

## Feminism in the Novels Of Amitav Ghosh

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Feminism believes that there is no difference between male and female. The differences are fostered through culture by forcing women to restrict themselves to the domestic sphere. Women have been forced to develop feminine traits like tolerance, passivity etc. by the male chauvinistic society. Women are shaped not only by gender but also by religion and culture. Post-colonial feminists do not accept the universalisation. In India, woman is a mother, wife and daughter and she has to struggle to maintain her identity. Three novels of Amitav Ghosh are selected for the study of women characters as portrayed by Amitav Ghosh.

Amitav Ghosh in his novels portrays women as leading spirits. *The Glass Palace* covers three countries like Burma, India and Malaya. It is a blend of history and fiction. Amitav Ghosh presents the history of Burma's transition from a kingdom to a republic, between 1885 and 1995 in his novel. It relates India and Burma and reveals the shared experience of colonialism during the period in which a new sense of self hood and national identity took shape among the people of the two countries. It explores a century of Indian history, of Burma's movement from "kingdom to Republic", a journey that is still going on. The novel probes into the events to present many voices inside the countries, Burma and India. Though Ma Cho is a minor character, her self-control and mental strength saves the protagonist Rajkumar, an eleven year old orphan. He works as a helper for Ma Cho. Orphans are usually exploited but Ma Cho resists herself and pushes him away when he gets his physical sensations through her.

When the king and queen of Burma are sent into exile during British invasion Dolly, a nine year old girl accompanies them. As she grows she is attracted towards Sawant, the local servant of the King. However, the first princess falls in love with him. Dolly feels a psychological transference and identifies herself with the first princess and waits for the baby's arrival when the first princess is conceived. When Rajkumar meets her with the proposal to marry, she declines first and later agrees when she is coaxed by her friend Uma. She becomes secured after her marriage as she is an orphan.

Dolly's second son is feeble and she gives importance to her role as a mother than wife. She secludes herself and the suffering changes her attitude. She showers all her love and looks after her son with utmost care. She develops a strong desire of renunciation. Meanwhile her husband Rajkumar involves himself in a physical relationship with a labourer and a son Ilango Alagappan is born. She finally leaves Rajkumar when she reaches India and goes sagaing. Dinu accompanies her and they decide to meet after a year. When Dinu goes to meet her, he comes to know that she passed

away a month before. She is not a symbol of passivity, obedience, humility but is courageous, compassionate and strong.

Uma Dey is the wife of a collector .She finds it difficult to cope with restrictions. She gives up dependence and grows into an independent individual fighting for peace and non-violence along with Indian National Movement. When Uma's civil servant husband dies, she takes off for Europe and then, in flight from its "ruthless hypocrisies" to New York, where she joins a group of Indians who agitate for independence under the tutelage of Irish activists. When Rajkumar tries to turn even war into an occasion for profit, she returns to India to spread the word of Burma's suffering and to join Gandhi in his non-violent fight for freedom. Uma returns from New York and like many Indians abroad, Uma has had a painful political awakening to the degraded state of India and Indians under British rule. She is the first truly modern individual in Ghosh's narrative, in contrast to Rajkumar, who has become blind to his deeds. The characters of the novel are torn between two kinds of oppression – traitors if they support the British, traitors if they turn towards the Japanese.

Arjun is another important character in the novel. He is Uma's nephew. In the perception of Arjun "modern" India and "western" India are the same. He takes pride in embracing western habits. Arjun is a middle-class Bengali, who as an officer in the British Indian Army has learned the British culture. His perception is partially shattered in the wedding of his sister. Arjun gets into heated argument during his sister, Manju's wedding with Buddhist monks, Burmese student, activists, and congress party workers. Arjun reads some quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and a passage that says: "why should India, in the name of freedom, come to the defense of this satanic empire which is itself the greatest menace to liberty that the world had ever known."(292).Arjun is extremely irritated, and cannot control his anger: "Idiots, I wish I could stuff this down their throat. You'd think they'd have better things to do than march about in the hot sun."(292). Dinu is another character who calls the Indian nationalists as idiots. He is a product of western education and a supporter of Fascism spearheaded by Hitler and Mussolini. Dinu believes in the white man's burden of civilizing the world. He, like the educated people of India believed that the British rule would get rid of all the evils in the Indian society. He reminds Uma of the evils like caste system, untouchability and sati. Uma is patriotic and firm in her views compared to Arjun and Dinu who fail to understand the negative impacts of British rule. She immediately responds saying that India's struggle for independence is also India's struggle for reform.

Alison, the granddaughter of Saya John and Dinu's beloved is also another strong character. During Japan invasion Alison drives along with her grandfather from Burma to Singapore. On the way her grandfather is attacked by Japanese soldiers. She fights in vain to save her grandfather and shoots the soldiers. To prevent herself from being shot by the Japanese soldiers she shoots herself and dies with the satisfaction that she was able to retort back.

*The Hungry Tide* portrays the strength of women through Kusum, Nilima, Piyali Roy and Moyna. Kusum is a captivating character. She goes to Morichjhapi with her son Fokir. Her self-assertion leads her to the tide country and she becomes a helping hand to the refugees. She requests

Nilima to safeguard her people through her Union. Kusum is braver than the educated Nirmal. She is a muse for him. Though Horen wishes to marry her she does not want the security. She takes all steps to change the social norms. Nirmal and Kusum try their best to carry forward the legitimacy of Daniel Hamilton's Utopian society. Nilima belongs to an aristocratic family with good educational background. The empowering elite section tried to move from traditionalism to modernism with new duties and responsibilities.

The plight of the refugees is presented through the words of Kusum, a dalit. Kusum was found missing and the inhabitants thought that she was lost in the storm. She was last seen in Lusibari, in 1970. That year, on the eve of performance of the Bon Bibi Johuranama, she disappeared. No one bothered to find out what happened to her as it was all too common in Lusibari for young people and children to disappear into the city. It happens often that one loses track of them. Kusum suddenly reappears in Morichjhapi and she explains what she saw. She explains that one night she heard of a great march to the east. She saw people passing by in a line covered in dust, carrying bundles on their back and children on their shoulders. They were from Bangladesh, in Khulna jail. When the war broke out their villages were burnt. They had nowhere else to go and the police drove them to the settlement camp. They could not sustain there due to the tides and the barren land. They decided to move from there. When a Scotsman like Daniel Hamilton could successfully establish a utopian village, then why not Indians. The refugees started selling their things. They sent people and found the right empty island called Morichjhapi. When they started to move the police put blocks on the road. They paid no heed to the words and they started moving. They set up their own government, invested in establishing institutions and organizations. There were thirty thousand people and many more could be accommodated. The island was divided into five zones and a family was given five acres. They realized that they could survive only if the people of the neighbouring islands supported. So one quarter of land were reserved for them.

At the same time the government was doing its role by trying to make others believe that the settlers were gangsters who have occupied the island by force. The settlers felt it was important to mobilize public opinion and to pressurize the government to leave them alone. As days rolled on dozens of police boats encircled the island. They used tear gas and rubber bullet and the settlers were forcibly prevented from bringing basic necessities like rice or water to Morichjhapi. Moreover boats were sunk and people were killed. It seemed as if war had broken out in the silence of the tide country. "The events leading up to the Morichjhapi turmoil as documented by Kanai's uncle follows closely the findings recorded in Annu Jalais's article "Dwelling on Morichjhapi." The article, an authentic piece of history based on interviews with the islanders, throws light on the politics behind the rehabilitation of East Bengali refugees and the government's attempts to evict them from the area by proclaiming the area to be a Forest reserve, which was allegedly occupied illegally by the refugee settlers. Thirty police deprived the settlers of food and water, they were tear-gassed, their tube wells destroyed and boats sunk. People who tried to cross the river were shot. Several hundreds died and their bodies were thrown into the river. These stories never appear in history. This issue is voiced by Amitav Ghosh. He brings out the troubling present using history as the tool to assess the linked past

events. The theme of the novel ranges from history to the current events which he reinterprets and weaves together.

Kusum starves herself in order to feed her son Fokir. Kusum kept Fokir indoors because of the swarming police. Fokir managed to go outside and catch a few crabs and fish. Kusum subsisted on a kind of wild green known as jadu-palong. These leaves were palatable at first but proved deadly in the end and caused severe dysentery. The inhabitants took the precaution of buying some essential provisions like rice, daal, oil and it was stored in Kusum's dwelling. But Kusum would have none of it. She roused herself on her mat, and hefted some of the bags on her shoulders. Fokir and Horen were made to pick up the others. According to Kusum the worst part of the struggle was the announcements by policemen that the existence of the refugees was less worth than dust. The inhuman announcement that the island had to be saved for the people struck like hammer in the hearts of the hungry people. Kusum began to interrogate herself if being born as human being was a fault, if the desire to live like human beings was a fault and if animals were more important than human beings.

Piyali Roy is a cetologist, a rare profession for women. She comes to Sundarbans to study about Irrawaddy dolphins. Piya defines home through her career. To Nilima home is a place where she can brew a pot of good tea. Moyna is a woman with self-respect. Ghosh's women are strong, can express themselves, travel, take their decisions and live independently. They break the pattern of sexuality and take their place equally with men.

Thamma is one of the most impressive characters in *The Shadow Lines*. She is a bold middle class Indian woman. She was born and brought up in British India. Sarika Pradiprao Auradkar comments about the grandmother as, "Her genteel bourgeoisie background was at odds with a secret desire to work for the terrorists; her struggle to lead an independent life after being widowed, her involuntary moves from Dhaka to Rangoon and then to Kolkata, her dispossession of the region she called home are discontinuous fragments of a story that she can make adhere only by the moral glues of family and nation, duty and discipline." (Auradkar 35). Thamma, the narrator's grandmother is a retired Headmistress and a disciplinarian. Her grandfather was an advocate. She felt that it was necessary to kill Englishmen who were reborn in the grandmother was growing like a honey comb. Her home was inhabited by so many branches of the family that they had become confused about their relationships. In the grandmother's memory theirs was a crowded house, everyone living and eating together, her grandparents, her parents, she and Mayadebi, her Jethmoshai – her father's elder brother – and his family.

The narrator's grandmother spent twelve years in railway colonies of Mandalay. She used to go to Dhaka almost every year. In 1935, her husband who was an engineer died of pneumonia. She was 32, no savings and has never worked. She possessed a bachelor's degree in history from Dhaka University. She got an appointment as a school teacher in Kolkata. She later became the principal of that school and retired as principal. She was born and brought up in Dhaka but came to Calcutta long before partition. In 1949, after the partition Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan.

Thamma plans to go to Dhaka to bring back her uncle Jethmoshi to India. The extent to which she assigns objectivity to her imagined community becomes clear when she asks her son whether she will be able to see the India and East Pakistan from the plane. Her son points out that the barriers become clear enough once she goes to her customs and she will be required to state her nationality, her place of birth, etc. She suddenly becomes confused about her identity: her place of birth does not correspond to her citizenship. She didn't have to fill in any form years back before partition.

As the struggle for independence was gaining momentum people from all walks of life plunged into freedom struggle choosing their own paths like militant nationalism, socialism, and non-violence the grandmother has a secret desire to work for the terrorists. She wanted to help the terrorists in all walks of life like washing, cooking and running errands. In Bengal those days there were secret societies like Anushilan, and Juginter, organizations of militant nationalists with their own networks and home-made bombs with the purpose of liquidating the British officers and Police men who were tools of hindrance to freedom. Many young women nurtured their desire of involving in freedom struggle through secret societies. Thamma also wished to involve herself in the political struggle. During a police raid in college, Thamma was shocked at the arrest of one of her frail-looking classmates who was a member of the secret society at the age of fourteen. Thamma became a silent witness to historical circumstances when the boy was taken to prison.

She struggles to lead an independent life and takes initiative to travel from Dhaka to Rangoon and then to Kolkatta. Thamma thought that the men folk would not be disciplined if there were no women. She did not like Tridib and thought he was a westrel. She admired Robi, Tridib's brother because he had a strong physique and had beaten a notorious bully. Thamma always admired heroic persons. She was fascinated towards the boy who was arrested for his involvement in terrorist activities against British.

In Amitav Ghosh's fiction women are portrayed as symbols of progress. They are generally independent and contribute to the society. They live a life of contentment and contribute to the society.

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