



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



---

ISSN 2278-9529  
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## A General Thematic Survey of Amitav Ghosh's Novels

**Anil Kumar Singh**

Research Scholar

Department of English,

Jiwaji University Gwalior (M.P.)

### **Abstract:**

This paper aims to interpret a general thematic survey of Amitav Ghosh's novels. It also focuses on his field of writing. As we know his area of writing deals with historical perception and East West Encounter, Globalization, Nationalism, Ritualism and traditionalism and Colonialism is the soul of his all works where he became a mouthpiece of repressed and uprooted peoples. This paper also deals with historiography, narrative technique, alienation and loneliness, facts of science, and colonial relationship etc. Quest for self-esteem and self-identity is the recurrent theme of his novels. In *An Antique Land* Ghosh is concerned with highlighting fluctuations & connections between the Tunisian Jewish merchant and an Indian slave. There are three major themes in the novel: searching the life of Bomma, social-cultural development of Egypt and the effect of post-colonial changes on the life of the Middle East. He adopted the form of travelogue to study the history of mankind. The novel is a grim reminder of the bloodshed and turbulence in Asia and the Middle East. Ghosh is an experimentalist writer and every time he reveals new ideas in his novel. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a fine piece of art of his experiment in which he mixed traditional Indian views and western sense of rationality. He tried to reveal the views and facts of science with the help of counter-science. Ghosh tried to establish the supremacy of counter-science over science. It is a science fiction that deals with both the Indian and Western Diaspora. The novel is about malaria's vector discovered by Ross & for his discovery. How Murugan is obsessed with the discovery of Ross and tried to reveal some unhidden truth and facts. Ghosh used the tool of blind beliefs to create suspense and the transmigration of soul is also an important aspect of the novel. He used mythological reference to make his novel a suspense-thrilling, detective and religious story that astonished the readers. The idea of the nation has been largely a western construct, a term prevalent in the recent history of human civilization. The greed of the colonizer and the pathetic condition of the colonized people is the major theme of *The Glass Palace*. The novel is based on European greed and the cruelty of colonization. The sufferings of royalty and the end of the royal life is the main incident of the novel and an epic novel having a fascinating narrative that covers the life of three generations, a new image of individuality and leading the self through the repetition of the image of the Glass Palace. The novel makes Ghosh a noteworthy writer, not a sparkling one and his *The Glass Palace* full of facts and style and re-opens old ones so effectively that it reconfigures our dimly remembered past in order to understand their effect on our disorganized present. Ghosh plays a magical role to make his works eminent and splendid variety of novels he presents in front of readers.

**Keywords:** Historicity, Anthropology and Travel Book, Narrative Technique, Alienation and Loneliness, Facts of Science, Malaria and Colonial Relationship.

Amitav Ghosh is perhaps the finest writer among those who were born out of the Post-Midnight's revolution in English fiction. He is one of the many Indian writers to have emerged in the 1980's but he is among the very few to have expressed in a developing awareness of the aspirations, defects and disappointments of colonized people as they figure out their place in the world. Ghosh belongs to the Rushdie tradition of writers, the ones who

are supposed to represent the global league. The extended family the basic unit of Indian society, the very archetype of our social fabric, has always been the epicenter of our social fabric, ever since the days of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. It has served as the bedrock for representing national identity. In post-modern context, however it would rather employ it to examine the fractured identities of the displaced Indian Diasporas, the inhabitants of what has now been termed the third space.

The novels of Amitav Ghosh deals with research for roots, consciousness of exile and alienation, time travels treatment of history as a collective memory, futility of geo-graphical segmentation, barbarian colonial operation, the freedom movements, internal social conflict and riots etc. Amitav Ghosh brings to the English language a case of felicity of expression, which endows all his fiction with a quality of its own certainly of writers like Ghosh it can be said that

Expression in English can bring a sense of release to the Indian intellectual as he endeavors to express the deepest turns and twists of his own mind.... Whatever its future form, it seems certain that the Indian novel in English will surpass its counterparts in the regional languages (Dewett, *Why writer in English??584*).

Ghosh's novels reflect a historicity, as his story is often present in novel. His novels reflect the tendencies and concerns of the age. The modern novel, according to Lionel Trilling is "a perpetual quest for reality and is the most effective agent of the moral imagination?" (Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination212*).

Ghosh is of course, historically accurate when he relates such an adulation for the novel to Bengali culture life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's and the legacy of the Bengal renaissance left to the middle class educated society of Calcutta in the decades that followed. Ghosh's preoccupation with the metaphor of the family bookcase led him to peer into the contents of others shelves in the course of his world travels and to finally ruminate upon the fate of the novel as it has travailed through the dusty laurels of grand-nineteenth century tones and arrived upon the postcolonial postmodern present. Cross breeding ideas and styles is the one form of literature founded upon a myth of parochialism in the sense of a definite locatedness in contrast both in aesthete and other terms.

He is also the one who sees history as the trajectory of events that causes dislocation, disjunctions, movements and migrations, eventually replacing and solid markers with shadow lines, destabilizing our notions of the past in the reverberations of the present. It is no doubt fitting that in the age of an extravagant embracing of globalization, we may claim to have closed the gap between battling the other and straddling it. The diasporic imagination of Amitav Ghosh with an understanding of biculturalism as it is very essential to our understanding of our history even as it is being created.

Ghosh's imagination is as necessarily diasporic as it is postcolonial, being a product of specific histories of the subcontinent in the twentieth century. He explores the identity of the so called world traveler in his fiction. Ghosh's inherent fascination with the cyclic patterns of history and its dissemination in society and culture is conducive to the acceptance of such a notion about migrancy, hybridity and diaspora, in which the tension between the states of de- and re-territorialization never quite dissipates, but is held in a constant delicate balance between the memory of a past and the desire for a future. Ghosh's tendency to flirt with magic realism seemingly plays fully metaphorically and glimpse of redemptive mystery that footnotes history with a potentially regenerative humanity. Amitav Ghosh is one of the most distinctive and influential writer and throughout his diverse and generically composite

oeuvre one constant has been his attempt to find connections between seemingly unrelated subjects. Ghosh dislikes being categorized as 'Postcolonial' in his writing he frequently focuses on the ways the partitioned South Asian subject has been affected by colonialism's legacy. Ghosh is concerned with highlighting filiations and connections which go beyond the neo colonial relationship, such as the persistence of pre-colonial trade connections between the Indian sub-continent and the Arabian Peninsula, Finally in his writing he constantly experiments with form and genre in order to adumbrate a dialogic, non- coercive method of knowledge transmission. Nowhere are these concerns more evident than in Ghosh's third book.

In *An Antique Land*, a text, that describes the generic borderlines between fact, fiction auto-biography, history, and anthropology and travel book. Ghosh's ethnographic field work is undertaken in the Egyptian villages of Lataifa and Nashawy on to his subsequent research. The novel describes the story of Abarham Ben a Jewish merchant of Tunisia who comes to India around 1130 A D and journey of the author himself who went to Egypt in 1980 on anthropologic research. In an Antique land deals with three major themes

- 1-As a student of anthropology, he searches the life of Ben and his Indian slave Bomma a native of Tulu.
- 2-He described the socio-cultural development of Egypt.
- 3- The effect of the post-colonial changes on the life of the Middle East.

Ghosh has adopted the form of travelogue to study the history of mankind. The novel revolves around Ben Yiju and his Indian slave Bomma like a perfect weaver Ghosh has interwoven history and narrative with a rare dexterity of Ben Yiju. Ghosh parodies and subverts the traditional ethnographic trope of confining personal commentary to prefaces or afterwards. Ghosh makes no mention of his arrival though his feeling of alienation and curiosity and presence are emphasizes throughout. Ghosh now links the matrilineal descended Tulu and patriarchal Jew who would otherwise seem to stand different sides of "an unbridgeable chasm" (Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* 189).

In an Antique Land is a brilliant hybrid, tells the story of two Indians in Egypt first Bomma and second Ghosh who revealed the story of slave written by his master. Ghosh discovered an elusive and mysterious acquaintance in the slave, with whom he seemed to share, across eight hundred years, the experience of dislocation, and who seemed to have given him a right to the there, a sense of entitlement and moving between the present and the ancient past. Ghosh creates an multi-layered narrative, rich detail linking the slave life but also a unique understanding of the private life of the world that both he and the author came to inhabit Ghosh writes with grace lucidity and clear- eyed perception. Lataifa is not an imaginary but a real place whose residents are all individuals and how are portrayed regardless of their status or character not with condescension but with a high degree of respect and even affection. He described the village life with unexpected bursts of humour and present with remarkable skill and agility Amitav Ghosh shows the repressing of historical experience which reclaims the past, Ghosh's tale of his research experience and findings in a new country. The alien culture, customs, religion and social life leave on indelible impact on the minds of the readers as well as on Ghosh's mind.

There is a story with in a story at several places in the novel. The narrative technique increases the validity of an event or a story and then provides a change to the reader for

example; the story of the government to pass the canal through that grave etc. is a miracle story. The readers believe the story and there is no interference of any kind from the author and so no one doubts its originality. Ghosh introduces his character by a new tale about each of them. He portrayed the characters of his novel very vivid and lively. Memory plays a very important role in narrating the tales and the reader re-lives the experience of Ghosh through his memory and narration. Ghosh's tale touches certain universal issues and rises above the art of mere story telling. He has a superb sense of history, geography and anthropology. Ghosh's knowledge of Arabic language and Tulu is also really admirable. He proves himself to be a true anthropologist as he unravels one truth after another with a new story. In his quest for Bomma's origins and life, we notice Ghosh's scholarly knowledge of religion e.g. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Sufism.

Homi Bhabha, in re-reading Foucault's notion of history in confrontation with its uncanny doubles- anthropology and psychoanalysis, Bhabha goes on to ask-

*How is historical agency enacted in the slenderness of narrative? How do we historicize the event of the de-historicized? If as they say, the past is a foreign country, then what does it mean to encounter a past that is your own country re-territorialized even terrorized by another (Bhabha, *Imperial Histories and postcolonial Displacement* 328-29)?*

Thus Ghosh has been successful in bringing out the feeling of alienation and Loneliness experienced by Benyiju in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Ghosh has once again managed to prove the theory that migration does not create the problem of alienation. This story of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is once again recreated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; it is Nabeel who is at the centre of the story. Nabeel's pathetic story ends on a very sad, pessimistic note by the narrator suggesting his complete annihilation in the world of History. In short we conclude that the roots of man's alienation are found in the life of Nabeel. The novelist has been successful and in the bargain the roots invite alienation. Ghosh has been successful in portraying man's loneliness and helplessness against the strong force of human nature.

The novel is a grim reminder of the bloodshed and turbulence in Asia and Middle East because of the colonial encounter. It is rather a revival of the forgotten history by showing the Arab Chinese worlds. The book no doubt, is an extra-ordinary example of Amitav Ghosh's intense urge as a tireless and genuine researcher. It is a contemporary novel. Ghosh takes more than a decade to find out the relationship between Yiju and Bomma. It is the best example of Trans-nationalism or rather internationalism with special reference to Indian and Egyptian civilization, likewise there are plenty of inversions pertaining to nationalism, cultures, borders, ethnicity race & religious in this wonderful work of art. It is not a mere novel but social anthropology and travel memoir.

As we know that Ghosh is talented and an experimentalist writer and he experiments with the form of his books and every time new ideas presented in it he has been true of his characters and they belong to real life, full of vigor and joy. In his next novel *The Calcutta chromosome* he assimilates both traditional Indian views with western sense of rationality. He tried to reveal the facts of science with the help of Counter science and he established the supremacy of supernatural powers over the science. It is a science fiction dealt both with Indian and Western Diaspora the novel breaks the literary traditions. The whole novel is a mixture of science and religion, myth and superstition and facts and coincidences that plays a mysterious role in the modern scientific realm. The novel is about malaria's vector discovered by Sir Ronald Ross and for his discovery he won the Nobel Prize, an Indian named Murugan

who has obsessed form the discovery of Ross According to him there is some hidden fact behind this discovery. To find out unravel truth, he went to Calcutta and there he tried to find the mystery with the help of Mangala who considered as the avatar of Kali, the Goddess of the destructing evil powers. Murugan surprised to see the rituals performed by Mangala to cure the patient of Malaria. He thought that whether the counter science have no proof to challenge the theories of science but in Indian tradition it have importance There is clash between science and magic man and machine wars. As Tabish Khair points out

The failure of say, Ronald Ross [the state scientist] or D.D Cunningham to discover the Calcutta chromosome and the ability of Mangala-Lakhan to do so stems from the failure of the colonizer's concept of rationality in comprehending the colonial subaltern ... this is a discursive failure and an index of alienation (Khair, *Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* 307).

Murugan is the voice of Rationality and Ghosh used this very effectively. He is unable to free himself of being foul in the medical history of malaria he experienced many incidents that proved to him about the mystery of Malaria vector He knew that truth that Mangala and Lutchman provided the proof of malaria vector to Cunningham. There is a symbolic element in the novel. The houses in the novel are the symbol of evidence of parasite of malaria e.g. laboratory and house of Anta. The Calcutta Chromosome a fine blending of science with post- colonialism and awareness of our rich Indian heritage to make our future progress inevitable, It is astonishing that even scientists depended on the illiterate native people for the evidence of Malaria parasite.

Ghosh attempts to deconstruct the influence of Westernity by his current novel and established the importance of supernaturalism as we seen everywhere in the novel. All the characters of the novel are reincarnation of each other as Urmila is the reincarnation of Mangala to whom people considered Goddess Kali. The whole novel is related to the colonizer and the colonized. Sarika Pradip Rao views that the novel is the thriller of science, myth, religion and superstitions.

The Calcutta chromosome's greatest strength lies in its success as blending the post- colonial with the science fiction framework. Ghosh sets up, the familiar post colonial tropes of borders and resistance become unfamiliar and beg a closer examination. Ultimately the novel forces readers to abandon their pre-conceived notions regarding our often arbitrary classification of literature, There is no reason a post- colonial novel cannot employ science fiction tropes or vice-versa (Aurad, *Amitav Ghosh: A critical study* 87).

The novel represent subaltern agency, where Mangala and Lakhan represent the voice of Counter science. The novel is post modern in form and texture. An important trait of post-modernism is related to pure and unrelated present. As we known the past mingles with present to give it some a new unique identification. The story of The Calcutta chromosome travelled from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and then again it moves. Ghosh fluctuates the time and it is very hard to understand and find out the starting and ending of the novel.

Ghosh uses the tool of blind beliefs to perform the nihilistic activity in this work. The transmigration of souls is also important aspect of the novel Ghosh also used the value of cult of silence, as an intellectual phenomenon He also used the mythological references to create an atmosphere of mystery and supernaturalism. The rites performed by Mangala to cured the patients and the unnatural death of Cunningham and the haunting ghost of Lakhan in many forms. Mangala also appears in many forms. Ghosh laid emphasis on the necessity of coming

back to life, No one dies and nothing ends. Resurrection is must and the journey of soul moving from one body to another body. It is a Hindu concept that the body dies but the soul is imperishable and all this is controlled by god. Being a human, Mangala attempts to master the skill of transferring souls. Mangala symbolizes the keen desire of a human being to become God this fine piece of art by Ghosh creates a suspense thrilling, detective and religious story that astonished the readers. The juxtaposing of past and present further developed by the use of future too in novels like *The Calcutta chromosome* Memory is used effectively to relate the past and the present. Motifs and metaphors with the journey motif being the most recurring one .*The Calcutta chromosome* a novel of individual life separate from the lives of other and silence is the only companion here.

At last we can say that Ghosh's novel emphasized the memory and time fluctuation very well silence become a very prominent tool and there is no need of language the cleverness of the novel is much more serious than the lack of transparency. Ghosh seeks to represent the actual reality of constructing and deconstructing, histories and stories, he opens us space for various presentations; none being authentically representative. The idea of the nation has been largely a western construct, a- term prevalent in the recent history of human civilization and international affairs to address diverse aspects of human communities, social but sometimes political also. The greed of colonizer and the worst condition of the colonized people and fight for their identification is also the major theme of Amitav Ghosh novels.

Ghosh's another novel *The Glass Palace* based on European Greed and the cruelty of colonization. An alluring face of human existence was damaged. In this novel royalty also suffered and end of the royal life. The book is also about human contradictions because, human cannot be fully explained. We cannot totally predicate any one's behavior. The novel presents meanness and weakness of human nature. The idea of nation acquires an imaginative value and is fed symbolically and more concretely, through the politics of race, its collective memory and desire .The psychological and emotional affiliation with the whole dynamics. The unavailability of real human communities is the main problem of historians. This is an idea of the nation is not very different from what Ernest Gellner proposes in his *Nations and Nationalism* "Nations as a natural God given way of classifying men, as an inherent... political destinies are a myth" (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 49).

The view about nation is as it is the product of certain historical, regional and psychological complexes and bound to across different communities of people *The Glass palace* is an epic novel of Amitav Ghosh and has fascinating narrative that covers the life of three generations. The novel cites the unrestness of violent political struggle. Rukmini Bhaya Nair says.

It strikes me that many Ph.D. theses is not half as diligently worked out as Ghosh's book and scholarship in them displayed to far less advantage in *The Glass palace*. The truth is that the contemporary novel- and Ghosh's talent have both matured to a stage where they can absorb a very rich diet of historical detail without necessarily running the risk of bilious readers ([www.amitavghosh.com/others/links/ 2](http://www.amitavghosh.com/others/links/2)).

Ghosh has changed his style in this novel and many stories have been woven together and a saga of many families, their lives and their connection with each other. The story deals with pre and post colonial India Burma and Malaysia, three countries. The novel tells the process of colonization and freedom struggle of India & Burma It discusses the art of survival in this difficult world and as a historical novel it delineates the events of over a hundred years. Even the characters whether Royal or native mingles with each other that they create a

real effect of historical scenario. Amitava Ghosh refers to the phrase banality of evil as the people followed their British master. The process of colonization and colonized are relevant in the novel. The real heart of the novel and its dramatic center piece lies in the classic imperial setting of the novel. He takes us into the South East Asian theater of war by cutting back and forth between a shy romance on a rubber plantation in Malaya's highlands, a microcosm of empire. Ghosh conveys the picture with particular vividness and imagery. There is perhaps some typicalness, which affects the people. Ghosh enters intensely and seemed to be his central concern the consequences of displacement and exhaustive research. He treats all but a few of his characters with warmth yet it soon becomes clear that the ones he regards as the most unreliable are the ones who collaborated with the British.

The novel reveals in clear terms how tactfully and cleverly the British have conquered countries and colonized the whole populations. The Indian diasporic experience in South East Asia records the historical depth and meaning in the novel. Many stories of banishment and loneliness mix and jostle with the interaction of class race gender and religion in it. Raj Kumar's life story is a story of the struggle for survival in the colonial era. He also exploited a woman worker on his plantations. The post colonial consciousness represents a conflict within his own self, a conflict through which he tries to step outside his colonial self, the history of the imperial phase and the recall his own past, history and reality from his present position.

Ghosh's typical art of characterization is praiseworthy. The novel performs an invaluable service in showing us how the events of the last tumultuous century, and especially the war. The novel brings together history, fiction, autobiographical records and memories. The colonial experience and memories are filled with a sense of pain and suffering of people who lived through those phases of history. Ghosh seeks an understanding of the past to have an influence upon the present. The past is remembered not as a dead and interior period, but as flowing on into the present. The post colonial struggle and complex cultural diversities of boundaries and political struggle for democracy. Ghosh uses his position as a specular border – intellectual, as Abdul Jan Mohammed has defined in his essay *Worldliness without world, Homelessness as Home*, an intellectual who is located on the outside/margin and seeks to analyze understand his society from the position.

*The Glass place* is one of the few novels to relate India & Burma in the shared colonial experience, a new sense of selfhood and identity took shape among the people of two countries.

The novel moves across genres of writing as well bringing together fiction and autobiography cultural, social and political histories, as it explores a century of Indian history, of Burma movement from kingdom to Republic a journey that is still going on (*Burma, from kingdom to Republic: A Historical and political Analysis*39).

Ghosh narrates the stories of the people's reactions to the historical events and changes, discontent and disapproval of the public and how they began to see the image of themselves reflected in the other. The surrender of Royalty ruined the people as the power remains no more powerful to govern. The novel present many little narrative echoes many voices inside the countries Burma and India, political struggle and complex relationship between Indian and Burmese and an abstract relationship and self-consciousness among the different sections of people. The search of individual for his quest is a new awareness of the self, the consciousness of a more individual & independent self of the particular person. All



are related to the wider movements for national independence and identity. A new image of individuality and self esteem is leading the self and through a repetition of the image of The Glass palace.

Queen Supayalat an ambitious and beloved wife of king The thebe, and the major reason of the war with the British. The ambitiousness of the Queen reflect an egoism and pride in her character and that is the reason of the complete separation between the king and the masses Amitav Ghosh shows the unpreparedness of the king to retort the power of the Britishers. All these images reflect an older closed in political system completely insufficient to face the new threat and problem. In the novel the images of ordinary people and their works are creating a democratic open art gallery and the quest towards the understanding to their world& to find their new self and this makes The Glass place an interesting & absorbing work of Ghosh. It looks at both the sides of India and Burma and not only portrays the fragmentation of the social system but also the India's loss of selfhood. The novel presents the images of the decolonization through which the people think of themselves, understand and conceptualize themselves.

Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* rises to the challenge with remarkable self-confidence and he has designed a fictional space on several occasions, the illusion of restoring an imaginative wholeness to the divided self of colonialism is very amazingly maintained through an appeal to shining and lustrous concepts like beauty and hope On the whole, Ghosh is a noteworthy writer, not a sparkling one; and this *The Glass palace* full of facts, fiction style and reopens old ones so effectively that it reconfigure our dimly remembered pasts in order to understand their effects on our disorganized present.

### Works Cited:

- Dewett, M.E. 'Why writer in English?' Times Literary Supplement. 10 August 1962, Print.
- Trilling, Lionel. *The Liberal Imagination*. London Press, 1961, Print.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *In an Antique Land*, Ravi Dayal Publication, New Delhi, 1992, Print.
- Homi K. Bhabah. *In a Spirit of Calm Violence* in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and postcolonial Displacement: Ed.* Gyan Prakash Princeton: Princeton University press. 1995, Print.
- Khair,Tabish. *Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi. 2001, Print.
- Aurad Kar, and S.P. *Amitav Ghosh: A critical study*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. 2001, Print.
- Ernest, Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Basil Black Well Pub. 1983, Print.
- [www.amitavghosh.com/others/links/AG-Rejects prize consideration html-2k](http://www.amitavghosh.com/others/links/AG-Rejects_prize_consideration.html-2k).
- trager, Frank, *Burma: From kingdom to Republic: A Historical and political Analysis*, Pall Mall Press, London 1966, Print.