” (The Hungry Tide, 294)

In order to direct inconsistent philosophical opinions, the novelist familiarizes the expressions of Kanai, Piya and Fokir. Piya being an environmentalist thrusts the idea that animals should not be endangered at any cost, while Kanai and Fokir are practical men who will not vacillate from killing an animal if it impinges upon the human territory. To them, if an animal disturbs the presence of human beings it must be murdered at any level without any sympathy.

In Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, the inconsistent philosophies are accessible through the collector and his wife. They characterize the educated Indian choice during the days of the colonial rule. While she fights against the suppression of India by the British, her partner takes their side. When the expatriated majestic family is brought under his observation, he takes to be a realistic servant of the Empire. He is caned for a slight laxity of his responsibility to the Empire and as a consequence he ends his life.

The novelist, Ghosh through his literary works experiments with the structure and the steady conclusion and selects the open-endings and incompleteness which are the key structures of polyphonic novels. By allowing the readers to understand the ending in their own way, Ghosh plants his philosophical tensions unsettled. Thus, in this technique a significant universe is given to the readers to question and understand the text.

Conclusion

Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* concludes with an eccentric image of interconnected dentures, not understood so far by the readers and leave them jumbled about the future. It points out incidentally that living peacefully may guide to contentment in life. The wind-up of *The Hungry Tide* plants much to think about the interested minds of the bookworms. Piya chooses to spend the rest of her life with Nilima at the Sundarbans, forgoing her life for the future project of saving the vanishing species of aquatic creatures. Her apparition of home is quite diverse to that of Nilima's opinion of an ideal concept of home. For Piya, home is a place where the Oracella is and for Nilima, home is where she can drink a vessel of good tea. Even Kanai had leisure time to pass with Nilima. What would be the real output of such a life composed? The bookworms are bestowed with more varieties to deliberate upon as the novel leaves the residues as open ended. Therefore, the reader can witness that the novelist Amitav Ghosh has used the polyphonic technique in both the novels. On the whole, he has come out with a new perspective of writing which is exceptional in its literary expressions in the contemporary world.

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