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A Retrospection: Cultural Moors, Memory and Identity in the Select Novels of Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract: Amitav Ghosh is a contemporaneous postcolonial writer. Ghosh is an explorer and chronicler; he highlights his personal and travel experiences in his writings. His perception of life and the globe brings a unique perspective to his narrative techniques. He perfectly entwines notions like cultural mores, identity, and memory in his novels. His works contribute to a reflective insight into the intricacies of human existence and collective history. This research article probes the contemporary novels of Amitav Ghosh. The select novels of Ghosh's imbued with cultural mores, identity and memories. In *The Hungry Tide*, the local populace followed and believed in some cultural mores. Such as believing in the local goddess the legend of Bon Bobi, the protector of local people from the wild animals. Memory is an important narrative tool in Ghosh's oeuvre. In the novels *The Shadow Lines* and *Gun Island*, the author interprets historical memories of characters with contemporary concerns that associated with the climate crisis. This environment and its resources amplify people's recurrent struggles for survival and belonging due to the imperialistic policy that led to the climate crisis. Ghosh not only preserves the cultural and historical legacy of marginalized communities but also underscores the relevance of these themes in addressing contemporary catastrophes, such as migration and identity crisis. The horrors of colonial exploitation are portrayed through the lens of cultural practices, identity crisis, and the collective memory of the subjugated. These interconnected themes provide a holistic view of historical injustices while offering a nuanced understanding of cultural resilience and adaptability. Acculturation in *Sea of Poppies*, accentuates the pluralistic concept of Amitav Ghosh. Discussing some of the novels of Ghosh it preserves not only the legacies of local people but also voices for their lives in shaping a sustainable future.

Keywords: acculturation, accentuates, cultural mores, memory, intricacies, retrospection.

Introduction

Ghosh is the most influential historiographer in four major ways; collecting cultural artefacts, mapping out the historical places, writing a history of the past and digging up the memories over the periods. His novels are a mixture of historical research, fiction, and personal narratives to re-envision the colonial and postcolonial histories. Amitav Ghosh's writing past is a landmark of writers in Postcolonialism. This research article sets out to explore the three following tropes- cultural mores, memories, and identity in the selected novels of Amitav



Ghosh. His works create a geographical and cultural cartography, showing how history is deeply tied to place. Writing the history of the past, Ghosh spins the line between fiction and historical research, using archival materials, letters, and oral histories to narrate the past.

Ghosh has precisely mentioned the historical locations, being forgotten or relegated places to life. Initially mapping the places in the novel *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh maps the place 'Sundarbans' and excavates its ecological and historical importance. In *Sea of Poppies*, he touches the Indian Ocean, India, China, and the Caribbean trade routes through the opium trade. In *the Glass Palace*, he examines the trade countries like Burma, Singapore, and Malaya. The British conquest of Burma and it creates impact on Southeast Asian history. *Sea of Poppies*, he explores the British colonial economy, particularly the opium trade and indentured labour system.

His description of contested Eurocentric historical accounts offers an alternative perspective on colonialism and globalization. Digging up memories through periods, Ghosh explores memory as a key historical source, showing how individuals and communities remember and reinterpret the past. In the novel *The Shadow Lines*, he investigates partition era memories and tries to fix how individual and collective histories interconnect. In another novel *Gun Island*, he connects historical migration with contemporary climate change, showing how memory is interlinked between the past and the present. Amitav Ghosh's novel characters shared their experiences. As a historian, he constructs those experiences as an identity through storytelling. Ghosh's novels highlight stories as a means to preserve cultural memory.

Objectives of the Research

1. To scrutinize the depiction of cultural mores in Ghosh's selected works and their relevance.
2. To explore the role of memory in shaping personal and collective identities in the aspect of displacement and historical trauma.
3. To understand how Ghosh critiques anthropocentric worldviews and advocates for an inclusive understanding of identity that encompasses the natural world.
4. To apply Paul Ricoeur's theory, how transdisciplinary research in the humanities focused more intensely on language and literature.
5. Propose solutions to the challenges posed by the erosion of cultural memory and identity in a globalized, environmentally fragile world.

Discussion

The peculiar itinerary of cultural mores, memory, and identity is constantly defied by forces such as pre and postcolonial history, environmental crises, and displacement. The author ostensibly uses the place as a tool to find the roots. Amitav Ghosh's writings *The Glass Palace*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Hungry Tide*, *the Great Derangement*, and *Gun Island* reflect the intricacies of these junctures; highlighting some cultural mores, the flimsiness of memory, and the fluidity of identity. The problem lies in how individuals and communities reconcile their cultural heritage with the realities of modernity, environmental degradation, and fractured histories. Ghosh points out that the modern literature adequately addresses these crises, particularly in the context of the Anthropocene.

Cultural Mores: A Synoptic View

Mores are the customs, beliefs, behaviours, norms and thoughts that are practised by society. They tend to deeply hold cultural beliefs about right and wrong. Learned customs and behaviours are called culture. Culture is an embodiment of tradition and it denotes everything associated with human beings. Cultural mores belong to a whole community of people but not an individual. In Sociology, cultural mores shape how people think, act, and communicate,



instigating various facets of life such as language, art, religion, and social structures. India is a great country, well known for its persistent rich cultural heritage. From the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, Indians follow the culture, religion and philosophy. These three are interlinked. They revered a god and goddess in various forms such as in the forms of carved stone (like Lord Ganesha), statue or sculptures in the form or shape of Jesus, Allah without any shape or statue and nature also as their deities. People believe in God and Goddess because they eradicate the evils and take sides for good ones. T.S. Eliot retorts that “Culture is an organic one and the basis of culture is religious belief.” Human beings practise culture as an experiment from the ancient period to the present time.

Myth is ordained and practised by human beings. Myth is a basic cultural folk tale that has knitted the stories based on the norms and traditions. It is a part of the existing culture of human beings. Yet, for this reason, teaching through stories or folklore accomplishes the norms. These norms are transmitted from the myths and followed by the people collectively and individually. The ultimate reason for this is stories that are powerful stories which a lot meant to people for the adopting a pattern of culture. From the ancient period to the modern day, storytelling is considered an effective medium to transmit the culture. The stories project the good things. The evil deeds in mythology teach moral values. From the Vedic period to the modern day, the human beings worshipped gods and goddesses have not changed. Starting from the inhabitants, human beings are deeply connected to the myths based on these deities. Myths continue to be an important part of the culture holding such significance that they have impeccably integrated into culture. In Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, the local populace followed and believed in some cultural mores such as believing in the local goddess i.e. the legend of Bon Bobi, the protector of local people from the wild animals. Manasa Devi, a snake goddess in the novel *Gun Island* is considered as a deity. Here the author explores and connects the norms and cultures through the stories of deities. From this point, humans are alienated from nature and it is understood that how Manasa Devi eradicates and cleanses the evil in the environment.

During the colonial period, the migrants who settled in various foreign places followed their native culture in the new lands. Ghosh ornately draws a picture of the culture of India. In *The Glass Palace*, the author mentions one incident about culture during St Patrick’s Day in New York where a group of Indians, participate in the March in the Irish parade. They held their own banners; they wear traditional Indian attires such as sherwanis and turbans, dhoties and kurtas, angarkhas and angavastrams.

Postcolonial writers try to find out the present destructive side of the colonial past in their narrative techniques. They also highlight how colonialists eradicate the culture, identity and tradition through their propaganda. In *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib’s grandmother, Tha’mma, is a strong-willed and pragmatic woman who values discipline, hard work, and tangible success. She hates Tridib’s pursuit of a Ph.D. in archaeology (about the Sena Dynasty) because she looks it as impractical and unproductive, so she thinks he will end up teaching in colleges. Thamma is a headmistress in a school and also from a middle-class Bengali upbringing, her thoughts and mindset are formed by British colonial rule. She values social flexibility through respectable professions. Tha’mma, despite being an educated woman, also knows Tridib’s interest in history and archaeology as she considers doing research in archaeology to be idle and unproductive. This is the best evidence of how societal standards are framed by the colonialists.

Narrative Memory



Ricoeur's narrative memory argues that memory is not a direct recollection of the past but it is a reconstruction through narrative. Ghosh's novels demonstrate this by revisiting colonial histories and explore their lingering effects on the present. Ricoeur, is philosopher and French Hermeneutical Phenomenologist, asserts that once a text is written, it becomes autonomous and open to multiple interpretations. Likewise, Ghosh's narratives often contain texts within texts diaries, letters, and historical documents that characters interpret differently over time. In *Gun Island*, the protagonist Deen Dutta deciphers an old Bengali legend, realizing that myths and stories carry hidden meanings shaped by migration, climate change, and human adaptation. Ricoeur's hermeneutic principle applies here, for the meaning of the legend that shifts depending on the reader's context and experiences. His theory of time and narrative memory suggests that storytelling helps bridge the gap between historical events and personal experience. Ghosh's novels often move across different periods, connecting colonial histories to contemporary crises. In the novel *Sea of Poppies*, he links the 19th-century opium trade to modern globalization, showing how past injustices continue to shape present realities. And in *Gun Island*, he explores the interconnectedness of past migration patterns and present climate refugees, illustrating Ricoeur's idea that history is a continuous narration between past, present and future. Ricoeur's concept of narrating stories through myths has both an archaeological and an eschatological horizon. It looks forward to the present and also looks backwards in the past. Ricoeur's credo on that "interpretation is the axis between language and lived experience (as memories)" (66). As noted earlier, the author's narratives focus on the lived experience of groups and it is expressed through the language then it is transcribed into a text and later interpreted by the readers.

Memory is the major subject matter in the works of Amitav Ghosh. Retrospection of memory is a reference to things past. Memory is a pivotal theme and it is indispensable to understand life. The narrator narrates the repository of family stories from the view of the past to the present. Remembering the past, and mentioning the timelines, he considered that these are important tools for 'memory'.

The novel *The Shadow Lines* is structured into two parts *Going Away* and *Coming Home*. The narrator is present between two countries England and India. He also navigates between the past and present. Understanding, deeply this novel gives an experience of riding on a roller coaster and entering new places. These two parts in the novel *Going Away* and *Coming Home* are the layers of meaning uncovered through reading. Memories are expressed as a stratum and it erects dimension to time. The past and present are involvedly tangled, illustrating the reader's mind into a labyrinth of memories. In *The Shadow Lines*, memory is the major enabling theme. It is fruitful and permits good memories and it also brings traumatic and restricting memories from the characters' minds. The narrator recounts the memories and experiences shared and told through his grandmother Thamma, uncle Tridib, Ila, Roby and May.

The narrator reflects the past, it builds illustrations in the reader's mind. As a result of narration, the novel discloses multiple storylines and images. Ghosh's detailed writing and vivid hiatuses make the novel a rich one. For instance, when the narrator gives a vivid picture about the corner of the lane, Nathu Chaubey, the Pannwala's shop and neon lit streets in Gole Park, Calcutta. "When I walk past his paan shop and look at the crowds thronging into neon lit streets...tarpaulin counters of vendors." (TSL 8) It revives a different visualisation of past memories. This sequence of past images offers the narrative an ardent quality of the writing.

Also, the narrator shared his memories with his grandmother. His mother took him to his grandmother. She is bedridden and she asks about his college and forthcoming



examinations. And he got a blessing from his grandmother. He lowered his head towards his grandmother and her heat of breath warmed on his face. Later. He received letters from his parents about his grandmother's health condition. One day he does not receive the letters, due to his grandmother's demise. Then he heard the news that his grandmother was cremated. His grief as anger at his parents who had not informed the matter to the narrator. This gloomy incident is inscribed by the author in the book. Ghosh renders his characters' lives through books, memoirs, travelogues, articles, and letters.

In *The Shadow Lines*, the memory becomes a tool to navigate the trauma of Partition, revealing the shared yet fragmented histories that define personal and national identities. History is part of historic memories; both are deeply interconnected. Firstly, the narrator recalls his childhood in Calcutta during 1960's. Secondly, the narrator recounts his family's history including his grandmother Thamma's life in Dhaka. Thamma also shared her experiences during the Partition of India in 1947. This narrative is the personal impact of historical events. And the narrator describes his experiences visiting London and Dhaka. These visits underscore the enduring impact of Partition on individual lives and memories.

In the works of Amitav Ghosh, history is tangled with memory. It offers an additional affluent form of experiences and more nuanced empathetic views on the past. Amitav Ghosh as a chronicler and a historian, connected historical and political events with memory. His works are the archives of history ensuring that lessons from the past. That past history is recollected and used to shape the present and future. Reminiscences provide a human outlook on history and give an insight into the events. It not only talks about the facts but also the experiences, and emotions who lived through the period. They form their identities, construct culture, and help societies acquire from past involvements. Without memory, history is a collection of disconnected events with no emotional or personal implications. Furthermore, memories habitually highlight the aspects of history that official records may overlook. That history creates personal struggles, emotions, and everyday experiences of common people. Here are some evidences of past historical and political events that make memories as follows;

Historical/ Political Events	Time Line	Evident in Amitav Ghosh's Novels
Third Anglo-Burmese War	1885	<i>The Glass Palace</i>
Second World War	1939 - 1945	
The Konbaung Dynasty	1752 -1885	
Communal Riots in Dhaka and Calcutta	1963 - 1964	<i>The Shadow Lines</i>
Partition of India	1947	
Second World War	1939 - 1945	
The Marichjhapi Massacre	1978 - 1979	<i>The Hungry Tide</i>
Sati Practice - Immolation of a woman on her husband's funeral pyre (Before Bengal Sati Regulation)	Before 1829's	<i>Sea of Poppies</i>
Opium Trade (Prior to the First Opium War)	1839 - 1842	

Identity: As Representation

Identity in Ghosh's works is regularly portrayed as fluid and multi-dimensional. *The Hungry Tide* throws light on a complex interplay of identities, as characters navigate the intersections of class, language, and environment. The figure of Piya Roy, for instance, embodies diasporic identity, as she bridges the cultural and ecological narratives of the Sundarbans. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh develops the discourse of identity to include non-human entities. And it blurs the boundaries between human and ecological identities. The narrative evaluates anthropocentrism. It suggests that identity is inseparable from the natural world.



In the interim, *The Shadow Lines* questions the fixed notions of identity and nationhood, by portraying the historical events such as partition which create ruptures in the individual and collective identities. The lines dividing nations, families, and personal histories are revealed to be both palpable and deceptive.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* is a Historical saga that spans over periods. The novel begins in the place Mandalay, Burma in 1885. The year 1885 is important in Burmese history because that year the Third Anglo-Burmese War happened and the Konbaung Dynasty was exterminated from power. The Burmese royal family is forced into exile. The novel starts with the character Rajkumar Raha, an eleven-year-old orphan who belongs to Indian lineage. The Burmese King Thebaw, Queen Supayalat, and their family. Rajkumar working in a food stall. There he meets Saya John, a Chinese teak trader, who becomes his mentor. Then the novel takes place in Rangoon, where Rajkumar runs a teak business. He dreams of making a fortune in his life to return to Mandalay. There he met Dolly, a maidservant of Queen Supyalat. They both fall in love but they are separated because she is also exiled with the royal family. The novel shifts to Ratnagiri, India in 1905. There is the place a Royal Family evacuated and Dolly is also in Ratnagiri. Rajkumar is a successful teakwood merchant. Then he goes to India to find Dolly. Rajkumar persuades Dolly to marry him. Then successfully propose, Dolly agrees to marriage. Later the novel moves to Malaya in 1920. Rajkumar and Dolly's sons are grown up. Neel is sent to study in India, while Dhinu remains in Burma. Political upheavals rise in Burma. World War II began, and the Japanese invaded Burma. Rajkumar Raha's family is forced to flee from Burma. The Raha family scatters across India and Burma. Rajkumar lost his wealth and his teakwood business and it was distorted. During the post war period, the family members slowly reunite. For this notion, the author portrays the character Rajkumar and how he faced an identity crisis and rootlessness in Burma and India. His identity scatters and he fight for his fortune to secure his identity.

The novel *The Hungry Tide* purports the themes of Identity and belonging. The characters Kanai and Piya navigate their journey against the backdrop of their cultural heritage and the environment of the Sundarbans. Piya's role as a bridge between cultures and she seeks to reconcile modern practices with traditional ecological knowledge. This not only provides insight into their individuality but also highlights the complex nature of identity in the multicultural society. Here, 'nature' serves as a major catalyst. The poignant interplay between cultural background and the natural world invites a reflection on identity. Sea of Poppies.

For this research, the researcher uses a qualitative method that allows for the study of themes such as cultural mores, identity and memory. Amitav Ghosh's use of intertextuality and contrapuntal through the various stories and events. It highlights the interplay of multiple voices, languages, and perspectives, creating a complex and encrusted storytelling technique. By integrating diverse narrative styles such as letters, and diary entries, Ghosh constructs a multi-dimensional discourse that reflects the fragmented and hybrid nature of postcolonial identities. Ghosh novels engross historical events, myths, and cultures and he meticulously laces the stories. Ghosh's works, as seen in *The Glass Place*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Hungry Tide*, and *Sea of Poppies* he analyses the historical memory in the face of climate change. By revisiting colonial exploitation and environmental degradation, he urges societies to confront their histories and the legacies of ecological imbalance.

Conclusion

Ghosh creates a geographical and cultural cartography that reflects the complexities of migration, colonialism, and globalization. His narratives highlight the fluidity of history, showing how past events continue to resonate in the present. In doing so, Ghosh reaffirms the



power of literature as an alternative mode of historiography, one that brings together personal and collective memories to reshape our understanding of the past. This research article, by focusing on the tropes of cultural mores, memories, and identity, underscores Ghosh's contribution to postcolonial literature and historiography. His storytelling not only recovers forgotten histories but also reclaims them, positioning the act of writing as a vital landmark in postcolonial discourse. Ultimately, Ghosh's works remind us that history is not merely a static record but a living narrative, constantly evolving through interpretation, remembrance, and storytelling. Ghosh's novels engross historical, political and ecological and he meticulously laces the stories. His narratives are deeply embedded with national consciousness. As a postcolonial writer, Ghosh's literary preoccupations with colonial and postcolonial situations to connect themes like cultures, identity, and memory.

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