Preface

The notion of Indianness, a topic of interesting debate, may be seen as an important pointer to examine the status of Indian fiction written in English. Sometimes, this notion has been used as trajectories, sometimes as ideologies, and sometimes as the state of an author’s mind. The assertion of Indianness, at an initial level, can be seen as one of the main motives behind the formation of the genre of Indian English literature in general. However, in Contemporary Indian Writing in English or CIWE, the problems one notices relate to the changes in the contexts as well as the purpose of reading. The confusing and heterogeneous socio-political realities of contemporary India, the need to assert one’s identity in a globalised world, and the anxiety of articulation before a large community of readers across the world, have made the authors of Indian English literature address the changing contexts of India’s literary landscape so poignantly. These authors are often seen deliberately incorporating the cultural resources of India into their fictional narratives to achieve recognition and fame, and gain wide readership abroad.

Some of the important issues discussed in this thesis relate to three focal questions: What is India? What does India represent? What represents Indianness? While searching for the notion of Indianness in the novels of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh, certain aspects of India’s mythical and storytelling traditions have been explored. The plurality of texts, language, locations and perspectives, that one experiences while reading the novels of these authors, help one to assume that these authors often engage themselves with the idea of India as a cultural space whose significance are to be traced in the deep layering of the narrative traditions of India that usually start with the Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, and the two Hindu epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata; and traverses through other storytelling traditions like the Panchatantra, Katha Sarit Sagar and so on. Thus, the mythical line of descend has also provided the scope
to relocate some of the important aspects of the storytelling tradition in the new writings from India in contemporary times.

It is quite obvious that the authors of CIWE express their awareness about two different Indias. Firstly, the term India indicates a sense of homogeneity, because 'being Indian' produces a sense of unity in the minds of the Indians residing in different locations of the world. Secondly, 'being Indian' also produces an ever-increasing sense of heterogeneity, as India is also to be identified in terms of the twenty eight Indian states whose topography, people, and culture radically differ from each-other. In both the cases, however, the representation of the notion of Indianness is made politically complicated and culturally complex as no representation can be apolitical. Even the term 'Indian' also invites various political definitions of the individual at different levels.

The study of Indianness as a representational mode in the novels of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh is based on specific representative periods, traditions, languages, and literary cultures shared by the authors. Thus, their preoccupation with the idea of India and their attempt to apply the notion of Indianness as a representational mode make room for a detail discussion of the development of India as an idea in general, and how the notion of Indianness has been used in the large arena of CIWE in particular. The problems of identity and appropriation in such authors often produce an ambivalence which undercuts more complicated issues of socio-cultural identifications. Subsequently, the search for Indianness becomes almost a prerequisite for writing fiction so that they could deal with Indian identity, Indian life and society in a meaningful way.

Why at all in the contemporary period should one be having an unprecedented interest in the notion of Indianness? The answer to this very specific question is to be found in the set of conditions under which an Indian text is born. A search for Indianness not only helps in locating such conditions, but also makes room for reading the texts contextually. Thus, what the authors
like Rushdie and Ghosh have written in their novels is to be traced in terms of the various influences on them, and in the forms of knowledge available to them. Their works prove that ‘being Indian’ also involves a variety of identities ranging from common Indianness to ethnic culture, social need and judgment, self-examination and appropriation. Both the authors are trying to understand India’s socio-political systems, and are also making all possible attempts to fictionally represent these systems. Thus, the notion of Indianness is the end product of the knowledge that might have evolved out of such an encounter between the author’s self and the system he/she was trying represent. The experience of reading the novels by Rushdie and Ghosh inform that an author is constrained by the specific socio-historical forces that surround the birth of his book. Thus, the image of India emerging out of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, and that accessible in Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, will bring in different facets of experience that have influenced their individual career as authors as well as the choice of themes in their novels.

The work on the thesis started in 2007. My interest in Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh grew when I was a student in the Department of English, Gauhati University from 2001-2003, and we had to study Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Amitav Ghosh’s *Shadow Lines* as part of the MA English syllabus of the university at that time. The selection of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh out of the many important Indian English authors has something to do with the kind of interest that their novels aroused in me at an early phase of my academic career. It was mostly Rushdie’s playful language and Ghosh’s quest narrative that influenced me most while I was reading them for the first time. It was also their conflation of the mythical and the real that diverted my attention towards the fictional works of both the authors.

This thesis is never meant to be complete as the selection of the novels for discussion is done keeping in mind what has been intended. I have restricted my studies only to those novels which specifically deal with the idea of India and
represent Indian mythical and storytelling tradition quite visibly. Although Rushdie has by now written eleven novels and Ghosh eight, I have taken three novels by Rushdie—*Midnight's Children*, *Shalimar the Clown*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and three novels by Ghosh *The Circle of Reason*, *In an Antique Land*, and *The Hungry Tide* for detail analysis in this thesis. However, references to their other fictional works are also made when it was felt necessary. Both the authors have an extensive collection of non-fictional prose writings in which they have provided much valuable information on the kinds of influences on them, their major fictional preoccupations, and the history of the birth of their novels written at various phases of their writing career and so on.

I do not intend to make my study ‘comparative’ although Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh do have many specific differences as writers. Attempts are also made in this thesis to find out whose Indianness these two authors are trying to address. While, Rushdie's adoption of the notion of Indianness can be traced through his use of the Indian mythical and epical tradition as the pretexts of his novels, Ghosh critiques the same pretexts as false consciousness. Thus, throughout the thesis, my attempt has been analytical. My argument is that Indian Writing in English should always be read in its specific historical and cultural context, and the English language should not be a problem for discussing the notion of Indianness. To formulate the hypothesis, I have used the deductive approach to find out how, at various stages of their writing career, Rushdie and Ghosh have developed their views on India. Regarding methodology, I have used the historical and descriptive research methodology for conducting the research.

As I have already stated, focusing on the present context of globalization and mass cultural exchanges, I have explored the idea of Indianness as a mode of representation. The other aspect of this question is concerned with what happens when a multicultural and multilingual country like India gets represented or studied in the English language. I am convinced that a proper and methodical study of the novels of the two authors will certainly help in discussing the notion
of ‘Indianness’. I hope that this study will also help in imparting useful knowledge on how in a country like India ideas have been formed; in familiarizing the readers with the idea of India and India’s narrative traditions which might also generate an interest in reading CIWE; in sensitizing the readers towards new considerations of established notions in different contexts, and finally in helping them to read CIWE with the help of the new insights derived from Literary Theory and Cultural Studies.

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