

SYNOPSIS OF
ACROSS THE “SHADOW LINES”: INTERROGATING
HISTORY IN THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH

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Philosophy in English

By

Samik Dasgupta

Department of English
VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY
Midnapore, West Bengal

This thesis basically proposes to present Ghosh's novels as attempts on the part of the author to explore the rifts in the modern society caused by religious, ethnic, racial, linguistic and cultural conflicts, and at the same time to formulate an ethos of multiculturalism through historiographical reconstruction of the past. History, as Ghosh finds it, is an instrument of representation that has been appropriated by the colonialists and nationalists alike to produce totalitarian notions of identity. The historiographical reconstructions in Ghosh's novels are consequently attempts on the part of the author to produce a postcolonial counter-discourse, intended to question the notion of monolithic and exclusionist cultural identity created by the established canonical history.

In this thesis, I have explored the way Ghosh's historiographical narratives reject the concept of homogeneous culture as advocated by the recorded history, and focus on the plurality of experience lying hidden in the unrecorded past. In the introductory chapter, while defining my thesis area, I have presented a brief survey of criticism on Ghosh's works for the purpose of contextualizing the subject. Broadly speaking, most of the critical essays on Ghosh's works focus upon the author's role as a subversive historiographer rejecting the hegemonic Eurocentric historiography – its metanarratives and totalitarian view point, and reflect on his persistent concern with the 'shadow lines' separating the individuals and communities from each other. To his critics, Ghosh stands as a typical postcolonial writer who perceives identity as a product of historiographical representation, and whose novels are all re-writing of the Eurocentric history, intended to "re-map the world by drawing connections across boundaries" (Prasad, *Re-Writing the World* 56). There are also a few critics who criticize Ghosh for his alleged evasion of the immediate political reality, and his embracing of a pre-modern syncretic culture as means of negotiating the rifts of the modern world. My thesis takes into account these critical views on the

author and his texts, and chiefly focus upon Ghosh's engagement with subaltern historiography as means of constructing an ethos of multiculturalism. I have, in this thesis, tried to demonstrate how the 'recovery of subaltern consciousness' in Ghosh's novel becomes an 'allegorical narration' which constitutes a necessary part of his postcolonial project for dismantling the Eurocentric notion of monolithic identity, and his construction of the aesthetics of pluralism. At the same time, I have defended the author against those charges that hold him responsible for evading political realities. I have argued throughout this thesis that nowhere in his novels does Ghosh refuse to confront the inter-cultural differences as suggested by some of his critics. Instead, they advocate a form of existence where differences are accommodated as necessary condition of the lived reality.

In the first chapter of the thesis I have discussed the theoretical issues related to the author's historiographical reconstruction in his novels. While exploring Ghosh's notion of multiculturalism as revealed in his works, I have, in this opening chapter, focussed upon the function of the postmodern and postcolonial ideals as philosophical foundation of his reconstructionist historiography. I have suggested that Ghosh as a postcolonial and postmodern novelist questions the notion of monolithic identity produced by colonial and nationalist historiography, and replaces the totalitarian approach of the canonical history with the fragmentary subaltern viewpoint in order to capture the heterogeneity of experience. I have, in this connection, traced the relation between the colonial and nationalist historiography, and noted the way the Ghosh draws upon the practices of subaltern history in his attempt to challenge the strategic suppression and deliberate erasure of the multiple voices of the past. In this thesis, I have primarily demonstrated how Ghosh's reconstructionist historiographical narratives aim at relocating the marginal, lost, or suppressed stories of the past from the typical 'non-Western'

viewpoints, and use them as deconstructive counter-narratives to unsettle “the simplified, seamless narrative of national identity” (Vinita Chandra 68). I have further argued that this subversion of the established history in Ghosh’s novels can be understood as primarily a postmodern project which is linked up with postcolonial resistance and the question of identity. Ghosh in his novels presents identity as a construct, elusive of class, culture and nationality. His novels, in general, move beyond the simple binarism of the postcolonial nationalist discourse by privileging a postmodern ethos of pluralism and multiculturalism. Significantly, this pluralistic notion of identity as it occurs in Ghosh’s novels, is realized through the experience of diaspora. The diaspora identity which evolves in the dialogical process, questions the notion of an essentialist identity, and recognizes heterogeneity as fundamental to the conception of identity in the modern world.

The basic contention of this thesis, as stated earlier, is to focus upon the aesthetics of accommodation which is articulated in Ghosh’s novels through his foregrounding of the subaltern voices that were excluded from the official historical records. Significantly, Ghosh mixes up fact with fiction in his rendering of all those unrecorded stories of the subaltern people, and in doing so allegorizes the past. It is this allegorical mode of representation which Ghosh uses in his novels to produce an alternative version of the past, and in doing so destabilizes the tidy framework of the nationalist and colonial history. The plurality of views and voices which come to be recorded in this process of historical reconstruction, defy the concept of a stable identity and the myth of the essential and universal ‘Man’. At the same time they advocate a notion of cosmopolitanism born out of an attitude of tolerance and mutual accommodation.

After a brief discussion of the theoretical issues necessary for the understanding of the novels of Ghosh, I have taken up four of Ghosh’s novels for elaborate discussion, namely *The*

Shadow Lines, *In an Antique Land*, *The Glass Palace*, and *The Hungry Tide* – in which the novelist is particularly preoccupied with the separatist practices of the modern world.

In the second chapter of the thesis I have entirely devoted myself to the study of *The Shadow Lines*. Writing from the postcolonial viewpoint, Ghosh here questions the established notion of discrete nationalist and cultural identity, advocated by the colonial and nationalist history of India, and attempts to re-narrate the history of Indian nationalism through the personal narratives of its characters. The entire novel traces the experience of the Partition of India and Bangladesh, and the post-Partition life in these nation-states through the symbolism of lines which are at once geographical, cultural, and temporal. In my study of the novel, I have precisely focussed upon the process of historiographical reconstruction which enables Ghosh to move beyond the self-other binary divide, and negotiate the boundaries of modern experience produced by the established Eurocentric history. I have here examined the way Ghosh's narrative challenges the very discourse of power that legitimizes the idea of a stable, single and 'pure' national identity by writing off the presence of the 'other' from the conceptual frame of nationhood, and in the process captures the experience of nationhood in its heterogeneous complexity. It is through the personal stories Tha'mma, narrator's grandmother, that Ghosh initiates his discourse on nationalism in the text. A subscriber of the exclusionist ideal of nationalism, Tha'mma believes that a nation is born through blood-sacrifice of war, and is defined by its "boundaries that serve to exclude 'Others' while bestowing unity and brotherhood on all those included within it" (Chandra 69). The novel shows us how Tha'mma's understanding of nation as a symbol of belonging and fixity gets problematized through her personal experience. Tha'mma's nationalist consciousness gives way to her sense of root as she gets back to Dhaka to 'rescue' her Jethamoshai living among his enemies in the "alien country",

Bangladesh. However, Tha'mma's rediscovery of her ties with her birthplace is followed by an experience that turns her birthplace –her ancestral 'home' into the Muslim Dhaka of the riots that kill her nephew, Tridib. The death of Tridib serves once again to reinforce Tha'mma's belief that borders mark out actual differences, and that "that across the border there existed another reality" (*The Shadow Lines* 219).

I have tried to establish here that *The Shadow Lines* portrays nationalism as something inherently limited as opposed to the post-national ideal of inclusiveness. But at the same time it suggests that the superficial embracing of a foreign culture cannot be an alternative of nationalism. The life and career of Ila, narrator's cousin, amply demonstrates this failure. A product of the post-independence world of diaspora, Ila is unwilling to accept India as her home, as she has never really lived here, and cannot identify herself with its culture. For Ila freedom consists in escaping barriers of nation. In her effort to free herself from the restrictive and orthodox Indian culture she marries Nick, son of Mrs. Price, a British citizen. But the marriage fails to bring her the freedom she aspired for. Nick refuses to treat Ila as an insider both socially and culturally, and makes her feel her isolation through open disavowal of marital loyalty. It is through this personal experience, Ila discovers the futility of her dream to be free by evading the national boundaries. As a matter of fact, in spite of her best attempts to be accepted by the people of her adopted land, Ila could never be one of 'them'. Ila's failure in being accepted by Nick and getting assimilated into the European culture is interpreted in the novel as result of the inadequacy of her imagination. It is because of this lack of personal imagination, and power to invent her own story, she gets herself trapped in the metanarrative of the European modernity, and seems to develop a notion that views Europe as "a group of free states upholding an ideal 'civic' nationalism" (M. Malhotra 166), where anyone can share a common culture, regardless of

race or colour. What she fails to take into account is that almost all the European nation-states were originally constructed on the basis of race, religion and language. In the words of Malhotra, “This eliding of history finally renders her unfree; if anything, ironically, it leads her deeper into bondage” (Malhotra 166). *The Shadow Lines*, as I find it, is a postcolonial text which suggests that neither Tha'mma's exclusionary ideals, nor Ila's facile internationalism can meet the challenge of sectarianism in the modern society. It is only a cosmopolitan worldview that can resolve such conflicts by embracing the differences. In the novel, this cosmopolitanism is exemplified chiefly through the characters of Tridib and May – the two travellers who cross all the borders of culture, nationality and language to produce their personal versions of truth. Unlike Tha'mma Tridib advocates a notion of reality founded on individual interpretation of personal memory, and calls for an imaginative reconstruction of the past on the basis of these memories and perceptions. To him, a place does not merely exist, “it has to be invented in one's imagination” (*The Shadow Lines* 21). The relationship between May and Tridib cuts across national and cultural boundaries, and in the process becomes emblematic of the entire vision of cosmopolitanism unfolded in the novel. Significantly, the pluralistic culture that Tridib advocates in the novel, is not the product of a mere physical interaction among people living across borders. Rather it is an imaginative process of identifying oneself with the strangeness of an expanding world, which does not necessarily call for an actual experience of belonging. *The Shadow Lines* is primarily an exploration of the nationalist historiography that asserts the notion of a homogeneous culture, and in doing so, hush up the memory of all those incidents that defy such notion of homogeneity. The riot in Dhaka in which Tridib dies, is one such incident that question the exclusionist ideals of nationalism. The novel shows how the entire incident is wiped out from all official records through an organized silencing process, before it is retrieved by

the narrator from personal memories of his relatives and acquaintances. *The Shadow Lines* suggests that national boundaries cannot write off one's past, and the inherent differences of the society, as they claim to do. On the contrary, the nationalist imagination transforms these differences into self-other binarism which continue to exist even after the partition of the nation-states, creating "shadow lines" that separate the communities by their shared sense of antagonism and hostility towards each other. Ghosh suggests that nation-states which are founded on separatist identity cannot outgrow the self-other binarism. Such nationalism can only perpetuate violence and hostility without making any sensible attempt at resolving the differences. *The Shadow Lines*, I have argued, is a rejection of the separatist, inimical and ultimately self-defeating logic of the nationalism, and a celebration of 'the indivisible sanity' that bind people to each other across borders. As a postcolonial writer, Ghosh believes in the heterogeneity of culture, and considers partition to be a symbolic reminder of the failure of national wish to live with difference. A different kind of cartographic imagination, developed by the narrator in the novel, rejects the notion of nationalist borders, and evokes the concept of the pre-national space that defies geo-political demarcations of the post-colonial world. The novel suggests that if imagination is the basis of the exclusionist national identity, it is also the basis for overcoming differences. In this chapter I have tried to suggest that the novel takes a rather restrictive view of nationalism by insisting on its separatist nature, and advocates an aesthetics of pluralism which is based on the recognition of the 'otherness' within. The stories that are presented in the novel are the products of diverse cultural histories which the narrator retrieves from 'collective amnesia' and subjects to a familiarizing process in order to interrogate the way in which "differences are ... polarized, (and) set off against each another, in order to achieve the false unities of nationalism" (S.P.Gabriel 48).

The third chapter of the thesis is a study of *In an Antique Land* – yet another of Ghosh’s novels to question the boundaries of the modern world. What Ghosh pursues in the novel, is a vision of multiculturalism which reveals itself particularly in his unravelling of the unrecorded medieval past. Against the hegemonic grand narratives of the colonial and nationalist history, Ghosh foregrounds the personal stories of ordinary individuals belonging to the medieval Indo-Arabic world of trade, and uses these stories to rewrite the pre-colonial cultural history of Egypt and India which was completely destroyed by the colonial powers. In the novel Ghosh draws the attention of the reader to the erasure of the cultural history of Egypt and India by the European Orientalists. This historical process of rubbing out the past is allegorically represented in the text through the removal of the so-called Geniza documents from the Synagogue of Ben Ezra in Egypt. For Ghosh the cultural decline in the Middle East and India and the imposition of what he calls “the map of modern knowledge” (*In an Antique Land* 342) is linked to the dispersion of the manuscript materials from the Geniza. Colonial historiography defined the indigenous history of the colonized people in terms of inadequacy and absence, and projected Europe as a reference point in the historical knowledge. I have demonstrated here how Ghosh’s reconstructionist historiographical narrative questions the colonial history by way of foregrounding the unrecorded accounts of the past. Ghosh’s historical narrative here retrieves a pre-colonial world of cultural accommodation located in medieval Egypt and India, and recounts the story of its destruction through intervention of European maritime colonial powers in Indian Ocean trade. The historical narrative of the text centres round the personal stories of Ben Yiju, an Egyptian merchant, and his slave Bomma - the two obscure figures representing the pre-colonial cultural world of ‘accommodation and compromise’. The history of Bomma and Ben Yiju, as reclaimed in the novel, represents a culture of accommodation and reciprocity – something rarely found in

the contemporary world governed by the European principles of modernity. While travelling in the modern Egypt, the narrator finds himself exposed to a series of disturbing questions relating to his religious identity, and witnesses two cultures confronting each other across an insurmountable gap created by mutual incomprehension.

As I find it, what Ghosh is trying to present in the novel is that cultural identities are not all located in the present alone, rather they are diachronically formed constructs that look back to the past. An exclusive focus on the present denies this diachronicity. It is precisely such a dialogic relation between past and present that Ghosh achieves in the novel. In his role as an anthropologist traveling across Egypt and India, the narrator-historian at every turn discovers continuities between past and present, which he uses to make sense of the troubling realities of the modern life. Principal among these is the linguistic continuity between the local dialect of Nashway and Lataifa, and the Judeo-Arabic of the Geniza manuscripts he studies. The syncretic culture of the pre-colonial era further reveals itself in the attitude of the simple and largely unlettered superstitious fellahen of the Egyptian villages.

The forgotten spirit of cultural accommodation is also traced in the popular folkloric tradition that stands against the notion of restrictive identity advocated by the official religions of the 'modern' society. These popular beliefs and superstitions existing outside established religious order are what, according to Ghosh, the meeting point between cults and cultures across time and space. The past-oriented vision of syncretism evoked in the text is, I argue, Ghosh's answer to the challenge of the 'hegemonic ideologies of modernity'.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis I have studied *The Glass Palace*, one of the most powerful postcolonial novels by the author, which aims at reinterpreting the colonial past

from a non-European perspective. The entire novel offers a sharp critique of the enlightenment project which was used by the European powers as an intellectual discourse for validating the colonizing process, and which was ultimately responsible for the construction of the centre-margin binary opposition between the Occident and the Orient. In its attempt to interrogate the colonial past, *The Glass Palace* focusses upon the British colonial rule of nearly a whole century in the South-Asian countries, and in the process reveals the rupture in the human relationship caused by the colonial discourse of modernity, and the nationalist ideals which were built upon the western notion of progress. The novel begins in 1885 at the time of British imperialist invasion of Burma. The Anglo-Burmese war which begins on 14 November 1885, leads to the surrender of the Burmese royal army, followed by the captivity and the deposition of Thebaw, the last of the Burmese kings. The novel indicates the way the colonial history justified such acts of intervention as part of the European civilizing project, by way of highlighting the essential barbarity of the native rulers. However, the colonialism as portrayed in the novel is a power that causes more than the destruction of the economy of the native land. It shapes the perception of the colonized subjects, and even turns them into collaborators to the colonizing process. The novel shows how the colonized people's submission to the Eurocentric notion of progress eventually leads to their psychological enslavement on one hand, and their participation in the colonizing process on the other. This results in the eventual alienation and self-destruction on the part of the 'mimic men'. Beginning with the subaltern figures like Rajkumar and Saya John, the novel shows how the middle class people like Arjun and Beni Pradas Dey get trapped into the colonial discourse of modernity, and in the process come to occupy a hybrid cultural space that extricates them both from the colonizers and the colonized. The novel shows how Rajkumar, led by Saya John,

enters the timber trade, and eventually turns into an active collaborator in the colonizing process through his capitalistic pursuit of money. Significantly, it is precisely his identification with the British colonizers that marks Rajkumar out as a ‘hated outsider’ in Burma, particularly at the wake of the Burmese nationalist uprising. It is not only Rajkumar and Saya John who submit themselves to the myth of modernity ushered in by the colonial powers, Beni Prasad, the Indian collector of Ratnagiri, ruins himself along with his wife in his attempt to adopt the ideals of modernity. The story of Arjun, Uma’s nephew, is yet another tragic tale of entrapment. Ghosh uses the character of Arjun to expose the complicity of the Indian soldiers to the colonizing process in Burma. Arjun’s entry into the imperial army initiates him into the British way of life and he submits himself to European notion of modernity through British military culture, principles and food habits. The later part of the novel is, however, a record of the disillusionment of this Indian Army officer with European modernity. Much of the anti-colonial argument of the novel is presented here through the character of Uma, Arjun’s aunt, and the wife of Beni Prasad. Ghosh suggests that Uma’s understanding of the double face of the European modernity and the deceptive nature of colonialism is the result of her travelling abroad and her engagement with the expatriate Indians, and at the same time that of her realization of the failure of her marital life with Beni Prasad.

The Glass Palace like Ghosh’s earlier novels, is not only a study of the ‘shadow lines’ etched by the colonial powers, but also those imposed by nationalist ideals. One cannot possibly deny the fact that the novel like *The Shadow Lines* brings out “Ghosh’s sympathies with anti-colonial nationalism as an emancipatory force in the modern world” (Mondal 123). But at the same time, the ideal of nationalism as presented in the novel is “bound up in a

larger defeat because it is complicit in the logic of a universal Western modernity” (Mondal 123). In the final section of the novel which deals with the story of Burmese nationalism, the narrator suggests that the Burmese hope for a democratic society lay in the leadership Aung San Suu Kyi as she alone could realize the Burmese people’s aspiration for freedom by accommodating the aspiration of all the ethnic tribes of Burma into a network of understanding relationship. At the same time Ghosh’s narrative generates a vision of multiculturalism by constantly focussing upon the stories of individuals who continues to cross all physical and psychic boundaries. Throughout the chapter I have tried to present the dynamic notion of identity celebrated in the novel. I have here demonstrated how the novel on the one hand questions the nationalist ideal of cultural homogeneity, and at the same time aims at capturing the experience of nationhood as a dynamic reality in the postcolonial world of migration and diaspora.

In the fifth chapter of the thesis I have focussed on Ghosh’s next novel, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) which like Ghosh’s previously discussed novels meditates on the failure of the nationalist identity to dissolve the barriers that separate people belonging to different classes or communities. The novel is built upon an imaginative reconstruction of the event of Morichjhapi – an episode which was deliberately hushed up by the elite historiographical narratives. The refugees who came to India in the wake of violence unleashed at the time of Bangladesh war of Independence went to Sunderbans where they had their relatives. But the government reacted by saying that refugee settlement in Morichjhapi was violation of the Forest Act, and affirmed persistently that a permanent settlement would disturb the existing forest wealth and would also create ecological imbalance in the area. The desperate bid on the part of the refugees to settle in Morichjhapi is thwarted by a mass-scale persecution and

massacre carried out by the government. Significantly, the matter soon disappears from all recorded documents. Ghosh's narrative here reclaims the memory of the event through personal accounts his characters and the entries of a notebook written by Nirmal, a retired headmaster and a sympathizer of the refugee settlers in Morichjhapi.

The Hungry Tide like Ghosh's other novels is an exploration of the fissures underlying the apparently stable framework of nationalist conception. These fissures, as revealed in the novel, are caused by the social and economic disparity which results in the exclusion of the urban and cosmopolitan figures from the experience of the subalterns. Throughout the novel Ghosh uses the personal narratives of his characters in order to counter the notion of a monolithic identity – a notion which is validated by the official versions of history.

The struggle of the Morichjhāpi settlers feeds into Nirmal's Marxist dream of revolution. As he listens to their slogans: "Amra kara? Bastuhara" (254), Nirmal recognizes, for the first time in his life, how it feels to see the world through the eyes of the dispossessed. He joins his feeble voice to theirs: " 'Morichjhāpi chharbo na!' " (254), exemplifying in the process the words of the German poet, Rilke: "life is lived in transformation" (282).

The Seattle-bred cetologist, Piya's quest for the gangetic dolphin in the Sunderbans turns into a quest for her own identity as she comes into contact with Fokir, an illiterate fisherman, and discovers a bond growing between them across the boundaries of gender, language, culture, class and nationality. Kanai, another cosmopolitan figure in the novel, also finds himself compelled to revisit his own identity as he enters the wilderness of the place. In the novel Kanai's self-conscious identity as a privileged, urban individual is pitted against Fokir's, a subaltern figure and an embodiment of the spirit of the place. Left alone inside the

forest at Garjontola, Kanai rediscovers his own identity through his imaginative identification with Fokir. He understands that to the dwellers of the tide country, he is nothing but a hated outsider – a representative of that class of people who are responsible for their lot. When Piya describes Fokir and Horen as “part of the horror” because of their participation in tiger hunting, Kanai tells her : “. . . aren’t we a part of the horror as well? You and me and people like us?” (*The Hungry Tide* 300).

Myth and folklore also play an important role in Ghosh’s subalternist historiographical reconstruction. The legend of Bon Bibi which is discarded by Nirmal as ‘nonsense’ is what forms the very consciousness of the inmates of the tide country. Significantly, the legend represents a syncretic culture that defies the nationalist history of separation based on religious difference. The story of Bon Bibi begins in Madina, one of the holiest places of Islam, and the ritual prayer to this goddess is a queer mix of the Islamic and Hindu form of worship. The rhythmic recitation of the prayer addressed to the goddess shows the evidence of Hindu ritual. At the same time, these prayers follow the Quranic pattern in invoking Bismillah and in repeated address to Allah. Ghosh shows how the element of syncretism retained in the folklores of the subaltern people of the Sunderbans stands in sharp contrast to the violent forces of history that causes disharmony and divide.

In the sixth chapter of the thesis I have briefly discussed four of Ghosh’s novels that are not taken up for individual discussion. Here I have very briefly dealt with two of his early novels *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, along with two of his latest publications – *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. I have argued that Ghosh’s first two novels, though offering a postcolonial critique of the hegemony of western rationalism and colonial historiography in a rather allegorical form, are basically concerned with the pluralistic notion

of cultural identity which constitutes the central concern of the author in all his works. His last two novels which form the part of the *Ibis* trilogy come to sustain, on the other hand, the author's postcolonial attempt at subverting colonial history in a more historically grounded plot. These novels, like all other novels by the author, foreground personal stories of ordinary individuals, and in the process dismantle the idealized unities of nationalism, race and religion built upon the notion of fixed cultural identity.

In the concluding chapter of the thesis, I have summed up my views on the form and function of Ghosh's reconstructionist historiography. In my study of Ghosh's novels, I have particularly emphasized on the author's understanding of the fundamental inadequacy of the nationalist identity in coming to terms with the experience of pluralism as a mode of being in the present world of diaspora. However, while exploring the inadequacies of the nationalist ideals in Ghosh's novels, I have argued that the author does not altogether dismiss the concept of nation. Nor does he propose any essentialist viewpoint, as suggested by some of his critics, in order to escape the real problems of this material world of reality. I have further emphasized here that Ghosh's rejection of the exclusionist national identity does not turn into an espousal of a homogeneous hegemonic global culture either. In fact, Ghosh's historiographical narratives reject the concept of homogeneous culture and essentialist identities advocated by the recorded history, and focus upon the plurality of experiences lying hidden in the unrecorded past. The concept of nationalism that he advocates in his novels can possibly be best defined after Anshuman A. Mondal as 'syncretic nationalism' – a concept that reveals his affiliations to the postmodern ideals where differences are negotiated through interactions.

As a matter of fact, Ghosh's attitude of ambivalence towards the concept of nationalism is linked up to a fundamental tension between humanism and postmodernism that lies at the

centre of his perception of identity. There is a constant interplay of humanist and postmodern ideas in the notion of pluralism advocated by Ghosh as a solution to the separatist practice in the modern world. In all his novels, Ghosh questions the totalitarian identities constructed by colonial and nationalist history, and focusses on the “underlying similarity of human experience across both space and time” (Mondal 29). I have argued here that this humanist imagination which runs through all the novels of Amitav Ghosh is not an essentialist one, but something more complex and concrete. In spite of his fundamentally humanistic approach to these problems Ghosh does not commit himself to any form of universality. Rather he insists upon a postmodern notion of identity built upon an ethos of pluralism in which individual identity is constantly negotiating with its ‘other’.

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