

Homogeneous identity in nation formation: an analysis of some selected works of Amitav Ghosh

Dr. Suman Acharjee

Assistant Professor (English), Dept. of Modern Subjects & Languages
Central Sanskrit University, Ekalavya Campus, Agartala, Tripura (W)
Email: sumanacharjee20@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article focuses on the relevance of the concept of nation in this postmodern era. Further, it analyses the importance of keeping homogeneous identity in the present scenario. To discuss the same, this article has taken into consideration some comments of different characters of Amitav Ghosh's works such as The Shadow Lines, The Glass Palace, Countdown etc. Thus an effort has been initiated to delve into the concept of nation in this postmodern era by which the relevance of the concept of nation and the possibility of post-national phenomena has been adjudged.*

Key Words: *Nation, homogeneous identity, heterogeneous identity, border, post-nationalism & nationality.*

Whenever the concept of nation comes to the mind, people generally tend to forget the natural heterogeneous identity prevalent in the society. Nation sounds as an identity mark based on which someone's status is adjudged in the international platform. India is emerging again as a new arena of power and thinking because of which the previous stigma of 'developing nation' is fading fast. It is a difficult task to maintain national unity as various kinds of fissiparous forces are on play to disrupt national unity. It is at this point the necessity of a national leader is felt who has the ability to tackle the challenges of maintaining national unity. In this regard, first of all, the concept of nation needs to be understood first. Benedict Anderson defined nation as "an imagined political community" (Anderson 6). It is imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). This quotation highlights that the concept of nation did not emerge naturally. The concept of nation was manipulated based on socio-cultural scenario prevalent at a certain period of history of every nation. Later the changing scenario of the world politics has made it important for every nation to maintain the homogeneous identity of nation. Though nation has been described as an "imagined political community" by Anderson, the present scenario of International political situation has made it necessary for every nation to sustain homogeneous national identity of its every citizen.

Amitav Ghosh in his 'Ibis trilogy' truly describes the heterogeneous culture of the society. While doing so, Amitav Ghosh has been found in ambivalent situation confronting both manipulated homogeneous identity and heterogeneous identity of the society. Mahesweta Devi once commented: 'I consider myself an Indian writer, Not a Bengali writer. I am proud of this.' (Devi xii). This very comment of Mahesweta Devi represents pure nationalistic feeling. The sense of unity that comes with the concept of nation faces many challenges in the name of caste, religion, ethnicity etc. But it does not mean that the concept of nation becomes irrelevant. Nation as a concept needs to be sustained as the very basic idea of international unity is utopian in nature. True nationalistic feeling can imbibe the sentiment of pure universal brotherhood. The present global atmosphere is also based on nationalistic sentiment. Each and every nation in this postmodern era is in competition of its own development due to which international cooperation is necessary. And this race of national development strengthens international unity and thus slowly progresses towards universal brotherhood.

Amitav Ghosh in his work 'The Shadow Lines' represents the process of nation formation through the character Grandmother who says –

'It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood; with their brother's blood

and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood.' (Ghosh 77-78)

This very thinking truly upholds the nation formation process of every culture. Wherever and whenever socio-political tumultuous condition is noticed, the cry for a new identity is heard. The same was heard under the British regime in India which got fructified on 15th August, 1947 with the emergence of a nation with a strong nationalistic sentiment. But as Grandmother says that borders are drawn with blood truly reflects the situation of border related riots which gave birth to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. But in the present situation it has become essential to maintain the unity of present nation which is based on heterogeneous culture. Someshwar Sati comments:

'The logic of the partition appears to be arbitrary. The lines that divide India from East Pakistan are as illogical as the lines of the circle the narrator draws on the map with the help of his compass and pencil. These lines are merely the whims of politicians and nothing else as they cannot enforce cultural difference nor can they separate the two communities living across the border.' (Sati 55)

The above mentioned quotation represents the process of creation of border between India and East Pakistan as being an 'arbitrary' step based on political whims. But the present matter of concern needs the steps necessary to be taken for maintaining present national unity which sometimes faces challenges in the name of religion, caste, vote bank politics etc. Side by side it is also a matter of challenge to maintain international status and to uplift the same with the passage of time. The demand of the time is to create separate symbols and rituals to uphold the true nationalistic image. Otherwise, the mere imitation of Western cultures or others may look very odd as it is found in 'The Glass Palace' in the character of Saya John –

'... small, eccentric and erratically dressed in his ill-fitting European clothes, his portliness accentuated by the patched duck trousers that hung in thick folds around his ankles, with his scuffed sola topee perched precariously on his head.' (Ghosh 2000, 77)

The way Saya John wanted to be one with the British is in reality ludicrous. Every nation needs to create its own unique style as per the phenomena of contemporary international society for being identified on international platform. In connection to this, Amitav Ghosh's 'Countdown' can be cited where a comment from the excerpt of an interview with Dr. G. Padmanabha, the then Director of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore has been included-

'India has many, many problems, but we are tired of being depicted in the West as having negative qualities. Given this treatment, one clutches at any, "victory" that makes one feel like an entity to be counted.' (Ghosh 1999, 11)

The above mentioned quotation is in connection to the nuclear tests conducted on 11th May, 1998 in Pokaran. The necessity of such kinds of tests in this era can be well understood by the following quotation from the same text –

'This was what nuclearists wanted; to sign treaties, to be pictured with the world's powerful, to hang portraits on their walls, to become ancestors. On the bomb they had pinned their hopes of bringing it all back.' (Ghosh 1999, 17)

This postmodern world is in a competition to gain supremacy from the perspective of financial matter. And this leads to the race in accumulating power to remain stable in the ever fluctuating economical arena. From the perspective of international political situation the steps which are taken to upgrade defence system in India is in reality essential. Here lays the justification of the following sayings of K. Subrahmanyam, a civil defence affairs expert:

'...nuclear weapons are the currency of global power. Nuclear weapons are not military weapons...Their logic is that of international politics. The international system of security has been

progressively brought under a global nuclear order that provides for the hegemony of the five nuclear weapons powers. India wants to be a player and not an object of this global nuclear order.’ (Ghosh 1999, 8)

But one needs to understand that nation must have to rise above narrow agenda because biased agenda brings catastrophic situations for any nation. Asma Jahangir, Pakistan’s leading Human Rights lawyer once commented –

‘A ruling elite that is devoid of all values, which gives leadership only to the agenda that everybody is for themselves – that is the disaster of Pakistan.’ (Ghosh 1999, 55)

From the above mentioned discussion it becomes clear that international unity is based on true nationalistic sentiment. True nationalistic sentiment imbibes the feeling of nation development which in turn leads to international cooperation and thus gives birth to international unity. Steps need to be taken to minimize the national disparity at international levels so that no nation bears under the stigma of being underdeveloped nation. Time has come to make distinction between nationalism and chauvinism. A true nationalist will accept the shortcomings of its own nation and will try to sort out the same. Such kinds of pure nationalistic sentiments need to be inculcated in the future generation so that the growing crave for accumulating nuclear weapons can be curbed and the true spirit of congenial conversation among nations can be created.

Works cited:

1. Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006. Print.
2. Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. 1988. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. Print.
3. Sati, Someshwar. “Interrogating the Nation, Growing Global in The Shadow Lines”. *Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines- Critical Essays*. Ed. Arvind Chowdhary. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008. 49-58. Print.
4. Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2000. Print.
5. Devi, Mahasweta. “The Author in Conversation.” Introduction. *Imaginary Maps*. Trans by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Calcutta: Thema, 1993. x-xvi. Print.
6. Ghosh, Amitav. *Countdown*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers, 1999.