

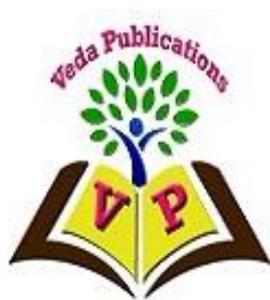


POST-MODERNIST MANIFESTATION OF TRIBULATIONS AND SOCIETAL DEGRADATION- A STUDY OF AMITAV GHOSH'S *SEA OF POPPIES* AND SHASHI THAROOR'S *SHOW BUSINESS*

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ABSTRACT



The Post-Modern existence of man is a mere shame to the society. Caste and class based discrimination, disorderly life, valueless being, societal degeneration are the hallmarks. One must not merely exist, but live life to the fullest and also handle it as per the situation demands. Artifice or showy life is short-lived whereas a holistic or essence filled one is a fulfilling experience. The didactic quality of both these novels Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and Shashi Tharoor's *Show Business* presents man coming closer to the Supreme Being and syncs with the creator at all times. There is nothing greater than the creator's gift to man called life and also the wonderful qualities like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control and faith are to be blossomed.

Keywords: *Post-Modernism, Social life, Marital Disharmony, Human Existence.*

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INTRODUCTION

Post-Modernism not only is a revolutionary movement breaking away from all things - traditional and conventional - nevertheless the remains of which is a society without barriers or rules, free thinking, goal based life and the like. Social values and order disappear and meaninglessness begins creeping in. What remains is mass culture, defects in the institution of family, basic life and finally professional life too begins bearing the brunt of the tensions that modern day living brought. What is said is never meant and what is meant is never said too. Aporia or the undecidedness of things is the current

phenomenon of society's doings. Lack of decision making or a just and decent living is non-existent. In order to elaborate on the nullity of life in the post-modern era, for my study I have taken up two very contemporary novels- Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and Shashi Tharoor's *Show Business*.

Deeti, the central woman protagonist of *Sea of Poppies* was a very dutiful woman and too conscious of her responsibilities towards the husband and other members of the family. All that a traditional Indian woman was expected to do was found in Deeti and also performed. Husband, as equal to the master was being followed and adhered



to. Deeti, however was the most suffering of the lot and good things for this good person were not in store. The very nature of life is; ironical to such an extent that experiences vary from individual to individual and also the positive and negative characteristics of it. Kalua, the low caste ox-cart driver was out of a superstition to keep his face covered lest it beget bad luck on the high caste Rajput Hukam Singh. Later Kalua turns out to be the hero of the novel saving his damsel in distress from societal condemnation and rot.

The savior of the world Jesus Christ died for all humanity's sins but all he got was dejection. It is only after one's death that one's true deeds come out, sadly when that person lives in the world, their life or doings never get acknowledged. Similarly in Tharoor's novel *Show Business* Ashok Banjara the chief protagonist's dear wife Maya was more than obedient and nice to her husband's needs. She serves him as a faithful dog would serve its master.

Women are always the suffering lot in any marriage. Despite her brother-in-law raping her and getting her pregnant society does not punish him or raise an accusing finger. On the other hand if a woman indulges in any crime of promiscuity, then she is either beaten or in the Islamic law condemned and then killed. Her very essence of living is threatened. The woman, Deeti suffers psychologically to such an extent that even her own husband is helpless and is not aware of his own brother raping and assaulting his wife. Maya, Ashok's wife too suffers both mentally and emotionally as her husband is in the world of glamour, the tinselville where emotions and all human feeling is aborted, only artifice prevails under the arlights.

In the typical filmy style Ashok sings to her:

"We're one small happy family
We live and love together
We're one small happy family;
In sunshine and bad weather." (42:5)

The actual fact is he never stays with her to experience what his wife goes through. It is easy for a person to merely enquire of one's well-being without actually doing any service to them.

Lip-service is not always real service. Routine life was the predominant nature of rural women folk in India and so was Deeti, to perform all home-related duties. The character of Maya in *Show Business* too kept all her likes and dislikes apart and married Ashok to live a dutiful life. Life on the decks of a ship was not home-like for the passengers who were going to Mauritius. In fact, sea sickness was not ruled out. They suffered through and through and Zachary Reid a passenger on board gave up his

comforts and luxurious life to suffer on a ship with other passengers. He learns to control his tongue on ship, in order to do this he his mother instills a kind of habit which was-to say five things of praise every day. To control one's tongue is a great task. The mind should be in congruence as well as the mental makeup too.

Emotions are one thing which cannot be righted all the time. Man's personality suffers when there is a gap or indecisiveness between his thinking and actions and the society's judgments. In psychology this condition is called Co native Affective behavior wherein emotions' arising from a particular individual does not match social values.

Ashok in *Show Business* gets intimate with his reel life heroine Abha in real life too. Abha here traps him and manages to get a body massage for herself. Without any forethought he resists to the temptation of Abha's body. The gap or the dilly-dallying of Ashok's mind and Abha's body are oscillating between two extremes. One's mind does not want to cooperate with another's body but as Newton's law goes, "every action has an equal and opposite reaction" and so it is with human life as such.

A very torturous and inhuman treatment was meted out to Kalua the low caste chamar man. Two mounted men came to him and flogged him and pressed his groin against the horse. What a worse torture it would have been for the man and they also injure Kalua's genitals only for the reason that he lost a wrestling match.

Intense and immense pain and suffering would make a man forget his own breath. Kalua is left lying unconscious. The three men escape too. Why is the law not tough on those who cause pain and sorrow to the underprivileged sections of society? Why do some undergo pleasure and some pain when God has made all men equal and equal partners in sharing happiness too. Of what use is education if it can't improve lives?

To rescue a fallen man (Kalua) a fallen woman (Deeti) comes. Most often we tend to find equals only mingle with each other in society. How degraded it must be for Deeti to rescue a naked man and that too a stranger! Tormented and devastated she felt but her goodness and sense of humanity drove her to take this daring step. Her one gesture saved Kalua's life and in turn Deeti gets a rich reward of a new life in resurrection and union with Kalua. Her future is carved by destiny in Kalua. If we help someone in need and pain our blessings and rewards will be manifold. If we further make the sufferer,



suffer then sooner or later we would be at the receiving end.

In *Show Business* too, Abha the actress delivers twin boys but is all alone in the ward struggling along with her mother. Her husband never comes and offers his support. Marital life demands that the husband and wife share in happiness and sorrow but in the end it is the wife who does all the maternal duties. The art of bearing and rearing is the mother's burden.

Society degrades women on the other hand, who do not display interest in the care of children as well as home matters. Men believe that it's a women's arena alone. The vows of mutual-sharing in marriage ends after the birth of a baby. It is the mother who toils and toils.

Tormenting a person after a wound is inflicted is more dangerous than screaming bad words or using filthy language. Here in the *Sea of Poppies* we experience Chandan Singh brother-in-law of Deeti constantly jeering and making sexual advances on her and her husband cum mother-in-law are deaf and blind to this. How very escapist kind of a mentality they have?

Rather, the institution of family is becoming a corrupt one here and hence turning degenerative. Deeti's own husband is merely a protector on paper but in actuality an accused person, as he is his wife's perpetrator of crime indirectly. The readers always see Deeti struggling for her survival within the four walls of her house itself!

Pranay, a character in *Show Business* talks of Maya's virginity openly to Ashok despite she being Ashok's wife. Despite her husband Ashok listening patiently, Pranay goes on to say that pre-maritally he took Maya to bed. How insulting and embarrassing for a husband to listen to his wife's pre-marital pursuits or sex-life? The common thing of secrecy and respect towards the husband was not catered to, by the friend Pranay himself. In fact, Pranay goes on to emphasize that Maya and he were very close to each other.

One who lusts after merely a woman's body does not seek true love; in fact this person is not interested in the woman's soul or heart, likewise the same woman would not accept or develop a liking for this man too. A woman's heart goes all out to the man who loves her the most psychologically. Maya here doesn't reciprocate Pranay's love at all and feels nothing for him.

The Indian society does not approve of a man just lusting after a woman; if he does so he ought to marry her and experience life together. A true woman's soul is her mind too.

Women's coming back to movies post marriage is a very debatable question in *Show Business*. The man is blamed for this-Ashok Banjara. There are many societal no-no's for a career for women post marriage. Firstly there are bodily inabilities- the flexibility would be lesser and lesser after a woman delivers, secondly her child would have to do away with the mother and thirdly lot of strain has to be handled and the husband would be affected too with the wife's frequent travels and extreme levels of socialization with other male actors and also the roles that would be offered. All the actions and requirements of the tinsel town would not match the otherwise practical world of reality that the woman lives in. There is a lacuna between expectation and reality. Hence the inadequacy of women having a successful career in films post marriage is inevitable.

Nob Kissin a character in the *Sea of Poppies* was entrusted the duty of taking his widowed aunt on a pilgrimage to Brindavan. He fulfilled it with all his heart. Never did they even have any impure feelings for each other. The spiritual love or Agape (in Christian terminology) prevailed among them. The widow Taramony even proclaims to Nob Kissin, "You will be my Krishna and I will be your Radha". The ultimate end of all love should be to attain the highest spiritual ideal i.e. drawing closer to one's creator which is all endearing. All other forms of love are temporal. Ashok Banjara's psyche suffers all the time. The minute he sees a new actress he wants to go to bed with her and then is very bothered about satisfying his passion.

Deeti in the *Sea of Poppies* finds solace in Kalua's comforting arms. She gratifies herself from Kalua's caressing. He saves her from dying in the Sati fire. What started off as seeking love becomes sacrificing love and then finally marital love and comforting too. Impure or sexual love should convert itself to unselfish love; this is the real value of human life. Merely running away from life's problems will not aid in solving it. Life has to be faced despite its wraths. Deeti leaves her daughter with her brother and goes away. The next time she comes to see her Kabutri does not recognize her and instead claims it to be a ghost. Hence we see naturally how an own daughter fails to recognize her mother. From the beginning all Deeti's ties were severely severed from her family itself. If a mother does not truly love her offspring then the response would be in the negative. How can one deny what is one's own? This is how societal degradation sets in. Mother and daughter should live together until the daughter marries.



In Show Business of Tharoor we realize that Ashok also shoves his responsibility to his wife and children aside and lusts after Mehnaz Elahi, the new Bollywood actress. Ignoring one's responsibility completely would lend that person in the midst of umpteen problems and finally land him in such a juncture that is full of complexities.

Deeti and Kalua go from place to place bearing all the insults and also their identity was at stake. Life was started afresh although without any knowledge or certainty. Deeti's life gets a new awakening all the time but no proper resuscitation in the end. Ashok Banjara was a split personality in career and life too. In life he was shuttling between women and wife. In career he was an actor par excellence but joined the political bandwagon and hence his identity went mismatched. Life has to remain constant even though the ride is not smooth all the time.

Smugglers are villains; this was what a character in *Show Business* said. We live in an Indian society where people are branded by their profession. Hence the bad or vile side of people continue to have such an identity only. In the *Sea of Poppies* also Kalua runs away from Deeti on the ship but is discovered by Bhyro Singh. Deeti was selected to be the head of the bridal family on the ship. After Deeti having a chequered married life Kalua rescues her and brings her a newly wedded life. He is the reflection or representation of a complete married giver of life. Hence what one's profession is reflects one's personality too. Excessive suffering ultimately brings in vitality, vigour and lost happiness to the epicenter of life itself.

Show Business has a very practical approach of addressing the current societal problem of own children not taking care of their parents in old age. Children don't love their parents as much as their parents do. Ashok's father advises him to live a good life and be a decent husband. Ashok did not fulfil his husbandly duties or his fatherly or son's duties. This novel does not find a solution to the problem. It just addresses it and brings to the awareness of the readers. One who can't fulfil one's duty cannot fulfill any other's. His parents also question him about the extramarital affairs he has with the heroines. He replies that it's a societal convention in Bollywood then Ashok replies in the affirmative but his parents say that his values should not be compromised. The world of movies has no inherent human values in it and it is a problem to have a career in this. This is a real pressing problem. Old age homes are mushrooming in every nook and corner of India. It is a very sad fact that children do not take care of their

own parents and leave them struggling all alone. That's when the 'empty nest syndrome' prevails and they set out to live in them.

On the similar lines in the *Sea of Poppies* Deeti and Kalua were married without any ritual and hence sanctity was amiss in their lives. To a certain extent the society's laws and rituals are all for a wealthy cause and wellness of lives. Maya and Ashok in the *Show Business* are just married on paper but in reality do not share any compatibility. Even the new born triplets don't get any love from their father. When Maya asks Ashok if he has to go he replies, "You know I do", this being such a very routine like and disinterested answer. It is just for the sake of things that Ashok maintains a relationship. Feeling the spirit of togetherness Maya begs Ashok not to go for the day. Then Ashok replies that he doesn't understand Maya at all. What a very dull response this could be for a wife who has been very dutiful and nice to her husband? Ashok Banjara the megastar is how he wants to be known as. He always divorces his familial role and refuses to even acknowledge that he's the head of the family.

Film stars are usually disconnected with their families due to the long work hours as well as their exposure to arclights which makes them dull and sapped of all their energy. The natural lack of camaraderie with family is snapped.

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* metes out very inhumane treatment to Kalua. On the ship Bhyro Singh Deeti's uncle whips Kalua so hard that his head went sideways to the wrist. What an intensely painful blow it was! Just for the reason that Kalua marries this girl Deeti and stays with him. On the social ladder we say that all people have an equal treatment and egalitarian ideal is practiced. Nevertheless, low caste people and slaves are always ill-treated even in an educated society. Only when the principle of equality is practiced can Indian society make considerable strides of progress. Fate was such that Kalua killed Bhyro Singh. Many a time man proposes and God disposes. The low-caste people are human beings too and if pain and insult is meted out to them, then they react at any given opportunity. All through their lives they are used to living a life of surrender and lack of justice. Hence, they also need to be treated equally.

Justice was finally done to Kalua the low caste chamar man. The accused killed the master. Bhyro Singh's neck was broken to pieces. Ashok Banjara too in *Show Business* lay in the hospital bed and he experiences both physical as well as mental pain having had an accident on the sets. He exclaims "someone will find out how to stop the pain, someone will find out who did it..." (307:2).



In the denouement of both the novels justice is finally done and Ashok as well as Kalua get punishment for their deeds. Bad people meet with a bad ending. The cosmic forces are always alive and active and hence man should watch his actions lest he suffer.

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