

A STUDY OF SOCIAL IMAGERY IN THE NOVELS OF SALMAN RUSHDIE AND AMITAV GHOUSH

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ABSTRACT

The research entitled “A Study of Social Imagery in the Novels of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh” is an attempt to explore the works and the contribution of the most renowned Indian writers-Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh. This deals with the portrayal of women characters in the select novels of Rushdie and Ghosh. Most of the writers of the world have contributed immensely to social imagery through their writings. Indian Writing in English which enjoys unstinted admiration in both home and abroad has its canvas painted with social imagery richly. The writers of Indian fiction depicted women and their experiences in patriarchal set-up with a deep and sympathetic concern and proper understanding.

The list of contemporary Indian English writers remains incomplete without Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie who have undisputedly earned a special position in the Indian English fiction. In “The Glass Palace,” “The Hungry Tide” and “Sea of Poppies” through the portrayal of women characters, Ghosh aims to envisage a future where women’s

empowerment will lead to emancipation in the larger social structures. He portrays his women characters sensitively and in fact, they are the leading spirits in his fiction and the distinct portrayals of a cultural construction. He never presents his women characters as overt radical feminists nor as the stereotypical images of Sita and Savithri. They are the characters of real life and the portrayal is done in a realistic manner.

Ghosh eschews feminist attitudes to bring out the social traumas undergone by the women in his novels. Despite the fact that there are only a few women characters in his novels and their role is limited, they are in control of the entire happening in the novels. They act as independent entities, growing and developing according to their own inclinations and finding social acceptance, defining their own space, determining their own lives, fighting their own battles, enjoying the fruits of victory and never fearing to taste the bitterness of defeat. The avoidance of vilification, victimization and degradation of women is commendable, though not surprising considering the fact that the author hails from the land of Kali.

A critical look at Rushdie reveals that he may have changed quite radically. Having been vocal throughout his career about his lack of religious belief, Rushdie on Christmas Day 1990 announced that he had become, for the first time in his life, a believing Muslim. This announcement surprised and dismayed Rushdie's strongest supporters, most of whom believe, as he had believed, that religion in general (and Islam especially) is a perniciously regressive and oppressive force in society. The lawyer Francis Bennion who who tendered his resignation from Rushdie Defense Committee opined that "Rushdie is not alone in thinking that Rushdie's conversion meant that he had "surrendered to would-be murderers." Such an interpretation is patently absurd, since it depends on the ignorant assumption that to accept Islam is to accept the beliefs and actions of Khomeini and his followers.

In "Why I Have Embraced Islam?" the final essay in Rushdie's new collection (*Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991*, Penguin, 1991), he appeals to the larger community of Muslims throughout the world, quite clearly not to Teheran. But little else is clear from that essay, the most notable feature of which is that it makes no attempt whatsoever to answer the question its title promises to answer. It describes with warmth and gratitude a meeting that Rushdie had on Christmas Eve 1990 with six Muslim scholars, but does not say whether that meeting had any influence upon his decision. It says that he had been moving towards religious belief for several years, and that *The Satanic Verses* is a mirror of his internal conflicts, but it does not say how, when, or (again) why he resolved

those conflicts in favor of religious belief. It would be presumptuous to attempt to answer such a private question, especially with so little information available.

INTRODUCTION

The research is taken up to get the social imagery of two legendary writers of the literary world, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh. Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie, born on 19 June 1947 is a **British Indian** novelist and essayist. His second novel, "Midnight's Children" (1981), won the Booker Prize. Much of his fiction is set on the Indian subcontinent. He is said to combine magical realism with historical fiction; his work is concerned with the many connections, disruptions and migrations between East and West. His fourth novel, "The Satanic Verses" (1988), was a major controversial novel, provoking protests from Muslims in several countries. Some violent death threats were made against him, including a fatwā issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, on 14 February 1989.

Rushdie was appointed *Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* of France in January, 1999. In June 2007, Queen Elizabeth II knighted him for his services in literature. In 2008, "The Times" ranked him thirteenth on its list of the fifty greatest British writers since 1945. Since 2000, Rushdie has been living in the United States, where he has worked at Emory University and was elected to the "American Academy of Arts and Letters." In 2012, he published "Joseph Anton: A Memoir," an account of his life in the wake of the controversy over "The Satanic Verses."

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta on July 11, 1956 in a **Bengali Hindu** family and educated at The Doon School; St. Stephen's College, Delhi, Delhi University, India; Delhi School of Economics and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, where he was awarded a D. Phil. in **Social Anthropology** under the supervision of Peter Lienhardt. His first job was at the **Indian Express** newspaper in New Delhi. Later he joined the faculty at Queens College, City University of New York as Distinguished Professor in Comparative Literature. He has also been a Visiting Professor to the English department of Harvard University since 2005. Ghosh subsequently returned to India and began working on the **Ibis trilogy**, of which two volumes have been published to date, "Sea of Poppies" and "River of Smoke."

Need and Justification

Any writer cannot be studied away from the society in which s/he lived. To understand the writer and his writing, first one has to understand the political, social and economical conditions of the society. One has to study the novels of Salman Rushdie and Amita Ghosh with reference to the society. Their novels reflect the social imagery of the society, the main theme being the Indian sub continent. "The Midnight Children," Rushdie's second novel, is about Saleem Sinai who was born at the Stroke of Midnight on August 15th 1947, at the pieces of Indian Independence. His novel is a combination of Magical realism and historical fiction. Saleem was bestowed with Telepathic powers, that connecting with thousand Midnight's Children. All were been in the initial hours of Indian independence. Salman Rushdie depicted the social conditions of the society in the novel.

Rushdie's book deals with Indian transition from British colonialism to independent India. It is the best example of post colonial literature and magical realism. The story moves in the different parts of Indian sub continent from Kashmir to Agra and then Bombay and Musubi, Lahore and Dhaka.

Amitav Ghosh's novel, 'The Shadow Lines' is the winner of "Sahitya Academy Award" and 'Ananda Purashkar'. The novel, capturing the prospects of time and events of lines bringing people together and holding them apart, is full of social imagery. The lines are clearly visible from one perspective and remain invisible from another perspective. The novel was written in the back drop of historical events like 'Swadesi Movement' Second world War', Partition of India and Communal Rights 1963, 1964, in Dhaka & Calcutta. It is the story of a young boy who grows up in Calcutta and later on in Delhi and London. The narration has Pradiv as the central character because of his tremendous knowledge. The focus is mainly on these novels and an attempt is being made to elicit the social imagery presented in them.

Review of Literature

Salman's first novel, Grimus (1975), a part-science fiction tale, was generally ignored by the public and literary critics. His next novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), catapulted him to literary notability. This work won the 1981 Booker Prize and, in 1993 and 2008, was awarded the Best of the Bookers as the best novel to have received the prize during its first 25 and 40 years. The character of Saleem Sinai of "Midnight's Children" has been compared to Rushdie. However, the author has refuted the idea of having written any of his characters as autobiographical, stating, "People assume that because certain things in the character are drawn from your own

experience, it just becomes you. In that sense, I've never felt that I've written an autobiographical character.

Ghosh is the author of "The Circle of Reason" (his 1986 debut novel), "The Shadow Lines" (1988), "The Calcutta Chromosome" (1995), "The Glass Palace" (2000), "The Hungry Tide" (2004), and "Sea of Poppies" (2008), the first volume of The Ibis trilogy, set in the 1830s, just before the Opium war which encapsulates the colonial history of the East. Ghosh's latest work of fiction is "River of Smoke" (2011), the second volume of The Ibis trilogy. Most of his works deal with an historical setting, especially in the context of Indian Ocean world. In an interview with Mahmood Kooria, he said:

"It was not intentional, but sometimes things are intentional without being intentional. Though it was never part of a planned venture and did not begin as a conscious project, I realise in hindsight that this is really what always interested me most: the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the connections and the cross-connections between these regions.

Objectives:

To explore 'realism' in the novels of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh through objective analysis in terms of the characterization as mere copy of artistic reality, the psychological conflicts to which they are subject, the moral conceptions that they nurture, the contemporary societal drags to which they often get exposed, marital divergence, infidelity and defense of ideals etc. besides making an attempt to study the colloquial and popular language, that acquires greater importance because it locates the characters firmly in the environment reflected in the text.

Research Methodology

The Research on the above title will be done with the themes and messages of selected novels of Salman Rashid and Amitav Ghosh. There will be chapter wise theory of social imagery and other aspects of their writings including the conclusive theory along with suggestions and benefits in the world of fictional writing. Abstract, Introduction, Background of the study,

present scenario and detailed discussions on both writers and their contribution to social imagery will be discussed through different primary and secondary resources inclusive of Internet use. Critical analysis and elucidations are being followed as part of research methodology.

Hypothesis

Both the writers Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh have picturized the social life of human beings in the last three decades, the format being the words and expressions in the novels. The **social imagery**, also known as the social aspects of novel, is a "work of fiction in which a prevailing social problem, such as gender, race, or class prejudice, is dramatized through its effect on the characters of a novel". More specific examples of social problems that are addressed in such works, include poverty, conditions in factories and mines, the plight of child labor, violence against women, rising criminality, and epidemics because of over-crowding, and poor sanitation in cities. The research work on both these writers will spread a key data of motivation and encouragement to the new generation of writers which may result in bringing out a big and sea social change.

Conclusion

The research, through a vast array of new findings, will be a substantial contribution to the Indian Writing in English and in particular to the critical vignettes of Indian Writings in English. This may help the readers become more involved in discussions, further investigations into variable and interesting levels of conversations into the Indian psyche. This may provide new insights into conceptualizing the social imagery in the fiction of modern writers.

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