
SOCIAL REALISM IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *SEA OF POPPIES*

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Abstract

Literature is an art and also a means of communication. As the use of language is governed by the socio-cultural context, a close relationship exists between language and contexts. A text that comprises the sequential and symmetrical body of language springs from some socio-cultural context. Therefore it becomes necessary to study a text in relation to the context of the situation. Social Realism insists on exact documentation of the fact of life with sociological insight. Social Realism, basically opposite to the ruling class and its mores, predominantly selects as its subject matter the negative aspects of life under capitalism, labor conflicts, poverty, the greediness of capitalists, the nobility of long-suffering workers. Social Realism is a self-explanatory term. It broadly means realistic depiction of society, delineation of life in its true colors. *Sea of Poppies* by Amitav Ghosh depicts the socio-cultural ethos of India after Independence. The present study aims at analyzing the nature of the social reality reflected in this novel. The author expresses his concern on society by using regional vocabulary. The style of using regional vocabulary gives more emphasis on socio-cultural ethos. He does not want to give an equivalent term for Indian cultural terms. Thus he uses Hindi terms in the novel *Sea of Poppies* which may be difficult for a foreigner to understand but paves the way to reveal the unique feature of our society and their superstitious belief. In order to present the real picture of society, an artist must have a sense of social awareness. Amitav Ghosh has the real concern on the society and thus try to reform society by projecting the issues through the life of Deeti and Kalua. Though they both belong to the different community, they break their bondage which was imposed on them. She has escaped from Sati and taken daring steps to Elop with him to begin a new life. Amitav Ghosh's picturization of the middle class is an authentic expression of his deep insight into the social psyche.

Keywords: *socio-cultural context, ethos, delineation, society*

Literature is an art and also a means of communication. Literary Language and Literary content is a deviation from the ordinary language which is denotative and of a plainer sort.

Unlike mundane discourse, literary discourse is an embellished and foregrounded one. It is the specialized use of content and language that comes under the purview of the study of style. As the use of language is governed by the socio-cultural context, a close relationship exists between language and contexts. A text that comprises the sequential and symmetrical body of language springs from some socio-cultural context. The language of a literary context cannot remain divorced from the context that gives birth to it. Therefore it becomes necessary to study a text in relation to the context of the situation.

Social Realism insists on exact documentation of the fact of life with sociological insight. Social Realism, basically opposite to the ruling class and its mores, predominantly selects as its subject matter the negative aspects of life under capitalism, labor conflicts, poverty, the greediness of capitalists, the nobility of long-suffering workers. Social Realism attempts to use art to protest and dramatize injustice to the working class of capitalist exploitation.

Social Realism is a self-explanatory term. It broadly means realistic depiction of society, delineation of life in its true colors. According to The Oxford Companion to English Literature, "Social Realism is a distinct term used loosely to describe a realistic, objective yet socially aware and detailed method of artistic presentation".

Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh depicts the socio-cultural ethos of India after Independence. In an interview, Amitav Ghosh mentioned that he had started *Sea of Poppies* as the story of indentured immigrants from Bihar. As the story grew in volume and scope, history entered it. The indentured immigration had started in the 1830s, at the end of the decade came the opium war with China and the firm establishment of the opium-based trade of the Raj. Amitav Ghosh selects some significant moments in the lives of ordinary people. These moments focus on the pathos of their situation – the work they perform, the miserable condition in the family. It is implicit or explicit, the criticism made of the social system.

The present study aims at analyzing the nature of the social reality reflected in this novel. The author expresses his concern on society by using regional vocabulary. The style of using regional vocabulary gives more emphasis on socio-cultural ethos. He does not want to give an equivalent term for Indian cultural terms. Thus he uses Hindi terms in the novel *Sea of Poppies* which may be difficult for a foreigner to understand but paves a way to reveal the unique feature of our society and their superstitious belief.

In *Sea of Poppies* Deeti's father wanted her daughter Deeti to be married off as she is the last of his children. As he is very poor, he gives a new thatch as dowry. Though Deeti is not satisfied with Hukam Singh, the groom-to-be, she is unable to tell her expectations. Deeti discovers that on the night, she was given opium by her mother-in-law and raped by her husband's brother which is traditionally accepted as Draupadi culture, in order to hide Hukam's impotency. It is mentioned in the novel 'Deeti as 'Draupadi'; (p.38). She was given opium and became pregnant not by her husband but by Chandan Singh. It is revealed when Chandan Singh

said to her that she would be childless that day if it was not by him. It claims that she proved her virginity which is an exception from the family. It is said *You gave proof of your purity to my family* (p.35). How a woman is treated and asked for virginity is revealed through this. She is considered as an object and not given importance to choose her husband as well as to decide her life. She is forced to live like Draupadi. She feels that Saturn is on her life and thus she has considered it as her fate. Deeti's husband's brother Chandan Singh is the actual father for her daughter Kabutri. When her husband dies, she finds a kind of freedom by facing death by having the ritual called sati on the funeral pyre of her husband due to the fear of the harassment of her husband's brother.

Amitav Ghosh has mentioned about humiliation on the basis of caste by making the character Kalua, the driver of the ox-cart. When Hukam Singh, a high – caste Rajput gets into his cart, Kalua is very careful to keep his face hidden from him.

“.. he made no move to help his passenger and was careful to keep his face hidden from him(p.4).”

Even Kalua is his nickname which means 'Blackie'. He was a man of unusual height and powerful build but black in color.

“But it was his color rather than his size that had earned him the nickname Kalua- 'Blackie' the skin had..” p. 54

The author has shown how he is tortured by his landlords. A human being is humiliated because of the slavery system in post-colonial India. "A well-known baiji, Hirabai, was hired and brought to the kotha where the landlords were staying. This animal should be mated with a horse, not a woman..”p.55

Words like *ghungta* (4), *roti* (6) *beti* (8), *jahaj* 'a ship'(8) *dhoti* (157), *ji* (156) *satua* (156), *Holi* (153) *sahib* (153), 'Sabbi, fixee alla propa' (151), *afeemkhors* (14) 'habitual opium-eaters', Saturn are used to give emphasis on socio-cultural terms.

The phrases 'Kam-o-kai na hoi' 'You think there is no work to be done', *sheje ki chatachati* (119) is dealt with the meaning in the text *Oh, what a licking 119), Jekar khet, tekardhan - he who owns the land, owns the rice*(157) are used and the author has given the meaning immediately after the phrases. Chandan Singh threatened her when her husband is in the sick bed, his brother forces her to accept him and make him happy in order to have a peaceful life in the future. So she wanted to be burnt on Sati. Yet it is outlawed the practice of 'Sati' which has its root in the minds of people. Sati can be practiced voluntarily and some women opt this in order to get rid of the sufferings of the society. Even though it is a cruel ritual, Deeti wants to die on her husband's pyre in order to get rid of the torture of Chandan Singh. It is accepted and it is like committing suicide.

When Kalua, a lower caste man helps her to escape, she is accepting.

“Racing to the mound, Kalua placed the platform against the fire, scrambled to the top, and snatched Deeti from the flames” (p.177).

She is thinking and feeling happy for being alive. “Ka sochawa’ What ‘re you thinking ... thinking how you saved me today.” (p.179)

She breaks the belief of superstitious and caste discrimination and traditional rituals. It is implicit in this novel. The pair starts a new remarried life.

Social realists further believe that the works of art stemming from the attitude characterized as ‘art for art's sake’ is the logical outcome of the conditions of life and art in modern industrial society. They take these artists away from reality which is the essence. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1968:94) profess the sociological approach to Literature. Such traditional literary devices as symbolism and meter are social in their nature... Literature ‘represents’ ‘life’; and ‘life’ is in large measure, a social reality..” In order to present the real picture of society, an artist must have a sense of social awareness. Amitav Ghosh has the real concern on the society and thus try to reform society by projecting the issues through the life of Deeti and Kalua. Though they both belong to a different community, they break their bondage which was imposed on them. She has escaped from Sati and taken daring steps to Elop with him to begin a new life. Amitav Ghosh’s picturization of the middle class is an authentic expression of his deep insight into the social psyche.

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