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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Indian Literary scenario Amitav Ghosh is the only writer who reflects the truth of Indian reality. He bears numerous responsibilities in the world of literature. He executes with admirable aplomb as an anthropologist, sociologist, novelist, essayist, travel writer, teacher and slips into global responsibility for establishing peace as an ambassador. He has excelled the global literary standards set by the post colonial and post modern writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Sashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy etc. He has become the colossal central socio literary figure with a substantial body of work drawing the global attention. He has become the only negotiator to mediate the core social and cultural problems of India and other colonized nations. All his major works have enjoyed immense academic attention across the globe and it has invited and produced a great amount of literary criticism. He has created a wide readership and a strong critical endorsement that reflects the attention of serious academicians and scholars. All the post colonial and post modern predicaments are wrestled to demonstrate a high level of self consciousness which continues interrogate the social, philosophical, cultural issues of the world in all its relevance and freshness. His works have initiated the emergence of critique of nationalism and universalism. His intellectual insights, conceptual, theoretical and textual experiments have engaged and interpreted the complex colonial and post colonial situations. They
have established a peculiar paradox of reading and appreciation eloquently responding to the post colonial and post modern issues of evolution and transformation of the world. Making his debut with *The Circle of Reason* in 1986, he has produced the ground breaking novels till today with *River of Smoke* (2011) that interrogate the history of humanity with discursive discourses. His non fictional writings are equally challenging and stimulating offering philosophical and cultural elucidation on different themes such as fundamentalism, history of the novel, Egyptian culture and literature. Despite this vast amount of creative and critical output surprisingly there is a small amount of critical reception. But his works have become the most favoured areas of scholarly exploration for many of the young scholars and academicians. These explorations have become part of unpublished research that focused exclusively on the relevance of Amitav Ghosh to the contemporary times.

The critical reception on Amitav Ghosh marks a notable divergence of interests between the criticism of Indian subcontinent and the western academy. Criticism from Indian academics mostly concentrated on the novels *The Shadow Lines*, *The Calcutta Chromosome* that dealt with the questions of national identity and communalism in the sub continent. There is a note of dissent from the Indian academics as they positioned themselves on the base of traditional Marxist criticism. However, these novels had enormous impact on the much debated post colonial issues of nationalism, identity and the fabricated cultural myths that inflate pseudo
nationalism. These texts have become part of university curriculum paving the way for the instant critical response of the students. Besides, there emerged some volume of essays reflecting the overwhelming critical negotiations and interventions breeding other novels *The Glass Palace* and *The Circle of Reason*. The Western critical response is firmly based on exploring the experimental and post modern aspects of culture registered in divergence and its is almost unanimously enthusiastic.

The extant criticism on Ghosh’s work has exposed significant socio cultural representations. One of the concerns is the representation of gender which has become the subject of much critical debate. The theme of *Shadowlines* is perceived for the inversion of passive male characters at the expense of active female characters. The novel in all its satirical representation critiques nationalism from the perspective of Gender. It reveals the complicit formulation of post national future within the framework of benign masculinity. Ghosh associates undesirable nationalism with femininity. He repeats some of the national gestures of portraying women as emblematic figures signifying ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘nation’ and authenticity. This is precisely a counter argument for the novel’s gender politics. In all his other novels there is relatively little debate about the representation of gender and other issues of sexuality. But as a matter of academic speculation, women have become a very significant presences in all his other works. Examining this aspect, James Clifford in the article ‘The transit lounge of culture’ says that we hear little
from women in other novels, but it is only in *The Calcutta Chromosome* the women figures emerge as central organizing principle (*Times Literary Supplement* 3 May, 1991). Mangala as the subaltern leader attempts to subvert the discourse of science articulating an alternate mode of knowledge. *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* presented detailed and individualized women characters than Ila and grandmother of *The Shadowlines*.

Political implications in Ghosh's works is another issue of serious concern. His works are perceived as the study of material conditions of post colonial experience. They espouse post modern idealism and elucidate the political realities. A. N. Kaul's essay 'A Reading of Shadow Lines' in *The Shadow Lines* (1995) aptly justified this perspective. He has argued that the novels of Ghosh explored the categories of human experience as metaphors of contemporary political realities. John Mee in his article 'The Burthen of the Mystery' praises the anthropological imagination of Ghosh, which has espoused the idea of space and time. Thoroughly examining the divisiveness of nationalism, the works of Ghosh scrupulously examine the enactment of divisive forces of racism, imperialism and class exploitation from the perspective of Indian nationalism. Another critic Robert Dixon in the essay 'Travelling in the West' has argued that *In An Antique Land* and *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh has presented an untheorized and utopian belief of humanity. He characterizes Ghosh's writing as an ambivalent tension between liberal
humanism and post modernism. Apart from the post modern response to the works of Ghosh, his works are also projected as an abdication of political responsibility or refusal to confront harsh political realities. This perspective is based on the premise that politics requires an active intervention into the affairs of the world. But what is at stake for Ghosh is viable political praxis. In the context of globalization, Ghosh works have accelerated multiple contradictions inherent in post modernity projecting his politics as ambivalent. His politics of ambivalence stand in odd with an activist vision of politics. The significance of Ghosh's politics of ambivalence is in the way it offers us a means of revising what politics might mean in a globalised, post colonial world.

To a greater extent all, the major works of Ghosh resonate with the preoccupations of contemporary society and culture marshaled under the framework of post modernism. Ghosh exhibits an interest in the nature and philosophy of language, textuality and the discourses in which human perception and experience is invariably shaped. For Ghosh the question of 'identity' is implicated in the representations of 'Self'. To him identity does not stand alone but it is derived from inborn 'essence'. Moreover, it is 'fashioned' by language and representation. From this perception, 'identity' has acquired the status of fiction interrogating the material consequences that influence the actions of humans. The texts of Ghosh interrogating the equivalence of fiction to unreality, represent the correlative view that 'identity' is unstable and fluid. The very notion that
fiction is untrue is part of the system of knowledge initiated by the intellectual revolution of early modern Europe. As this is deeply implicated in colonial culture, elucidating the intellectual legacy constitutes the central concern of Amitav Ghosh. Negating with the ‘meta’ or ‘grand’ narratives of progress of civilization, Ghosh has focused on the fragments of human experience that are excluded from the grand designs of civilization. The generic multiplicity and indeterminacy of his works, splices the contrapuntal formation, which are associated with popular culture.

It is wrong to characterize the works of Ghosh as unproblematically postmodern. His works have showed certain affiliations, but there are other affiliations to the context of his works. So, there is a dire necessity on the part of the reader to execute a peculiar paradox of reading to perceive the novels of Ghosh. They convey a ‘sense of place’ and ‘sense of dislocation’ as fictional representations. Our contemporary contexts of our lives are justifiably conditioned by the reactions to dislocations. Ghosh’s extraordinary oeuvre portrays a balanced portrayal of warm location and terrifying dislocation. This is predicated on the consciousness of one losing the precious lived sense of place as a catalyst for the emergence of novel. Ghost had evinced a great faith in the evolution of the novel. To him, the novel bears the writer's perception and responsibility in a most appropriate manner. The novel according to Ghosh has been universal from its evolution. It creates a space for cross cultural reading and experimental
ideas and styles. It is one form of literature founded upon 'a myth of parochiality'. It is from this vantage point, Ghosh takes upon the responsibility of using history as a tool for fictional representation.

The imagination of Ghosh is a product of specific histories of the subcontinent and necessarily diasporic and post colonial. He unveils himself as a world traveler and reveals the identity of every place with subtle presentations. Cutting across autobiographical resonances, Ghosh permeates academic antecedents-history, sociology and anthropology. With all his historical research pursuits, he is concerned with Indian/South Asian diaspora in different regions of the world. He is intrigued by the inherent fracturedness of diasporic identity. Analysing the space with reference to history, he travels between cultures and lands with the power of imagination. He retrieves the history of India, Bangladesh, England, Egypt, Burma, Malaya is his novels. Reiterating the journey of imagination of the West Indian novelists such as Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, Ghosh reinvents the ways of subverting the colonial injustices. He interrogates the burden of colonial past that weighs heavily on migrant post colonial generation. In all honesty, he churns out a glimpse of 'final redemptive mystery'. The retrieval of imagination with the objective of subverting the grand colonial history is employed meticulously by Ghosh in his works.

Ghosh makes an intellectual exploration into the history of marginalized and the contexts of nationalism, internationalism, migrancy, violence and communalism. He constantly looks for the ways to render
history into fiction and often posits fiction against history. Exploring the human predicament, he finds the individuals and characters asserting and liberating themselves from the burden of history. His sensibility of unveiling the nuances of history, sociology and culture makes him distinctive apart from the bunch of Indian novelists. The Diaspora and displacement are the keys to understand the thematic concerns of Ghosh. They direct us to explore the contemporary perplexities in hyphenated identities. The dilemmas of diaspora engendered in the margins of history are foregrounded in Ghosh’s fiction. The historical research and exploration becomes secondary to some extent. Arun P. Mukherjee in *Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space* is concerned with reading the novels of Ghosh as oppositional to the dominant literary and cultural ideologies of Euro America. But Ghosh’s intellectual exploration of the major and marginalized cultures is seen as representation of aesthetics. However, if one accepts the moot point that fiction is a representative of humane history, one can trace the genesis of humane historian. Ghosh as a humane historian travels between cultures and negotiates for a ‘third space’ in social studies. In the contemporary clash of binaries of nationalism, globalization ushers in the erasure of culture and articulates the absence of culture emphatically. So, when the cultural interaction is confined to exchanges between national cultures, the inhabitants of the third space oscillate between the dominant cultures. Nikos Papastergiadis in *The Turbulence of Migration* (2000) says that
Ghosh’s fiction negotiates between two lands divided by space and time and attempts to redefine the nuanced understanding of the past.

The thesis titled as: “Re-Writing the World: A Spectroscopic Reflection on Amitav Ghosh’s Oeuvre” makes an exploration into the world of Amitav Ghosh and examines the contemporary influence of history, sociology and culture on the evolution of globalization. Chapter one ‘Contemporary Indian Fiction’ examines the evolution of contemporary fiction in English since the beginnings. The chapter explores the thematic concerns of the first generation writers and critically evaluates the representation of culture, history, sociological and diasporic elements. The contribution of contemporary Indian writers is presented as a significant contribution to the enrichment of world literature. The circumstances responsible for the emergence of Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Sashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai etc. are examined in the light of the global attention generated to perceive contemporary Indian fiction. The chapter offers a synoptic view of the thematic concerns of the popular novels such as *Midnight’s Children*, *A Suitable Boy*, *English, August*, and *The Great Indian Novel*. The chapter also examines the popular novels of women novelists. The novels of Sashi Desh Pande, Manju Kapoor, Bhaharati Mukherjee, Gita Mehta and Arundhati Roy are examined with the objective of exploring the problems of contemporary immigrant women. A brief critical evaluation of the themes of these women novelists who examined the experiences and the
strategies of survival of immigrant women is provided. Making an obvious comparison between the contemporary male writers and women writers, a subtle evaluation of the themes of the novels is presented paving the way for a literary critique of Amitav Ghosh. The literary characteristics of all the works discussed in the thesis is precisely presented to establish a bio critical elucidation of Ghosh predicting the serious discussion on the thematic concerns of the chosen novels for the thesis.

The second chapter titled 'Indefatigable Narrative Research' examines the first non fiction of Ghosh 'Dancing in Camboida at Large in Burma' and the earliest fiction 'In an Antique Land'. The chapter provides the thematic understanding of the collection of essays of Dancing in Cambodia. Chapterwise analytical understanding along with the textual illustrations is provided in this chapter. The issue of anthropological description of the sea journey of King Sisowath and the circumstances that led to the colonization of Cambodia are discussed. The second section of Dancing in Cambodia that discusses the theme of resurgence is confined to the exploration of the cultural symbol of 12th century temple 'Angkor Wat'. Ghosh's anthropological discovery is reinforced by scientific methods of exploration. Exploring the history of Cambodia, Ghosh presents the socio-politico-cultural crises of Cambodia and Burma on the lines of prophetic vision. The trend of blending history and politics emulated by Ghosh becomes a sensitive insight into the contemporary postcolonial experiences. The second half of
the chapter discusses the theme of *In An Antique Land* and explores subaltern cosmopolitanism. Written in a new genre as a historical investigation and anthropological record, Ghosh proves his indefatigable research. The chapter tries to establish the testimonies to the interaction with different cultures. Like many researchers into antiquities, Ghosh develops richly imagined conclusions. Ghosh develops a sense of self as an immigrant and negotiates with different cultures. He becomes increasingly aware of the attitudes of cultural exclusion and prompts the questions about the culture and customs of India. The chapter provides the theme of *In An Antique Land* as per the divisions of the novel with required textual illustrations. The chapter also brings in the information related to the traveling experiences of Ghosh in composing the novel. Ghosh extracts the required historical information from the works of various scholars like Simon Van Geldern, Jacob Saphir, Abraham Firkowitch, Solomon Schechter etc. After the scholarly critical elucidation, the chapter presents the thematic similarities and dissimilarities of these two works discussed in this chapter. As both these works are based on the narratives of history of 12th century, history-interface fiction is churned out.

The third chapter ‘Dismantling Euro Centric Discourse’ presents the thematic and comparative elucidation of *The Glass Palace & The Imam and the Indian*. These two novels presents the history of South Asian countries. *The Glass Palace* presents a wide array of fictional characters and the amalgamation of historical and fictional aspects. Focusing on the
consequences of empire in Burma and Malaya, Ghosh bases on the experiences of his uncle, Jagat Chandra, provides an imaginative recollection of his family's history. The chapter brings in the understanding of postmodern architecture in relation to the connotation of the title. The Glass structure is presented as Deconstruction architecture. It is perceived as the celebration of aestheticism and a 'socius of dissociation'. The fragile nature of the glass structure is lucidly explained in all its aptness to the theme of the novel. Presenting the thematic concerns with textual illustrations the chapter offers a complete critical elucidation of *The Glass Palace*. The second half of the chapter is confined to the analysis of *The Imam and the Indian*. It is a non-fictional narrative. It is about Ghosh's experiences on wide variety of subjects published by Ghosh in different journals. Ghosh's initiation in extracting more information about Imam obviously becomes the theme of the novel. The book is a collection of eighteen articles written by Amitav Ghosh. The thematic concerns and the critical aspects of all these articles are examined to the best possible extent. Towards the end, the chapter examines the thematic similarities and dissimilarities of fiction and non fiction in narrative patterns.

The fourth chapter 'Balancing Complex History' examines *The Hungry Tide & Sea of Poppies*. The critical perception *The Hungry Tide* has received from the critics is presented in the beginning of the chapter. As the theme of the novel stretches to several generations of
complex family history and the glaring divisions between men and women, the critical presentation of the theme with textual illustrations is dexterously presented. The curious love triangle that involves local fisherman Fokir and Indo American cetologist Piya Roy who comes to study the sunderbans island of Morichjhapi is unveiled effectively. Ghosh reveals the heart of political darkness, histories of dispossession and migration and the efforts of refugees to establish classless, casteless secular societies. The chapter presents these aspects with textual illustrations. The second section of the chapter presents the thematic illustration of *Sea of Poppies*. It is a unique fictional creation on the sea routes of Indian subcontinent. The sea and the ship Ibis form the background of the novel. Divided into three parts 'Land', 'River' and 'Sea', the novel succeeds in presenting different aspects of the experiences of life visualized by Bhojpuri woman Deeti. The chapter presents the circumstances that compelled farmers to grow poppies in small clusters between the winter crops. Ghosh shows how unwillingly the farmers are forced to plant poppy seeds and consider them as luxury seeds to compensate the loss. He discloses the shameless colonial oppression and the compelling famine conditions. The grappling of dominant castes for a sense of place and self, the exploitation of Dalits by high caste characters as the significant themes of the novel are examined in the chapter. The Dalit protagonism demonstrated by Kalua by marrying an upper caste Rajput lady Deeti. The consequences of Dalit protagonism and
the thematic resonances are discussed in all its expanded interpretation. Later, the chapter establishes the thematic similarities and dissimilarities of these two novels. Both the novels are the revelations of the influence of caste, creed, and religion on Indian society. They succeed in untying the incomprehensible aspects of Indian history and culture.

The fifth chapter ‘Critical Elucidation’ provides a very insightful critical and analytical exploration of all the works discussed in the previous chapters in the light of contemporary critical streams. They are examined in the light Post Colonial, Post Modern, Marxist, New Historicist and Feminist critical perspectives. A brief theoretical subjective description of all the critical terrains is provided before the thematic explanations of the works discussed. The chapter presents a serious critical elucidation of the contemporary aspects of Post colonial, Post Modern, Marxist, Feminist and New Historicist aspects reflected in the thematic resonances of these novels. The chapter provides a very interesting theoretical application in all its density.

The conclusion is the summation of all the socio literary and critical aspects discussed in the entire thesis. The conclusion illustrates and substantiates the credentials of Ghosh as the Postcolonial and Post Modern writer. The ground breaking and revolutionary insights churned by Ghosh as altered the traditional history of South Asia. It is in the light of historical, cultural and adventurous interventions of Amitav Ghosh, there is a reawakening across the globe to re examine and restructure the
gamut of the history of the world. Ghosh fulfills the responsibilities of a historian and a fiction writer on the lines of West Indian and Latin American writers. It is well argued that it is only through the telescopic reflection of Ghosh’s works, the entire history of South Asia is subjected to serious archeological retrieval.