

## ***DIMENSIONS OF ALTRUISM IN AMITAV GHOSH'S SEA OF POPPIES***

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### **Introduction:**

Rescue a stranger  
Sacrifices of humans  
Putting others first

We are animals  
Taking care of each other  
Survival of gene" (Urbansk, 2017)

The Haiku poems on altruism by Olivia Urbansk are presented in Reyes-Espinoza's Philosophy Blog is based on The Explaining circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress by Peter Singer.

Altruism in human being is behavioral character, that an individual has simply generosity among one another universally. However, the topic of altruism in human being is highly contested today's world, and in the progress of human behavioral character around the world. The first book in the Ibis Trilogy, Sea of Poppies, by Amitav Ghosh, is an attempt to redevelop these concepts through a reading of human life and the strong elucidate expression of survival, putting ourselves behind other beings and maintaining our gene through altruism, evolution, and kin altruism theories in a new perspective of characters. From above given, two haiku, selfless helping attitude is the best social behavior, so the broader aim of the altruism is to retrospect every individual's altruism, to enhance every individuals the social behavior, and to make a universality of humanity pave the way of altruism throughout the world.

### **Altruism**

Altruism signifies showing selfless concern for the welfare of other beings and desire to help, in other words people to jeopardize themselves to help other beings. The word altruism was derived from two languages "altruism" from French and "alter" "other" from Latin and it was coined by August Comte, who he was the founder of positivism.

Altruism is viewed in ethics as a goal of moral behavior that takes place through a

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code of conduct, which focuses on the good deeds of other people. According to Adam Smith, altruism has three aspects, Egoistic, Egocentric and Altercentric. Egoistic that induces them to reciprocate favor. In Egocentric, where the recipients are enjoying the donated goods, though the benefactors increase their utility. In addition, in aspect of Altercentric, altruism is followed under ability of concern in some interest and lends their ears to understand their problems and other people's perspectives and views. August Comte says that the innumerable types of Altruism are sorted under three categories. They are Intentions, Actions, and Ideologies, which are stated as Psychological Altruism, Behavioral Altruism, and Ethical Altruism respectively. While Comte says that altruistic sentiments are innate. Consequently, Comte hopes that the idea of humanism is based on some basic scientific understanding of human nature and society. Altruism refers to the selfless help or self-sacrificing behavior, meaning how an individual helps another with no intentions of return help from them. For example, Indian independence is attained from the freedom fighters who sacrificed their life for the future generation. Kin altruism, reciprocal altruism, cultural altruism, and pure altruism are the other types of altruism. Kin altruism is concerned with those who give of themselves and make sacrifices for their family and loved ones. Nepotistic altruism is the self-sacrifice made by somebody solely for the welfare of their offspring. This could appear self-centered, but for that person, helping their child is different from helping a stranger. Individuals who practice cultural group altruism only assist members of their own ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Even in high-stakes situations, pure altruism shows that a person is willing to serve another person without expecting them to have empathy or humanity.

### **Theory of Evolution**

Theory of evolution had started from Origin of Species by Charles Darwin. According to Darwin, species change over a period and emerge as a new species but they share the common genetic traits from their ancestors. This is the mechanism, which Darwin explains it as natural selection. Natural Selection is an inevitable process, which leads to the survival of the fittest theory. Normally, an odd trait is changed through the evolution of natural selection in accordance to circumstances in the environment. Natural Selection occurs in five basic ways: Variation, Inheritance, Selection, Time, and Adaptation. These entire five stages take place over a period, along with the changes in traits, which evolve into new species. This population of new species becomes the survival of the fittest in the environment. However, the Nature's rule is different. Due to limited resources, the environment fails to support the huge population of species. More species are born but only some survive in accordance of environment. Those predominant ones, which survive through the selection in environment,

are known as the survival of the fittest. Survivability depends mostly on traits in the evolution of selection process. When those traits become neutral, they are neither helpful nor harmful- this unpredictable process becomes deficit causing some random changes in the species. The theory of Kin Selection was found by W.D. Hamilton and the term Kin Selection was coined by Maynard Smith. Kin Selection comes from Natural selection but it does not select the fittest individual to survive, but it selects the altruistic individuals to survive. The Passover of this unique method of altruistic behavioral gene to future generation reproduces many altruistic individuals. Kin selection also proves that the individuals are more likely to behave altruistically towards their relatives. Kin selection shows that the powerful method of evolution of social behavior is through relatives. From Darwin's point of view, it shows the fuzziness in the existence of altruism in nature. However, in Hamilton's theory of inclusive fitness, it favors any social behavior by natural selection where it depends on genes that are shared with relatives. So inclusive fitness mostly occurs in binary ways that occur are directly or indirectly depend on altruistic social behavior.

### **Dimensions of Altruism**

The dimensions of altruism can be witnessed through the characters in *Sea of Poppies*, which intend to symbolize their lives. In a village of Ghazipur, Deeti was living with her family, who was a devoted wife of Hukam Singh and a caring mother of Kabutri. This triangular bond of the family was dissected, because of Hukam Singh's death and she faced mental tortures from her brother-in-law, Chandan Singh made her to intend to fall into the pyre. Later, she came to know that she was pregnant because of Chandan Singh.

I will burn on my husband's pyre rather than give myself to you.... It was not as if she could promise her daughter a better life by standing alive as the mistress and 'keep' of a man of no account, like Chandan Singh. Precisely because he was her daughter's natural father, he would never allow the girl to be the equal of his other children- and his wife would do every thing in her power to punish the child for her parentage. (Ghosh, 2008, pp.158, 159)

Act of Deeti typifies, one couplet from *Tirukkural*, "Who guards herself, for her husband's comfort care, her household's fame, / In perfect wise with sleepless soul preserve, -give her a woman's name" (Pope et al., 2002, p.8). This couplet represents the ideal wife to her husband- one who upholds her chastity with him and upholds the status of his household virtue and dignity. Deeti is also raised with every custom to preserve the names of both houses. She had to travel to an opium factory while her husband was bound to a bed. She also worked hard in the fields and supported her family financially by helping her husband domestically. She also looks after her daughter and her sickly spouse. She managed to

maintain both her family and her dignity. In one instance, she abandons her daughter at her brother's house along with some cash and jewellery to take care of her. This shows that women's self-sacrifice for well-being family, and to safeguard her virginity and her daughter's life. She is in a melancholy state of mind as she deals with an excruciating circumstance in every way: as a wife, she lost her husband; as a mother, she wants to look after her daughter. However, she was financially dependent on her husband's family, and if she continued down that path, she would lose her potential. Her brother-in-law chastised her, but she was aware of the truth of what had occurred on her first night in her husband's home. Their malicious deed is finally proven. Deeti finally becomes the foundation for their insane act, loses all hope, and let her suffering permeate every area of her life, leading her to draw near her husband's funeral pyre. This is evident since Deeti's struggle to live her life is projected using Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. Through Deeti's behavioral characteristics, the idea of nepotistic altruism is projected.

Deeti had always got on well with her brother's wife, and knew that she would treat her daughter well..... composed as she tied Kabutri'ss cant few pieces of clothing in a bundle..... among her few remaining pieces of jewellery were an anklet and abangle.....with instructions to hand them over to her aunt: She'll look after them for you..... (Ghosh, 2008, p.159)

Hukam Singh's ox cart driver was Kalua. Due to his race and enormous size, the villagers regarded him as untouchable. When she decides to plunge into her husband's funeral pyre, none of her family members moved forward to save her, but it was Kalua who rescued her. To save Deeti, Kalua man oeuvres the wagon in her direction. Through the personality of Kalua, the pure altruism gets radiated.

Half dragged and half carried, she was brought to the pyre and made to sit cross-legged beside her husband's corpse. Now there was an outbreak of chanting as heaps of kindling were piled around her and do used with ghee and oil to ready them for the fire racing to the mound, Kalua placed the plat form against the fire, scrambled to the top, and snatched Deeti from the flames. With her inert body slung over his shoulder, he jumped back to the ground and ran towards the river, dragging the now-smoldering bamboo rectangle behind him, on its rope. On reaching the water, he trusts the platform into river and placed Deeti upon it. (Ghosh, 2008, p.177)

Neither Kalua nor Deeti is family members or members of her community. However, this kind of selfless assistance to others without anticipating compensation demonstrates pure altruism. Here, Kalua's assistance is invaluable. Therefore, when the time comes for society to emerge, pure altruism is something that is innate in every human being. Similarly,

a couplet illustrates Kalua's propensity for lending a hand. "Assistance given by those who ne'er received our aid / Is debt by gift of heaven & earth but poorly paid"(Pope et al., 2002, p.14). From this couplet, it is clear that when a person is in a position of need, someone must step in to assist them. When the recipient gives the donor access to both heaven and the entire world, there is no possibility for them to aid in a similar fashion. Kalua's willingness to help others and his kind nature is evident in the way he rescued Deeti, without anticipating anything from her. Although Kalua is of low level and appears to be ignorant based on his physique, he has the potential to be great of an intelligent individual who is purely altruistic personality. Another couplet symbolize with his character, "Theme no lofty line, whose souls are mean, are never great / The men of lowly birth, when high of soul, are not of low estate"(Pope et al., 2002, p.117). This couplet explains that neither a person born wealthy nor a person born of humble origins has tremendous souls. To put it another way, even if a person is born poor, their character and quality may not be seen to be those of a high soul, and vice versa, even if they are born rich, their character may not be viewed as being of low quality. As a result, a person's actions toward others might be used to determine their character. Amidst Kalua's humble origins, his behavior toward society demonstrates the characteristic of greatness, which is the potential to genuinely aid others and act in an altruistic approach. The survival of the fittest is imprinted in Kayla's character, which means that benevolence is the only evolutionary trait that is passed on from one generation to succeeding generations. Transformation begins with each person's own inert mindset, which they develop from when they are ignorant and pass on to their family and kin. This selfless act of goodness then stimulates environmental evolution and shifts in society perspectives. Society become cognizance with mindfulness of upgradation.

Tantima, the wife of Muslim Boatman, once assisted Mrs. Lambert in delivering a baby to another family in Sea of Poppies. Even though circumstances arise to help the Lambert family, Mr. Lambert's family is a well-to-do family. In contrast, Mr. Lambert's female kid, Paulette and Tantima's son Jodu, are both raised in his mansion as siblings. Tanitma's helping tendency and her unaware helping of Mrs. Lambert in her predicament are the first two elements of altruism. This demonstrates Tanitma's pure altruistic behavior. Next, Mr. Lambert determines to treat Tantima with pride in order to show his gratitude for her altruistic behavior. As a result, he and his family made Tantima as Paulette's nurse. Reciprocal altruism is observed from this perspective. As he receives help from Tantima to reverse the situation, he is still able to uphold Tantima's good deed despite the Lambert family's dilemma.

The Lambert Sahib's attention was now focused on comforting his wife and he could

be of no help in the delivery: it was Jodu's mother who bit through the cord and wiped the blood from the girl's tiny body. Leaving her own child, Jodu, to lie naked in the boat's bilges, she took his blanket, wrapped the girl in it, and held her close to her dying mother...From that day on, it was as if she had not one child but two...Jodu's mother became Paulette's wet-nurse, and the two children spent their infancy lying head-to-head in her arms. (Ghosh, 2008, p.66)

While someone observes Tanitma's character, a couplet encapsulates the refinement of the evolution of such a wonderful character as treating another person's child as if it is one's own. "Duty demands no recompense; to clouds of heaven, / By men on earth, what answering gift is given?" (Pope et al., 2002, p.26) According to this couplet, altruism is unshakeable if every recipient intends to pay back the donor for what they received? If this is the case, what does the earth get in exchange for the cloud's favor of showering? Tanitma is therefore unable to pay Paulette back for the love she has shown by nursing her since birth despite her good intentions. This couplet represents Tanitma's quality of procreating both offspring as the same, even if their wombs are different. Every woman therefore understands the suffering of other women. This shows that, altruism is always evolving around the world and is inherent in every woman.

Despite being a devoted upholder of hereditary tradition, Raja Neel Rattan Halder, the Zamindar of Raskhali, has a relaxed and comfortable family life with Elokeshi. When the Old Zamindar, Raja Ram Rattan Halder of Raskhali, passes away, his father had invested the largest sum of money on behalf of Mr. Burnham in an opium ship, which had returned from China and had failed to make a profit. As a result, the debts owed to Mr. Burnham's business were no longer even supported when the Raskhali estate was pledged as security. Neel, therefore, loses everything; everything vanished as smoke in the air, and the police commissioner detained him for forgery and imprisoned him in Lalbazar. In respect to the judgment by Justice Kendalbushe, he is sent to the labor camp on the island of Mauritius. Neel was transferred to the Alipore prison. Meanwhile, Ah Fatt shares a cell with Neel. When he is mortally injured, Neel treats him with the humanity befitting a raja while also attending to his necessities, something he had never done before, not even for his successor. This demonstrates how Neel's actions reflect a pure altruistic concept.

After scouring his chest with a pumice stone, Neel wrapped his silver soap in a rag and began to wash the man's limbs... To take care of another human being - this was something Neel had never before thought of doing, not even with his own son, let alone a man of his own age, a foreigner... all the cleaning he had done, so he made a nest of blankets for him in a corner. (Ghosh, 2008, pp.325,326)

Neel's social behavior, on the other hand, demonstrates that altruism is a driving force for Nobel personal like Raja of Raskhali. As Neel comes from a high social background and experienced an abrupt decline in status, this pitiful situation in his existence served as a lesson for him and a reminder of his humanity to others. Fate convinced him that everyone experiences suffering and struggles in order to survive in society. The amazing view of Neel's behavior toward Ah-Fatt causes that unexpected downpour in his life to accomplish wholehearted altruism, which is defined as altruism that emerges from a person's inert behavior. Neel's freshly hatched altruism behavior is here profoundly illustrated through a couplet. "The good of in ward excellence they claim, / The perfect men; all other good is only good in name" (Pope et al., 2002, p.118). The couplet emphasizes that greatness is not attained through richness or a hereditary hierarchy but rather through the quality of one's mental well-being and ability to adapt to their situations. Here, greatness manifests itself in a person's behavior towards other beings and in their degree of mental health. Neel and his cellmate possessed similar admirable quality of adaptable character and altruism in that regard. While cleaning Ah Fatt, he never considers his reputation. Neel believed he lost everything in an instant, but Ah Fatt is the only person in the cell at the time, and the two of them were dealing with distinct concepts of problem. Here, the ingrained virtue of altruism shines as a radiant beacon in the darkness within the cell. Neel's voluntary support indicates his altruistic behavior.

Leading opium and cargo businessman Benjamin Brightwell Burnham facilitates the transfer of goods and services across nations. As a philanthropist, he officially orphaned Mr. Lambert Sahib's daughter Paulette Lambert. Burnham is the one who offers her shelter at his Bethel after Lambert's passing.

In opinion of this court you will be better served by Mr. Burnham's tutelage than ever you were by your father's. It falls to you now to show yourself worthy of this good fortune.....Before her arrival, Paulette had imagined that the Burnham would expect her to make herself useful in the manner of a poor relatives: the discovery that she had little to offer them, by way of compensatory services, had come as something of a shock... (Ghosh, 2008, p.130)

In order to increase his profits, Burnham involves him in illegal undercover activity. He possesses a little degree of reciprocal altruistic behavior in him despite having a self-centered personality. Owing to the fact that he committed numerous misdeeds and created a fake name, he nevertheless had little sense of altruism in his heart. "See knot the gamester's play; though you should win, / Your gain is as the baited hook the fish takes in" (Pope et al., 2002, p.112). This couplet emphasizes that one should refrain from gambling if they

are successful. If they do, it is like a fish swallowing the iron in a fishhook. Therefore, Burnham establishes an ethnic and cultural centric lifestyle around the international trade in opium. He consequently develops his reciprocal altruism for the business to protect him in the interests of survival of the fittest, but he is unaware that he will end up becoming the fish swallowing the iron in the fishhook. This demonstrates Burnham's twin altruism: first, by providing Paulette with accommodation in accordance with the principle of reciprocal altruism; second, by demonstrating that a sahib helps another sahib in order to support his ethnic group by demonstrating Lambert's daughter to show cultural group altruism.

Frenchman Lambert Sahib is a botanist and philanthropist in Kidderpore, Bengal. She was from Mauritius, Paulette is their daughter. Mrs. Lambert died during her child birth. Together with Jodu's family, her father takes care of her. She was too little to realize Mr. Lambert's death; therefore, she was taken in by the English family that belongs to Mr. Burnham.

Lambert-sahib graced with his presence only two-three times, but he is not like others - not loochee, not gambler, not shrewd. For him, difficulty is that he is too much good-hearted, all time doing charities and giving up funds. Naturally many villains are taking advantage.... (Ghosh, 2008, p.135)

Here, Karnan from the Mahabharata serves as a metaphor for Lambert's character. Because the views of these two characters regarding altruism toward society are the same. This couplet highlights similar behavior. "To punish wrong, with kindly benefits does ply; / Thus shameth their souls; but passeth illunheeded by" (Pope et al., 2002, p.39). As stated in this couplet, if someone causes difficulties for anyone intentionally, their act of help provokes that individual to feel guilty about the teasing deeds that have been done to a person. Hence, the couplet's purpose is to highlight Lambert's philanthropic idea of pure altruism while making Burnham feel guilty and ashamed. His sense of guilt and shame pushes him to behave in line with his ethical principles with the help of reciprocal altruism.

Nob Kissin Pander, gomusta frequently uses a flawless English accent. Others referred to him as Baboo Nob Kissin. He is a celibate seeker who is devotee of Lord Krishna. He helps those members who only possess pure souls. When he reaches the end of his life, Lambert Sahib claims that he gave his wife's miniature and requests him to keep it safe for his daughter Paulette. Then he persists in obtaining Paulette mother's locket "mareech-dip", drives her to learn about her upbringing, and urges her to discover the truth. He also helps Paulette in reaching Jodu and entering inside Ibis. Meanwhile, as he visits Neel in the Ibis, he shares about his family's current situation and updates since he had gone to prison.

Paulette recognized instantly the tiny face... it was an enameled miniature of a woman with dark hair and grey eyes-her mother, whom she had lost at the very moment of her birth...After her father's death, she had looked for to conclude that it had been stolen...Paulette's eye misted over at the thought of those childhood years, when she and her father had lived with Jodu and Tantima, as though their bungalow were an island of innocence in a sea of corruption... I clarified that passage to France, even defining being costing more than this locket "Mareech-dip"...I am truly grateful to you for bringing back the locket. (Ghosh, 2008, pp. 134,135,137)

A couplet comes to mind that Kautilya views through Baboo Nob Kissin as he concentrates on his persona. Because he is aware of who acts morally upright and who is not. Even though he was accompanied by the wrong person, he skillfully helps the righteous when they need it while maintaining his reputation. "Expenditure, returns and profit of the deed / In time to come; weigh these than to the act proceed" (Pope et al., 2002, p.39). According to the following couplet, before beginning a project, a person should be aware of almost any failures or other consequences that may result from their course of action. Finally, what is gained is goodness, thus those tactics must be considered before being executed. Here, speculation on Baboo Nob Kissin's methodology about how he deliberately applied altruism to each character in the Sea of Poppies takes place. When he works for Mr. Lambert Sahib as a daftar, he is aware of his actual nature. Later, while working under Mr. Burnham as a gomusta, he was aware of all his pluses and minuses and is able to help the good-hearted souls when they are in need of it. Finally, the quality of Bamboo Nob Kissin suggests that he has an innate sense of pure altruism.

#### **Conclusion:**

The level of altruism varies depending on the character as so many characters in Sea of Poppies explicitly state that their altruistic behavioral character emerges from their undiscovered well-being altruism and that their dimensions of thought further create dimensions of altruism while they are indulging in self-introspection. Altruism is ingrained in every human being, and as it emanates and evolves over time, it nurtures altruism, which might benefit society and future generations.

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