

Representations of Home/ lessness: A Postcolonial Study of Amitav

Ghosh's Contemporary Novel *The Sea of Poppies*

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Abstract:

The concepts of home and homelessness have grown greater significance in the discipline of literary criticism and literature. Postcolonial studies view the term home critically in light of how it enabled empire-building. This article considers the different representations of home and homelessness in Amitav Ghosh's contemporary novel *The Sea of Poppies* (2008) and enquires into the ideological conditions underpinning an oeuvre that alternately presents the impact of colonialism on the lives of the characters of Ghosh. It sheds light on the stories of migration, displacement, belonging, the quest for identity, and nation and national trauma, all in the context of home and homelessness as experienced by the characters in the novel. The study aims to understand the notions of 'home' and 'homelessness' through a detailed examination to the several causes of homelessness and the state of having a home from the Postcolonial theoretical perspectives. It makes an investigation into finding the reasons that lead to the state of homelessness and also tries to encapsulate the emotions of people who have had a 'home' at one time but are now 'homeless' even though they may have a house in an adopted homeland.

Keywords: (Home, Homelessness, Postcolonial, Amitav Ghosh, dis/placement, diaspora).

التمثيلات المختلفة للوطن والتشرد في رواية أميتاف غوش المعاصرة "بحر الخشخاش"

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المخلص:

لقد اكتسبت مفاهيم الوطن والتشرد أهمية أكبر في حقل النقد الأدبي والأدب. تنظر دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار إلى مصطلح الوطن بشكل نقدي في ضوء كيفية تمكينه من بناء الإمبراطورية. يتناول هذا المقال التمثيلات المختلفة للوطن والتشرد في رواية أميتاف غوش المعاصرة "بحر الخشخاش" (2008) وتثير أسئلة عن الظروف الأيديولوجية التي يقوم عليها هذا العمل الفني الذي يعرض بالتناوب تأثير الاستعمار على حياة شخصيات الروائي غوش. ويسلط هذا البحث الضوء على قصص الهجرة والنزوح والانتماء والبحث عن الهوية وصدمة الأمة والوطن، كل ذلك في سياق الوطن والتشرد كما عاشته شخصيات الرواية. تهدف الدراسة إلى فهم مفهومي "الوطن" و"التشرد" من خلال دراسة تفصيلية للأسباب المتعددة للتشرد والوطن في سياق نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار. تركز الدراسة على التحقيق في الأسباب التي تؤدي إلى حالة التشرد ومشاعر الأشخاص الذين كان لديهم "وطن" في وقت ما ولكنهم الآن "بلا مأوى" على الرغم من أنه قد يكون لديهم وطن في منطقة متبناة وهي البلد الأم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (الوطن، التشرد، نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، أميتاف غوش، المكانية واللامكانية، الشتات).

I. Introduction

'Home' is seen as a place where one lives, and 'homelessness', on the contrary, would mean not having anywhere to live. Home and homelessness are notions created by culture and society (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994: Somerville, 1992). Therefore, home is considered by many as an expression of one's identity and provides a sense of cultural belongingness, and it is often likened to a nation as one's homeland. In modern cultural discussions, the relationship between the concepts of home and nation has confronted much interrogation. Therefore, the premise drawn is that home not only approves the commanding and imposing power of the nation but also becomes the symbolic and delegated space through which this power is distributed. Hence, the fundamental implications of home and nation in modern society become considerably interconnected. Thus, a "nation" becomes a

"homeland" while the "home", in turn, becomes a space that replicates the "natural" authority and social order of the nation.

The terms home and homelessness are dialogic and cannot be used in a vacuum, in as much as to say that they exist as a response in anticipation to each other. Home is seen to provide a spatial, temporal, and socio-cultural order. It serves to respond to one's spatial and temporal identity. It connects people to a place, to their past and future. It reflects spatial and social dialectics and also reveals the dialectics of appropriation. On the other hand, homelessness reflects postcolonial issues such as lack of identity, the hope of return, rootlessness, chaos, hopelessness, degeneration, and denigration. It is reminiscent of colonial issues like slavery and indentured laborers. It erodes communal, social, religious, political, and economic space. It results from politics, bureaucracy, and commoditization of the means of production. Thus, the roots of homelessness leading to the evolution of the so-called diasporic community can be traced back to the era of colonialism and imperialism, which established itself in Indian English literature (Hutson and Liddiard, 2004, p. 62).

Postcolonial Indian writers occupy a great spot in the history of world literature in general and English fiction in particular. Famous among the Indian writers writing in English in the second generation are writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, and others. Each, in his/her way, has contributed to developing Indian fiction in English. Though most have experimented with themes about Indians living in foreign lands, describing their trials and tribulations, they have kept specific idiosyncratic differences alive in their own style. Like other postcolonial writers, Amitav Ghosh (1956-) is a renowned Indian postcolonial novelist whose works address "India's colonial and post-colonial experiences and go more for the local than the global" (Koban, 2019, p.2). Ghosh is one such writer of the Indian diaspora who has carried on the baton easily and with panache. Ghosh's novels reflect several postcolonial issues, such as

the problems of hostility and displacement, entitlement and belonging, and the quest for identity. John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2010) maintains:

... as if colonial values are no longer to be reckoned with. It does not define a radically new historical era, nor does it herald a brave new world where all the ills of the colonial past have been cured. Rather, postcolonialism recognizes both historical *continuity* and *change*. On the one hand it acknowledges that the material realities and modes of representation common to colonialism are still very much with us today, even if the political map of the world has changed through decolonization. But on the other hand, it asserts the promise, the possibility, and the continuing necessity of change, while also recognizing that important challenges and changes have been achieved (33).

Ghosh's novels document the history of ordinary people and how their simple lives change into complex existential problems. Through his works, Ghosh has defied all borders, be it with themes or with his protagonists who are constantly in search of their own selves or identities. Noting the immense authority borne by Ghosh in the literary world, Brinda Bose (2003) writes:

"Amitav Ghosh today cheerfully, if humbly bears numerous mantles of responsibility in the world of the book (case): anthropologist, sociologist, novelist, essayist, travel-writer, teacher, and slips in and out of these veiled categories with admirable aplomb." (13)

As a postcolonial novelist, Ghosh is most concerned with the history of postcolonial conditions. His works are not confined to India but are transnational and historical-anthropological. Ghosh also picks historical themes and digs deep into those events to enact the human condition. He appeared on the literary scene around the 1980s and is still engaged in his creative work. Ghosh was born in the year 1956 in Kolkata. He has his education in Delhi and Oxford, where he graduated in social anthropology. He has so far written nine novels, two non-fiction, and three collections of essays. Following is the list of

his novels, chronologically: *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2005), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), *Flood of Fire* (2015), *Gun Island* (2019), and *Jungle Nama* (2021). His non-fiction: *In an Antique Land* (1992) *Countdown* (1999), and his Essays: "Dancing in Cambodia and At Large in Bunna" (1998) "The Imam and the Indian" (2002) "Incendiary Circumstances" (2006).

An essential aspect of Ghosh's novels is the amount of interaction that is left with reality and its open-endedness. Several ideological strains and conflicts are left unanswered for the readers to interpret. His novels are polyphonic, and as Bakhtin (1984) suggests in *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

[Ghosh] excludes all one-sided dogmatic seriousness, and does not permit any single point of view, any polar extreme of life or of thought to be absolutized. All one-sided seriousness, all one sided pathos is handed over to the heroes, but the author, who causes them all to collide in the 'great dialogue' of the novel, leaves that dialogue open and puts no finalizing period at the end (165).

Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* is a historical novel chronicling colonial times with its setting in countries like Burma, India, and Malaya. It questions economic issues and what constitutes a nation and national identity. Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2008. It forms the first volume of what is supposed to be the Ibis Trilogy. Set in history prior to the First Opium War, the novel depicts the journey of several Indians of different castes and religions, ethnicities, and nationalities, all being sent as indentured laborers to the island nation of Mauritius. The second volume in the Ibis Trilogy is *River of Smoke* (2011). From the details given about the Indian indentured laborers, the novel describes the lives of other characters and also about the opium trade in China. The plot is set a year before the Opium War in the small Chinese town of Fanqui, which foreigners

use to trade opium with local Chinese traders. The final of the Ibis Trilogy, *Flood of Fire*, appeared in 2015.

Understanding the Home/lessness in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

The concepts of home and homelessness have been significant themes in fictional narratives. Perhaps Charles Dickens's writings are exemplars of such themes. The Dickensian perspective of home and homelessness comes from a structured and hierarchical understanding of the society and social mores of the time. It looks at home and homelessness from the viewpoints of society, polity, economics, and human needs. Home provides identity, order, sense, and security. Homelessness is a lack of identity, orderliness, meaningfulness, security, and safety. This is a recurrent theme in the writings of the Indian diasporic writer Amitav Ghosh. Ghosh is undoubtedly one of the most prolific and vital writers writing in English about India and Indians across the globe. His novels evoke brilliance in the narrative style, and at the same time, he has been able to realign different thematics in his works. His novels are woven in threads of myth, mystery, fact, and fiction in that the historical events and forces that have shaped those events occupy the central position. Though his novels revolve around a particular understanding of India, his narratives traverse different locations of the world. For instance, Ghosh is both local and global in his perspective.

As an anthropology student, Ghosh is always interested in colonialism for its distortions and historical wrongs to interrogate colonial anthropological knowledge. Maria Elena Martos Huesow Tites, In her essay "The Subaltern Ethnographer: Blurring the Boundaries through Arnitav Ghosh's Writings" (2007):

Just as Ghosh is deeply interested in colonial history and orientalist ethnography as native constructions serving nationalist purposes, so his choice of spatial setting and temporal frame is highly relevant in as much as he describes a story of multicultural society in medieval times (58).

Padmini Mongia (2003) has drawn attention to a similar fact:

By offering a glimpse into the cosmopolitan, humane circuit of relations prevalent in medieval India up to the moment when European dominance via colonialism enters its history, Ghosh poses a postcolonial challenge via the pre-colonial [...]. Although European colonialism and imperialism have been written as having a historical inevitability to them. Ghosh's precolonial world questions that inevitability. The world he creates reveals the possibility of futures and histories other than the one we have come to regard as inevitable (84-85).

However, colonialism had opened avenues for trade and commerce. Yet it had also displaced multitudes - some voluntary, others forced. There is also the story of the partition of the country. In redrawing the boundaries and creating new nations, the colonial Government indeed created many partitions in the form of losing one's home and hearth and also those threads of memory associated with a home. There is a perpetual quest for home in Ghosh's novels, which is multi-dimensional.

Ghosh's Sea of Poppies is the first part of what will be the 'Ibis trilogy'. The story is set in a period just before the Opium War between Britain and China, on the banks of the River Ganges and in Calcutta. Symbolically, all the characters are made to resemble poppy seeds coming in large numbers as if making a sea of poppies, but each seed knows nothing of its future.

The *Sea of Poppies* (hereafter to be mentioned as *SOP*) begins with Deeti, a simple villager married to the crippled Hukim Singh, who works in the Ghazipur Opium Factory. With her husband's death, she is destined to die too as a 'Sati'. However, an oxman from the neighboring village named Kalua rescues her, and the two flee to save their lives. To keep themselves out of the reach of their family members for the unacceptable sin they have committed, they board the ship *Ibis*, which is bound for 'Mareech' (Mauritius), carrying with it a group of indentured laborers who are basically prisoners of fate in one way or the other. The *Ibis* is a melting pot of different kinds of people from different origins and

racés. Zachary Reid, the American sailor born of a slave mother and a white father, holds the reigns of the Ibis and is supported by the head of the lascars, Serang Ali. The ship carries with it the unfortunate Neel RatanHaldar, the Zamindar of Rakshali, who was found guilty in a sham trial orchestrated by Mr. Burnham, from whom he had borrowed money to be used in the opium trade. He was being sent on seven years' Imprisonment to Mauritius. While in prison at Calcutta, he meets Ah Fat, who is half-Chinese and half-Parsi, who is also to be deported to Mauritius. The ship becomes home for people like Paulette, who escapes the clutches of Mr. Burnham, her guardian, who behaves unseemingly with her and forces her to marry the much older Justice Kendalbushe. Along with her goes her childhood friend Jodu. Unaware of what happens to them on the journey and in Mauritius, all these people lock themselves in the chains of destiny, sharing each other's joys and sorrows as they battle their existence through much strife and bloodshed on board the ship Ibis. The story ends with Nee!, Ah Fatt, Jodu, Kalua, and Serang Ali escaping from the ship, not knowing where the sea waves will carry them.

As such, the story of *SOP* becomes the story of homeless beings that are carried by the currents of their fate to unknown destinations. Their story reflects the multitudes that crossed the seas to create new identities for themselves in a strange land and make it their home away from their original home instead of being taken much from them. Even though all of them belong to different strata of society, they revolt against the setup and carve a new course for themselves, thereby creating unique identities. However, this identity formation is volatile as there are several identity reconstructions in their lives over time. Weinreich (1986) writes, "A person's identity is defined as the totality of one's self~construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future" (299). Weinreich's definition helps understand a person's identity in their past, present, and future context. Similarly, in *SOP*, each character tries to

connect to memories of their past and present. This is a typical attitude of people who seek comfort in discussing their roots when displaced.

In *SOP* Ghosh, migration is a displacement process to get cheap labor for the colonizers. The predicament of the workers is unknown as they may be subjected to torture and death at the hands of the colonizers. The British colonizers forced or created such situations that people had to migrate to fill their coffers. In contrast, a few, like the characters in *SOP*, were forced to migrate because of circumstances beyond their control. The fear and apprehension of being sent to an unknown land from where to return may be impossible is a feeling well reciprocated by the inmates of the Ibis. Giving a definition of who the indentured laborers or 'girmityas' are, Ghosh comments: "They (girmityas) were so called because, in exchange for money, their names were entered on 'girmits' - agreements written on pieces of paper. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworlds" (*SOP*. P. 72).

In a homeless situation, where danger lurks at every corner, it is natural that the characters try to reconstruct their identities. The fear of being recognized is paramount. Again, they are eager to start their lives afresh. Hence, they shape their identity based on these conditions in the Ibis. Thus, Deeti becomes Aditi, Kalua becomes Maddow Colver, Zachary Reid becomes Malurn Zikri, Jodu becomes Azad Naskar, Paulette becomes Putleshwari or Pugly, and Neel Rattan Haldar becomes Neel. For Deeti, her new name is more than reassuring to her:

It was on her lips to identify herself as Kabutari-ki-ma, the name by which she had been known ever since her daughter's birth... her proper, given name was the first to come to mind and since it had never been used by anyone, it was as good as any. Aditi, she said softly, I am Aditi (*SOP*. P. 233).

She takes her name as the mythical Aditi, who was granted a boon to live her life once again. She has escaped from her previous life, almost from the clutches of death, and now has been given another chance to live her life once again with a new identity.

In her review of *SOP*, Gaiutra Bahadur (2008) remarks that Ghosh has excavated the character of Deeti from the pages of Sir Grierson's Dairy, where the latter mentions of a female coolie's father living by the Ganges stating that he has "denied having any such relative, and probably she had gone wrong and been disowned by him". The historical record mentions this woman with a name, a processing number, and the year of emigration. What Ghosh does is to recreate the entire story of Deeti's life by his vision. In fact, Ghosh admits, "if history is of interest to me it is because it provides instances of unusual and extraordinary predicaments" (Hawley, 2005, p.66).

Deeti has been much wronged in life. Violated by her own brother-in-law on her wedding night, being forced to die as a Sati on her husband's funeral pyre, she has had no comfort in life. Having eloped with Kalua, the untouchable ox-man she lands in Calcutta to board the Ibis to ferry her away from her misfortunes. Bahadur (2008) comments that "many of the women who fled India as coolies were indeed upper-caste widows, but there were no brawny heroes to snatch them from their fates. They simply left alone - an act dramatic enough for that time and place that it shouldn't need the enhancements of pulp plot". Deeti is aware of what her situation is going to be like once she becomes a girmitiya coolie in the Ibis. She knows that she is leaving her home and family forever, so much so that she may not see them anymore.

She tried to imagine what it would be like to be in their place, to know that you were forever an outcaste; to know that you would never again enter your father's house; that you would never throw your arms around your mother; never eat a meal with your sisters and brothers; never feel the cleansing touch of Ganga. And to know also that for the rest of your days you would eke out a living on some wild, demon-plagued land (*SOP*, p.72).

Deeti's condition is reflective of a patriarchal and dogmatic society that has oppressed women beyond measure. Women never enjoyed any freedom, and no choice was allowed for them. They become homeless even in their own homes. Enlisting such women in the indentured laborer list if amounts to escape the torture at home and homeland; the future is equally uncertain. This uncertainty renders her perpetually homeless. Her story from the feminist point of view is very poignant in that it gives a new meaning to homelessness.

In the postmodern sense, the term identity is fluid and discursive. It is not a solid and stable entity. As such, it can be changed at any time. To alter one's identity does embody the "fundamental me; I can have more than one identity, depending on situations" claim Middleton and Walsh (1995). They further state, "We are inundated by a multiplicity of clamoring voices proffering alternative identities. This inevitably results in us making different choices" (50). It is, therefore, appropriate that Paulette Lambert, an orphaned, homeless French girl, veils herself and runs away from her benefactor Mr. Burnham, who tries to exploit her to fulfill his carnal lust.

In her desire to start a new life, Paulette becomes a part of the Ibis, disguising herself as a Brahmin's daughter with 'ghungta' as a means of camouflage. She is able to create this identity because she feels more at home with the Indian language, clothes, food, and its people:

... she had also disguised her appearance in a number of other ways: her feet were lacquered with bright vennilion *alta*: her hands and anns were covered with intricate, henna designs that left very little of skin visible; and under the cover of her veil, the line of her jaw was obscured by large, tasseled earrings... (*SOP*, p. 359).

Perhaps the strength she has invigorates her when she talks of her journey back to France and recreates as if she listens "out her father's voice. How wrong he was! How mistaken he had always been in his understanding of her, making her into that which he himself wished to be, rather than seeing her for the ordinary creature that she was" (*SOP*, p.137). However, with resources at hand which can take her only to Mauritius, she gladly accepts it as it is

the island where her mother was born - "it is like her native-place. There, she can cope with the joys and agonies of life" (*SOP*: 137). Her return to Mauritius may be a homecoming, but the uncertainty lingers on whether that home still could welcome her.

Though the characters find themselves in a new environment, they try to adjust to the new ways through assimilation and biculturalism. They struggle to settle in the unknown territory by mixing the foreign with the native, thereby reducing all possible gaps. Zachary Reid finds himself casting according to the new relationship that he forges with Serang Ali, the chief of the lascars. With the help of Ali, Zachary is able to transform himself into a 'pukka sahib', perhaps a desire in him to move away from the discriminating, racist condition he is born with. It is more of a desire to be one among the seamen. Thus, he finds himself at ease in adapting their speech "as if his oddly patterned speech had unloosed his own tongue" (*SOP*, p.16). His identity change is similar to that of Paulette's integration with India and its culture.

The fostering of friendship and a common relationship based on fellow feelings remove the socio-economic differences among the inmates of Ibis. While the sea helps in erasing their past, the ship invigorates a new sense of life. Anupama Arora observes that the Ibis, "gets invested with new symbolic meanings by the migrants and is remade into a vehicle of transformation from which new selves and identities emerge. Different characters feel the 'birth of a new existence' on the ship" (38). Ghosh writes, "When you step on that ship, to go across the Black Waters (Indian Ocean), you and your fellow transportees will become your own brotherhood: will be your own village, your own family, your own caste" (*SOP*: 314). This new relationship culminates in their calling each other 'jahaz-bhai' and 'jahaz-bahen': 'ship brothers' and 'ship sisters'. This relationship reflects their desire to be a family, which they have been forced to leave because of the disrespect they receive in their homeland. Paulette sums up:

On the boat of pilgrims, no one can lose casle and every one is the same: it's like taking a boat to the temple of Jagannath, in PurL From now on, and forever afterwards. we will all

be ship-siblings - *jahaz-bhais and jahaz-bahens* to each other. There is no difference between us (*SOP*, p. 356).

Whenever people migrate from their homeland, the sense of loss is always overwhelming, even if the same is reconstructed. The exodus of people as indentured labourers from South Asia to countries like Fiji and Mauritius has created instances of hybridity and multiculturalism, which Ghosh explains well in *SOP*.

In the *SOP*, Ghosh makes a scathing attack on the system of indentured laborers carried out very skillfully by the British colonizers. Once the slave trade was declared illegal, traders like Mr. Burnham shifted their interests to other profit areas. He says, "when God closes one door, he opens another? When the doors of freedom were closed to the African, the Lord opened them to a tribe that was yet more needful of it - the Asiatick" (*SOP*, p. 79). However, one similarity remained between the old and new forms of trade - a huge amount of profit accrued from the shameless exploitation of colonies in the name of better prospects. While the African slaves were sold, the Asian or Indian laborers were shipped as indentured immigrants. The criteria on which the ginnitiyas were selected was that "they [had to be young, able bodied and willing to work" (*SOP*, p.205). Jodu's presentation of the evocative picture of the Ibis meant to transfer the ginnitiyas is reminiscent of the African slaves being transported across the Atlantic:

He picked up the chains, and on looking more closely at the bracelet-like clasps, he became convinced that it was indeed meant for a human wrist or ankle. Now, running his hands along the floor, he saw that there were smooth depressions in the wood, of a shape and size that could only have been made by human beings, over prolonged periods of time. The depressions were so close to each other as to suggest a great press of people, packed close together, like merchandise on a vendor's counter (*SOP*; 143).

In fact, the Ibis was a ship that earlier transported slaves, and now it has taken the work of ferrying indentured laborers: "A hold that was designed to carry slaves will serve just as

well to carry coolies and convicts" (*SOP*, p.80). Mr. Burnham represents traders who have made a considerable profit by transporting convicts and are now making headway into the business of transporting indentured laborers. Anderson (2009) shows the "relationship between the political economy of convictism and indenture" (95). Anderson also remarks, "The practices and experiences of indenture are best understood primarily in relation to the institutions and imaginative discourses that framed the well-established contemporary colonial practice of penal transportation as a process of social dislocation and rupture" (94). Like the slaves and convicts, the *girmitiyas* are confined to depots, and once they are on board the *Ibis*, they are heavily guarded to quell any form of mutiny. Lisa Lowe (2006) opines that the "global intimacies" of Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. "emerged a modern racialized division of labor" (192) as the Asian indentured laborers "were used instrumentally... as a collective figure. a fantasy of 'free' yet racialized and indentured labour, at a time when the possession of body, work, life, and death was foreclosed to the enslaved and the indentured alike" (194).

However, by the end of the novel, the ship becomes a home for the *girmitiyas* and all the lascars. It is their only shelter from all problems and, at the same time, their only refuge. If it is, on the one hand, a symbol of their escape, then on the other, it safeguards them from the onslaughts of the world which has been so rude and cruel to them. In the words of Jatiya Sengupta (2002), "Ghosh's rendering of British colonialism and its aftermath ... is an interplay of fact and fiction in an illusory place of imagination to create an awareness of the experiential reality of the postcolonial worlds" (26). It is a fact that at home, one is able to hold on to one's culture and identity steadfastly. But with a change in 'address' of residence, and that too, a total dislocation from the 'parent' country brings in or raises questions concerning loss and confusion. At times, the loss of identity and culture can be attributed to the desire or 'zeal' among those displaced to become one with the 'residing' country. The displaced tend to forgo their culture and identity to receive equal patronage as those received by the country's original inhabitants. Consequently, this level of

homelessness could be self-willed or situational. Multiculturalism creates an ethos for a new cultural identity but not a complete break from the past. In the *SOP*, the characters change their identity to save themselves. They become homeless out of their own will and rootless. So, the question of being homeless here is more self-willed than situational.

For the women characters in *SOP*, homelessness is a forced condition thrust upon them by the situation. They are all but cases of estrangement, exile, and escapism. Nevertheless, the question here is whether the displaced ever reach their home or remain homeless - be it in Deeti and Paulette in the *SOP*. The fates of Deeti and Paulette remain unknown, as much as it is unpredictable with the sea.

Diaspora appears in Ghosh's novel as a reflection of the issues of home and homelessness that emanate from his thoughts. In the words of Patrick Iroegbu, in his essay "Migration and Diaspora" (2010) writes, that it is a "term applied to a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains not only sentiments but equally material links with its land of origin". Diaspora refers to any displacement of people from their native land in search of better opportunities in life. The diaspora community may have a faint desire to return to their homeland, but circumstances may not permit them to do so. Ghosh also deals with another form of diaspora in his novel, *SOP*. Partition of the countries led to the creation of a refugee community who were seen as outsiders and not allowed to be assimilated into the mainstream. For them, the displacement is not voluntary but rather forced upon them. They have no choice but are compelled to accept a foreign land as their home because it provides shelter for them.

Conclusion

The works of Ghosh are in tandem with what McLeod perceives as postcolonialism. Gosh looks with concern and sympathy upon those who are marginalized in society by circumstances rather than by the mighty. His characters fervently assert to get back their identity, distinctiveness, and self-esteem. Ghosh's depiction of home and homelessness emanate from real historical incidents, though they are tailored to suit the needs of a

fictional plot. Unlike writers like Khushwant Singh, Bisham Sahni, and Chaman Nahal, Ghosh portrays a very subdued side of the partition of India, which rendered thousands homeless.

The *Sea of Poppies* examines the alleged abuses in the recruitment of indentured servants from India who end up on a ship bound for British plantations to Mauritius. As the stories of different occupants of the ship get merged, the ship 'Ibis' is seen transformed into a country. Different characters feel a re-birth for themselves on the ship. Deeti is drawn to Paulette's re-imagining of their situation and sees a new family being born on the ship. The ship is, therefore, seen as the 'mai-bap' of Deeti, an assertion that the 'Ibis' is the 'mother-father' of her new family. This new family is an extension of their original family but is very much unlike the longer, as concerns like that of caste do not bind it. The new family is attached by shared experiences and the desire to be together in the face of all obstacles and hindrances in the new land. Hence, they call themselves 'jahazbhais' and 'jahazbahens' - 'ship brothers' and 'ship sisters'. They creatively hold on to new familial relations that give them the strength to survive and tie them to each other. This is the essence of holding on to one another when displaced and made homeless. This is the elixir to remain alive in homeless surroundings.

Thus, Ghosh's novels depict the result of such historical events that befall his characters' lives. At the same time, Ghosh describes their joys and sorrows, fears and apprehensions, pains and sufferings, which they undergo at different levels of time and space. His characters hail from divergent socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. Very realistically, Ghosh presents in his novel the historical events such as the British annexation of India, World War II, Japanese invasion of countries like India, partition of India, separation of Pakistan and Bangladesh, communal violence stemming from such partitions, and colonial effects in countries like India. Ghosh observes with an eagle's view the sufferings and sacrifices, trials and tribulations of those who suffered because of such histories, and he records them with much authenticity. Such episodes in history left a

considerable section of the human population rootless. This caused many to migrate and stay in exile, forming a class of people who began to feel that their very identity was questioned. Their adopted homeland's influence has affected their language, religion, and culture, leading to their hybridization.

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