



16

THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF AMITAV GHOSH'S WORKS: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Tenkale M. N.

*Assistant Professor in English,
Department of English,
Kai. Rasika Mahavidyalaya, Deoni,
Dist. Latur, MS, India*

Abstract:

This thematic analysis explores Amitav Ghosh's literary works through a postcolonial lens, examining how his narratives engage with the complexities of colonial and postcolonial histories. Ghosh's novels often delve into the effects of colonialism on individuals and societies, revealing the lingering impacts of imperialism on culture, identity, and memory. The study highlights key themes such as displacement, migration, and the intersection of personal and collective histories, demonstrating how Ghosh's storytelling challenges dominant narratives and reclaims marginalized voices. Through this analysis, the intricate ways in which Ghosh critiques colonial legacies and offers new perspectives on postcolonial identity are brought to light.

Keywords: *Postcolonialism, Imperialism, Identity, Displacement, Migration, etc.*

“The term ‘Postcolonial Studies’ (refers to) the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France and other European imperial powers. These studies have focused especially on the Third World countries in Africa, Asia and South America. Some scholars, however, extend the scope of such analyses also to the discourse and cultural productions of countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand, which achieved independence much earlier than the Third World countries. Postcolonial Studies sometimes also encompass aspects of British literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, viewed through a perspective that reveals the ways in which the social and economic life represented in that literature was tacitly underwritten by colonial exploitation” (Abrams, 237).

Amitav Ghosh's novels are complex and intricately patterned, they interweave the freedom struggle, riots, partition, sexual exploitation, romance and love making. The stories, developing through different locales, deal with exploitation and power structures before and after colonialism. The characters of these stories often transcend their personal sorrows and get identified afresh in new roles.

Amitav Ghosh seems to be very meticulous in portraying the colonial experiences and memoirs of a time gone by. The past selectively handled, and experiences relevant to Indian culture highlighted. The narrative framework operates at several levels of time and history, of space, character and theme. The most significant among these is the framework of the in-



between', the diasporic vision that elicits ambivalent responses from the reader defining its own position through this ambivalence. The fictional space, which Amitav Ghosh creates, being part of the prevailing discourse, depicts the material conditions of postcolonial societies where the experiences of colonialism, the struggle for liberation and the de-humanising, decadent socio-political conditions that follow independence exercise an enduring impact.

The struggle for liberation invariably produced new states and new boundaries but along with it homeless wanderers as well. Alienated and rootless as they were, these vagrants failed to get assimilated into the emerging structures of institutional power. The established order renounced them for their intransigence and rebelliousness. Driven by a quest for identity and migratory instinct, Ghosh's protagonists are either orphans or aliens to the cultural and social milieu in which they are placed. "Keeping hybridity and multiple identities at its center, as well as the possibility of transnational solidarities, recent postcolonial theory has explored, cultural practices and political thought that cut across national borders" (Nayar, 07).

The use of the theme of journey or migration in his novels speaks of Amitav Ghosh's obsession with the quest motif operating in the restless psyche that has imbibed and inherited a cultural displacement as the outcome of the colonial regime. The political and cultural dominance of the West alienates individuals from their indigenous cultural tradition and makes them strangers groping in the dark for their identity.

The physical and psychic explorations providing promises of alternative worlds and visions invariably compel them to traverse diverse geographic locations and points of time. The eventful, explorative, personal journey takes shape through individual memory and recollections of others. The individual's search for a meaningful existence is personified in memory as a re-lived experience. The uncertainties and horrific apprehensions of the contemporary world generate a psychic trauma that stifles all voices and turns human existence meaningless. Hence the narrator-protagonist of *The Shadow Lines* is seen to be undertaking a silent quest for meaning in life, and to articulate the inner void in him, the quest assumes the form of a search for words to articulate the silences that unsettle the individual self. An ingenious conflation of reflections involving personal histories, family histories, and national history are restructured in a quest for meaning, a quest for knowledge, taking into account the inherent inaccuracies of recollections, the "deceptive weight of remembered detail" (Ghosh, *SL*, 67).

The protagonists of the novels from *The Circle of Reason* to *The Glass Palace* are portrayed to experience their past as discursively separate and opposed to the present. These innocent victims of the social and political unrest created by the whirlwinds of colonialism and its aftermath, share almost the same emotional phenomena in spite of changes in their times and milieu. As a result; alienation remains a constant factor throughout their life stories and experiences, incessantly driving them to quests for their real identity. These subversive quests portrayed in the novels celebrate the ultimate triumph of the native spirit proclaiming centrality to the subaltern. "Nevertheless there are commonalities between several of his major interests and the concerns of postcolonial theorists who take a constructivist view of culture. Like Edward said, Ghosh draws attention to the artificiality of the East-West binaries of Orientalism. Like Homi Bhabha, he demonstrates the hybrid interstitial nature of cultures, as articulated through language" (Thieme, 251).



Historiographic re-construction is a popular stratagem of the postcolonial writers in their attempt to demystify the met narratives of history. Amitav Ghosh effectively employs this to promote narrative as a mode of knowledge alternative to the scientific, on which the western imperial enterprise has been founded. The basic idea that seems to underlie his writings is that history, like culture and knowledge, is not an absolute entity, but a construct. It tells a story about the past, which implies that there is no single unalterable history, but histories constructed in accordance with the prevalent power structure of the time. So it is possible to reconstruct it with intuition, as in *The Glass Palace* that employs a collage of fiction, memory and history to reconstruct the past in the present multi-ethnic, culturally diverse, pluralist society of the postcolonial situation. The issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace*. The novel repeatedly employs the metaphor of *The Glass Palace* of Mandalay fort to suggest the emergence of an awakened self-consciousness among the different sections of the colonized that gradually attains the wider dimensions of a national independence movement.

Postcolonial India shows a growing predilection towards westernization, individualism and the nuclear family, homogenization of culture, and the emergence of a bourgeois perspective, indicative of a cultural transformation which seems to sensitize Ghosh to confront them through his works of art that take on a subversive vision. The employment of such fictional techniques as multiple narrators, use of irony, fantasy and magic realism contribute to the subversive vision of his novels, a vision of life that opposes all kinds of hegemonic oppressive systems in the political as well as personal spheres.

Irony and fantasy subvert the existing social order by presenting what is lacking in it and engaging in a negative relationship with it. Conversations are employed aplenty to resist the mono logic voice of the narrator or the author and for the direct presentation of divergent opinions. What he seems to visualize and advocate is a humane system based on equitable feeling, love and understanding. Among the fictional techniques of subversion, Ghosh seems to be proficient in the use of magic realism. It dissolves the boundaries between the physical and spiritual truths and explores the possibilities of existence at various levels of consciousness, which greatly assist subversive aesthetics. Tapping the possibilities of magic realism, Amitav Ghosh makes a comingling of hard scientific facts with folklore in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, to assert the supremacy of ancient India in the world of knowledge. The practice of folk medicine by the character Mangala and the rustic infiltration into the world of knowledge to control "the ultimate transcendence of Nature" (Ghosh, *TCC*, 90) are founded on the theory of migration of souls. Indian faith concedes the migration of human souls from one body to another by virtue of a supreme power that is all-inclusive. The novel subverts the conventional western notions about knowledge, death, immortality and reincarnation. Another interesting fictional device employed by Ghosh is the subverting of accidental causes and coincidences to restore the subaltern's potential of comprehensibility and historicity. Throughout *Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Glass Palace*, accidental causes and coincidences which epitomize the incomprehensible are turned into a pattern and thus made eminently comprehensible for those inclined to hear from and learn the language of the subaltern.



“...(Post colonialists) develop a perspective, not just applicable to postcolonial literature, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived 'Otherness' are seen as sources of energy and potential change” (Barry, 192). Amitav Ghosh's writings portray the confrontations in the postcolonial society offering potential resistance to the dominant ideology, at the same time collaborating with it. Most of his characters take a liberal humanist stance towards issues they confront, betraying this ambivalence of collaboration and confrontation. Ghosh's pen pictures expose the postcolonial socio-political scenario as dominated by the colonial ideology and underscore the need for a potent resistance movement in the discursive and material practices to subvert this ideology as well as its power structure.

References

- Abrams, M. H., Geoffrey Harpham. (2010). A Handbook of Literary Terms. Cengage: New Delhi. Print.
- Barry, Peter. (2010). Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory. Viva: New Delhi. Print.
- Fiction in English. Atlantic: New Delhi. Print.
- Ghosh, Amitav. (1989). The Shadow Lines. London: Black Swan. Print.
- Nayar, Pramod K. “Postcolonialism Now”. In Litterit. Vol. 35, June-Dec 2009. Print.
- Theime, John. 2004. 'Amitav Ghosh', Piciuccio Pier Paolo (ed) A Companion to Indian



This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

To Cite the Article: *N. M. Tenkale. “The Thematic Analysis of Amitav Ghosh’s Works: A Postcolonial Perspective.” Literary Cognizance, V-2 (September, 2024): 103-106. Web.*