



Amitav Ghosh's Novels: A Discourse on Realms of Nationalism and Trans Nationalism

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Abstract

History has been used as a significant orbit in his novels. Psychoanalytical approach in collaboration with the past, present along with distant identities helps in gaining an insight into the interior mappings in sync with the exterior territories i.e. geographical margins. Multilayeredness synopsising geographical, psychological and cultural space hallmarks at large the works of Ghosh. His novels largely standardize continuous perceptual information. All important events with useful information appear in proper sequence thereby creating and recreating the flow of actions. Thus, the environment and events become the basis of rational human behavior. With the spatial familiarity, the components like the feeling of warmth, safety, and security helps to understand the place better and make it multidimensional. This fact brilliantly catalyzes the works of Amitav Ghosh. He very diligently uses the conceptual matrix wherein nationalism gets transferred to internationalism is one frame. It's a cultural evolution shaping man's destiny. Ghosh comes across as the designer to his character's destiny through his novels. He uses places, routes, and landmarks for establishing connectivity and linkages with various events and incidents. This helps him to map and remap the world and draw connections between various nation states.

The paper will bring to light the creative engagement in his major works with historical, political and geographical realities along with the truth involving great narrative skills and imagination.

Keywords: History, Environment, Internationalism, Geographical

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has got a new meaning in the works of the writers working on the travel writings. This has given a larger platform to the Diaspora Writers to cover a large deal of historical and cultural perspectives. Traversing through the past in the current times to explore the future, is the prime concern of the travel writers. These geographical territories along with capturing the psychological phenomena of the characters also define the spatial constituents of the characters and locations respectively.

The aforesaid fact has stimulated itself in the present scenario in Indian Diaspora Writing. This changed atmosphere catapulted their writings to a different level altogether. Though various forms of art have attributed to the understanding of the environment viz: dance, paintings, music, films etc, it is largely the writings which help in binding ecocriticism firmly. This form of art very successfully raises the issues of gender, race, and identity crisis and so on. Amidst an alien land and surroundings, an unconscious longing for their homeland always lends a fascination to their work. Scenario, abilities, aspirations and talent extend a platform for different writers from different countries. Each writer gets adjusted their writings according to the different kinds of exiles- whether fleeing their countries due to an oppressive regime or being alienated on their own. All forms of geographical dislocation or socio-cultural displacement from or in a country is explored to the fullest. This lends a new dimension to their writings which is known as Eco-Criticism. Indian English writings have given an equal concern to global worries. This arises out of a sense of displacement and rootlessness. Their themes explore the idea of dislocation and self-fashioning. There is a global readership and an enduring appeal to their work. They may be nostalgic for their homeland but sometimes take a liking for the West too. The physical transformation shows the conviction with which they have accepted and adopted Western culture too.

There is a constellation of history, geography and culture continuously moving in their works, thereby encapsulating geographical space, psychological space and cultural space which crosses the national boundaries to international borders. Because of an honest script of the demonstration of native geniuses, this texture of writing has won wide audiences in all its richness and complexities. It has turned out to be a new form of voice in which the world converses regularly. Indian Writing in this context is much more augmented. The complex world of the psyche is caught in the labyrinth of history and culture of the sub continent. This is also the encounter between the west rationality and Indian myth, hollowness of national

identity and international boundaries. This post colonial literature celebrates what Salman Rushdie calls a historical weightlessness. The history is re visited, re explored and the residual effects of politics are re exposed. This form of expatriate writing presents the psychodrama of human relations which makes them transcend the barriers of genre, narratives, time, history and location and became the focus points of the writings of many writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai etc.

Rushdie celebrated the plurality, the excess of culture, the rootlessness. He felt that if one did not belong to one place, then one belonged to many.” There is magical realism in the marginalized consciousness which heightens the sense of reality.” These emotional entanglements form the core of their work.

This paper talks about eminent diaspora writer Amitav Ghosh’s award winning novel *The Shadow Lines*. The craftsmanship of his work has been the way he weaves the wool and the wrap from distinct yet interrelated strands of travel writings, cultural criticism and cognitive mappings. The whole exercise of trying to explore these three trajectories has been to support the hypothesis. The study interrogates and re-affirms Ghosh from unsearched areas to the searched areas.

The Shadow Lines (1988) was a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on individuals who lived through them. The author with his skilled craftsmanship takes the narrative beyond the national frontiers and opens out to encompass cosmopolitan experiences. The quest for identity unfolds itself the mood and background of a new internationalism. This opens the way for new experiences which are seen and understood through the narrator’s consciousness. The name of the narrator is not revealed which suggests a contemporary consciousness- an all-encompassing identity. This forms the intricate part of narrative design.

The novel is primarily ‘a memory novel weaving the past and the present, across the frontiers from India to Bangladesh, Britain, It is a socio-political postmodernist work of fiction which explores the role of imagination and consequently evokes reality.

The personal lives of the characters, which populate his novel with public events and also poignant human emotions, are very astutely woven through an intricate web of memories, relationships and images. These also constitute for the pillars on which his narratives is based.

Tridib, one of the protagonists, was a storyteller. He spent much of his time gossiping with young never- do- wells at street corners and tea stalls. ‘He was a familiar figure within the

floating, talkative population of students and would be footballers and bank clerks and small time politicians and all the rest who gravitate towards that conversation flowing stretch of road between Garighat and Gole Park'(8). Tridib's niece Ila would sometimes come to Calcutta and the narrator as a child would wait for her arrival. She appeared to the narrator 'an exotic butterfly with easy intimacy with places which are magical names in the boys' atlas' (20). But when the narrator goes to London to observe her life from close quarters, he is shattered to see Ila living in a world of self deception and shallowness. She's out of line with both the worlds and ends up belonging to neither. She loses her identity in an attempt to ape the borrowed one.

Another multifaceted character very skillfully traced by the novelist is narrator's grandmother Tha'mma. She in fact, is the mast of the novel. During her days of childhood and growth, she had her sympathies with freedom fighters and wanted to do something for them in a small way.

'She put her hands on my shoulders and holding me in front of her, looking directly at me, her eyes steady, forthright, unwavering. I would have prayed for strength and God willing, yet I would have killed him. It was our freedom: I would have done anything to be free' (39).

With a fine use of 'Stream of Consciousness, the issues of identity in terms of larger cultural and historical collectivities is finely articulated. There are memories of the past in concurrent with the present through which the geographical distances are transcended. The events are deliberately gathered and released when the actual occasion arises. They are then transformed by the literary artists like Ghosh into the materials of the narratives. Grandmother's visit to Dhaka to her ancestral home is the most shattering climax where she questions some of the fundamentals of nationalism.

'But there aren't any trenches or anything. How are people to know? I mean where's the difference then? And if there is no difference both sides will be the same; it will be just like it used to be before when we used to catch a train to Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day, without stopping us whatever it is for all then- the partition and the killing and everything. Is there isn't anything in between?'(151)

The struggle with silence with no words to communicate becomes the heart of the novel. What makes this novel very contemporary and relevant is the lessons from history which have never been learnt. The deplorable violence unleashed upon Sikhs in Delhi from October 31st, 1984 to Nov 04th, 1984 shows history repeating itself.

The absence of pessimism, despair and ambiguity makes *The Shadow Lines* a very commencing and effective piece of art. The author boldly tackles both national and international political themes.

He shows how different cultures and communities are becoming antagonistic to each other in Contemporary India. Therefore, the use of political allegory is used very effectively to stress the need for a type of civilization where the communal holocaust can be avoided. Above all the use of imagination and memory technique makes '*The Shadow Lines*' a compact novel. Reference to houses, photographs, maps, road names etc are very artistically used. It gets related to a search; a quest for identity and meaning for personal significance in a living world. The discrete and distant identities provide a strong foothold to the understanding of history. Every character seems to have an intimate relation with history whether it is Tridib pursuing Ph.D in Archaeology or Tha'mma living through partition, Ghosh's mappings seeks to expand cognitively and culturally where the places and routes form the basic building blocks of the cognitive map.

Amitav Ghosh combines the innovations of postmodern fiction with an insight to produce powerful and provocative investigations of the post colonial world. Each novel of his is a "mapping test" which explores the cultural and societal effects of our changing sense of time and place. He teaches his readers how to travel and re- discovers them again. The outscapes are being escaped i.e. not only the exterior territories are mapped but also the inner recesses of the mind.

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