

Elements of History and Historicism in the Works of Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract:

The writings, explanations, and reporting of Amitav Ghosh all revolve around a common set of concerns. Since he is troubled by the current tide of intellectual analysis, he approaches the problem from a variety of angles. Through his writing, he makes clear the complicated history of pilgrim information and discourse on colonized social orders, people groups, and ideas; and the formation and reconstruction of identities in pre- and post-frontier societies. In public declarations, Ghosh has frequently denied that his work is a clear depiction of Post expansionism or that he is a 'post-pioneer' author. He has clearly shown that he has no idea what this concept involves. Regardless, Ghosh agrees with a sizable number of pundits and scholars who have made significant contributions to the field's characterization and thus regard his work as a critical file for a number of the themes, issues, and threats that establish the contemporary complexity of the post-pioneer problem. A close reading of Amitav Ghosh's works shows and evaluates not just his own tastes and concerns, but also the limits and potential outcomes of post imperialism as a core practice.

Key Words: Historical elements, post-modernism, colonized social orders. reconstruction of identities etc.,

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta on 11 July 1956. His formative years were spent in India, Iran, Sri Lanka, and East Pakistan thanks to his father's military and then diplomatic career. Several other authors, including Shashi Tharoor, hail from Delhi, where he studied at St. Stephen's College and at Doon School. His master's degree in sociology from Delhi University dates back to 1978. A certificate in Arabic from Tunisia and a Ph.D. in social anthropology from Oxford University followed in 1982.

Amitav Ghosh came into the literary world in 1986, when his first book, *The Circle of Reason*, was released. The novel's critical reception was overwhelmingly positive. His second

work, *The Shadow Lines*, was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Prize. (1988). He also was awarded the Anand Purskar for the same thing. *The Calcutta Chromosome* also earned him the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best Science Fiction Novel and a number of other honours, including the Pushcart Prize and the Grand Prize for Fiction. (best science fiction, 1997). His nonfiction writings are as well received as his fiction. The New York Times called *In An Antique Land* (1992) "one of the remarkable books of 1993." Both *Dancing in Cambodia* (1998) and *At Large in Burma* (1998) were pieces that covered a variety of topics, including travel, history, cultural criticism, and political reporting. Eighteen pieces on topics as diverse as fundamentalism, the novel's history, Egyptian culture, and literary honors in the Third World can be found in the anthology *The Imam and The Indian* (2002). Its sixteen years of composition span the years 1986 to 2002. The author wrote these articles in the lulls between his books; thus they serve as a record of his developing tastes and perspectives on the craft of writing. Ghosh, who previously won the Padma Shree, was recently honoured with Italy's highest literary honor, the Grinzane Cavour Prize. Ghosh's star rose after the publication of the bestselling novels *The Glass Palace* (2000) and *Hungry Tide* (2002). of 2008, he released the first book of his ambitious Ibis trilogy, titled *The Sea of Poppies*. The second book, *River of Smoke*, was released in the trilogy that same year, in June 2011. In an interview, he states, "I am qualified for this position because I am a skilled anthropologist and researcher with a long association to a subaltern studies group, as well as having journalism and academic experience in both the West and India." (Online source)

The distinctions between migrant and indigenous Indian authors are rendered moot by Ghosh. His beliefs show a nuanced reflection of political, economic, and cultural materialism, and they are intricately intertwined with subaltern world and current South Asian issues and imperialism. Derridean qualities such as interdisciplinary play, individual pluralism, and a dynamic interplay between center and margin characterize his writing. "A cryptic but suggestive phrase, arguably emphasizing the individual as the most significant locus of change," as John Hawley (2005) puts it. It is clear that he's broadening his definition of writing to encompass anthropological study, historical analysis, fictional narratives, social commentary, and, in a word, the freedom to experiment with whole new forms. (166)

At the Delhi Literary Festival, Ghosh spoke out against discussions pitting Indian languages against the English language. "Ghosh appeared annoyed by these complaints," writes

Rukmini Nair (2002). He believed that problematic values could be investigated just as successfully in English as in any other Indian language, and that was the writer's task. (165)

Ghosh does not engage in "India-slamming" to garner Western sympathy, nor does he romanticize bizarre regions of India as though they were somehow "the embodiment of India." Ghosh, although being a well-travelled author, prefers to be classified as one of the lesser, less exquisite and generally ignored classes of Indian essayists. Ghosh is interested in depicting the lives of characters who, despite the unpredictability of time, have endured or are enduring such power arrangements. Few people are still around who can remember the turbulent history of human life and the stories of those who survived it. The pain and anguish of certain people, places, and things has not been forgotten. By expanding on other, less prominent features, Ghosh aims to show that these events or personalities did not happen in isolation. These unsaid events, unknown individuals, and unknown sufferings form the backbone of the story.

Postmodernism and deconstruction not only called historical narratives into question, but also altered, renegotiated, and rewrote them. The interminability of openness and the impossibility of closing a conversation undercut the authority of history. Like many other fields of study, history witnessed profound changes in the second part of the twentieth century. It was easy to see that a comprehensive history had failed, therefore many people began to question the entire field. The resulting discussions and theories recognize the impotence of genuine (re)presentations and laud the interpretive records, problematizations, complexities, and predicaments that bubble up from the placid surfaces of history. Facts and history, structures, times, repercussions, and archives—all the elements that make history what it is—have been supplanted by things that have nothing to do with history. Nobody owns the past now, because the history that ends up being taught in schools is always the product of continuous appropriations. According to Michael de Certeau, all history is historiography and is constantly alluding to its own veracity. Trace analysis is possible in the aporic world of analysis and pluralism. This interpretation game is especially appealing when applied to literature, which is often viewed as a critique of contemporary society.

According to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, historicism is 1) the belief that a person's life is shaped by a series of experiences rather than by the deliberate efforts of humans. 2) The belief that all social questions are still unresolved by history and that historians should study each era without approving their own value systems. 3) A strong or unwavering

commitment to established norms, such as laws and traditions, that can be independently verified. 4) a look for transition laws in history that can explain and forecast past events. (From the Online Edition of the 1913 Random House Dictionary)

Historicism is a branch of literary criticism that attempts to evaluate works of literature in their original settings. It acknowledges that a piece of literature is shaped by the political, economic, and cultural climate of its time. Questions regarding the reliability of both historians and history were prompted by the development of new concepts and theories in the 20th century. The 1980s were pivotal for the New Historicism in North America. This approach elevates the problem to the political realm and gets at the nub of the knotty interplay between language, culture, and history. The central tenet of New Historicism is that history is not a self-consistent process. Instead, it views historical events as a series of fluid and unrelated "chronicles." Problematic and alternative material practices with roots in the real world are of greater interest to them. Many believe that shifts in social structures result from power dynamics and other forms of coercion. By treating the text as a unique landmark in an organization of various and material praxes, new historicism was able to overcome the text-and-history dilemma without relying on a connection between text and setting or closer look and basis.

While new historicists study a wide range of topics, one thing that sets their research apart is an emphasis on how a text challenges the dominant ideas of its time before being brought back under control by the more moderate forces it chooses to study in order to explain itself. (Wolfreys et. al 124-125)

History, once again, is about the people who actually lived through those events. There is always scepticism about the veracity of these records. Because we prefer to generalize and focus on the larger picture, our understanding of what transpired during an event is limited to broad strokes. Even in general remarks about these things, the individuals who are injured by them or the victims are left out or reduced to numbers. For instance, we may know that 50,000 Jews were exterminated by the Nazis, but we may not know their identities. Ghosh imagines and creates hypothetical historical events so he can examine the effects of historical participation on an individual's life. Some writers working in Indian English have explored the intriguing field of hypotheses and enjoyed the resulting speculation. Today, it is important to consider what the past does not record. Some writers, like Amitav Ghosh, use this stillness as

an opportunity for their practical imagination as they attempt to draw connections between the past and the present in both fiction and nonfiction. Amazingly, his work incorporates both historical and contemporary elements, both actual and imagined. The Indian literary heritage has always included works about the country's history and literature. The historical, mythological, and literary masterpieces of the Ramayana and Mahabharata are due to this tradition. Both Rushdie and Ghosh are prominent authors who write in English and hail from India. Their writings demonstrate an understanding of the controversies surrounding history, historicism, historiography, and India's oral history canon.

The book *In an Ancient Land* is based on Amitav Ghosh's research in Egypt and his impressions of the twelve-hundred-year-old merchant Abraham Ben Yiju and his servant Bomma. Amitav Ghosh discovered the 12th-century writings describing the master and the treatment in 1978. The earliest of these letters was penned by a guy named Khalaf in Ishaq in the city of Aden in the year 1148. According to the letter, Ben Yiju was then residing in the city of Mangalore in southern India. At the same time, a massive army of crusaders surrounded Damascus, making this period of time significant throughout the world. The irony here is that these letters predate the letter that brought attention from persons like E. Strauss by nine years. Jewish businessman Ben Yiju hailed from Tunisia. Hundreds of years later, his documents were discovered in a Cairo synagogue. Ben Yiju's Indian slave is rumored to be a valued part of the Yiju family and household. This establishes a baseline from which many historical narratives can develop. Ghosh connects the dots between the past and the present with the stories he tells. He is curious about the evolution of society and culture.

The narratives of its people have always been the primary influence on a region's past. All of these tales, in their various forms, reveal the evolution of a community over time. The intricate connection between their past and present is also highlighted.

"People seemed to talk about murder everywhere in Egypt. I had never heard Egyptians criticise their president in front of strangers, let alone talk about killing him, even in a figurative sense." (Ghosh, 1992, p.39)

The Hungry Tide also includes a location's rich history. Nirmal explains to Kanai, the young child, how Hamilton established communities in the area, beginning with Lusibari. *Hungry Tide* keeps bringing up historical references. When asked why anyone should know or

remember this, Nirmal reportedly said, "For what purpose would that be good for anyone? It was reassuring to be reminded that no place, up to this moment, could avoid the tidal sweep of history, even in the tide country, where people lived on the fringes of grander occasions. (Ghosh, 2004, 77)

Ghosh aims to depict the events and integrate the Sundarbans, an obscure region, into the larger historical context. Sundarbans has been ignored for years, thus it is surprising that environmental concerns have just brought it to the forefront of the public's mind. Furthermore, he writes about history in two distinct ways: both historically and fictionally. The scientific literature on the Malaria insect serves as the basis for the entire plot of *The Calcutta Chromosome*. The colonization of Burma, Indian immigration to Burma, natural resource exploitation in Burma's past, Mandalay, and the exodus of Indians from Rangoon that sparked the Opium Wars are all covered in the novels *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*. All of his works, in fact, combine fact with fiction in ways that harm neither medium if separated.

Communal riots in 1984 and World War II, both of which occurred long before the novel's setting, are also discussed. We don't know as much about the years leading up to the riots in 1984 as we do about the years leading up to the World War II bombings. The book's plot hinges on the fact that Tridib is killed by a mob of outraged citizens. The protagonist reminisces with her grandma about her childhood during the rise of Indian nationalism. Through their accounts, we gain insight into the lives of those affected by tragedies like the partition and the riots. I was determined not to let the events of my past fade away completely," he explains. I was resolved to demonstrate its significance to others. (Ghosh, 1988, 217)

According to Ghosh,

"*The Circle of Reason* had developed upwards, similar to a sapling rising up out of the dirt of my nearby experience. *The Shadow Lines* started in the present, however developed downwards, into the dirt, similar to a root attempting to track down a wellspring of food. I arrived at this cycle to take a gander at what common viciousness had meant for my own life. I recollected stories my mom and uncle had educated me regarding the Great Calcutta Massacre of 1946 and hostile to Indian mobs in Rangoon in 1930 and 1938. At the core of the book, however, was an occasion that occurred in Dhaka in 1964, a year prior to my family moved to Colombo. I vaguely remembered a

night when an angry mob attacked our house, which was full of refugees. I hadn't thought about this event in a long time, but after 1984, it started to bother me... I went to libraries and looked through hundreds of newspapers. With persistence, luck, and some educated guesses, I was able to figure out what had happened. From what I remember, the riots spread over a large part of the subcontinent. (Ghosh, 2002, 315).

In every book, historical events are the background against which the characters' lives play out. In *The Shadow Lines*, the author talks a lot about partition, riots, and World War II. The history of malaria research in India is at the heart of the *Calcutta Chromosome*. In *The Glass Palace*, the British invasion of Burma, the splitting of the country into two parts, and the Great Exodus are all shown.

The Hungry Tide is a book about the history of settlement in the Sundarbans and Sir Daniel Hamilton's part in it. The big opium trade is the setting for *Sea of Poppies*, and the author says that the Opium War will be a part of the next books in the trilogy. It turns into a world of stories about people who have, could have, or would have lived through such times and who would have suffered, done well, or been doomed. These stories show the many ways that different events affected the lives of people in the present day. Science and technology have helped people change over time, which is an important part of history.

The Calcutta Chromosome discusses the historical backdrop of Malaria research, *The Circle of Reason* discusses the historical backdrop of phrenology in an entertaining manner, *The Hungry Tide* discusses the historical backdrop of logical examination on the Irrawaddy Dolphin in South Asia, and *The Sea of Poppies* discusses the historical backdrop of studies and exploration in Botany in Calcutta.

Ghosh is important for the gathering of Indian journalists who write in English and were brought up in this present reality where English is as of now not secured by its pilgrim past and is something other than a language of correspondence. His writings are postmodern because they use magic realism, new ways of using language, playing with time, history, and digressions. All of these things show that he knows how to tell stories in the Indian tradition. Even though he takes his work very seriously and tries new things with it, it is not esoteric. His ability to build up the emotional impact of a tragedy without using mushy language is a trait shared by all of his works. He achieves formalism while expressing his ideas and making

stories that build up like a snowball. So, Ghosh shows that he knows both Western and Indian ways of telling stories.

Ghosh has been a major contributor to the world of literature in the second half of the 20th century because he is dedicated to literature and is very interested in history, the subaltern, and problems that threaten world peace. Even though new writers like Kiran Desai, Amit Chaudhary, and Arvind Adiga have come along, he is still a well-known voice. People have many different roles and experiences in their lives. As a writer, he tries to capture the many sides of life. His works aren't limited to one place because they show how pain and suffering, as well as hope and nobility, are universal. *River of Smoke* is the second book in the ambitious Ibis trilogy. It is the end of a journey that started with *The Circle of Reason* and stopped at many important places along the way. Based on his other works, we can expect to see previously unexplored parts of Opium War, subaltern characters from across the subcontinent, the nuances and politics of colonialism, the predicament and despair of war, and some people who take advantage of the situation of war. By looking at the themes, ideas, and quality of Amitav Ghosh's writings as a whole, it is clear that his contribution to the world of literature has been of great importance, as he has improved both the content and the style of Indian writing in English prose. All of his works still look at ideological debates about the past and the present, probing a complex web of historical, political, economic, and cultural details. His body of work shows how carefully he works and how he has made a creative contribution to the modern world and to people in general.

This study has identified a number of distinctive and worthy of future study characteristics of Ghosh's writings that are, however, beyond the scope of this undertaking. Before writing, Ghosh performs significant study, which is a distinguishing trait of his works. His works are based on archival research, field trips, and the study of the language and cultural histories of the phenomenon and region he is writing about, as mentioned in the study. The research that went into his articles can be identified. From a cultural studies standpoint, Ghosh's involvement with the merger of topographical and cultural anchors is a possible area for future research. Ghosh seeks to affect the English language usage in fiction. This is also a potential research topic for a comprehensive examination of the evolution of his theory of English language usage across time.

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