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English

Past-Life Suffering and Historical Crisis in Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye***W.M.Seenivas Leandar Bias**

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Bharath College of Science and Management (Autonomous)

(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli)

Thanjavur, Tamilnadu-613005.

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's fiction interrogates how storytelling works in tandem with historical documentation. He discovers lost histories, using oral narrative, folklore, and myth as a form of evidence. But mainstream historians nowadays are known to write only about clearly documented events which show national development. This has been stressed as an erasure of subaltern people, namely refugees, enslaved people, and marginalized peoples' narratives that the official state archive violently disowns. Amitav Ghosh often turns the novelist figure into a shamanic one, enabling us to think more lucidly about human and non-human history in the Anthropocene. Amitav Ghosh is the pre-eminent "writer-historian" in today's international literary arena. He views archival material as a source for historical research that allows the historian to uncover new knowledge about the past, including that which had previously been unattainable. Amitav Ghosh sees history as a tool, Amitav Ghosh's approach enables historians to produce new narratives of the past, foregrounding previously marginalized individuals.

Keywords: Amitav Ghosh, Memory, Family, Fate, Powers, History and Futures**Introduction**

The story starts in 1969 is narrated in the first person. Shoma's nephew, Dinu, narrates; the two share a profound, almost adoptive bond. Dinu's recollections depict two very different worlds in 1960s Calcutta. His childhood home was small, his family was poor and strict, and his English-medium schooling was more important than his comfort. Shoma and Monty's bungalow, Tavoy, was a very different place. Set by Dhakuria Lake, right on the Gupta family's line of sight, it was a large, arty, intellectual home. There were books and curios and a calmness very unlike Monty's frenetic ground-floor pediatric surgery. After a busy clinic, Monty Bose went home to Tavoy. Always in boiling immediacy, he had already informed his wife Shoma about his home visit to the Gupta house. Monty had always been a fierce materialist; he'd told an American professor years before that he "works with real things" and dismissed reincarnation as "dreams and fantasies." And yet what he saw in little Varsha adult intensity, busy Bengali, and those fang-shaped birthmarks so dismayed him that he wagered an appointment for Shoma to the Guptas first thing in the morning.

Psychology and Neurology professor at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Dr. Catherine Booth, known offhandedly as “Cathy the ghost-doctor” by Monty. This name of hers was derived from the Bengali twisting of her last name, Booth, to Bhoot, which means ghost. She served as a Marine Corps psychologist during the Korean War. Today, she’s considered to be one of the world’s leading authorities on “cases of the reincarnation type” in general, and has done much of her work guided by the extremely successful real-world researcher, Dr. Ian Stevenson. Shoma had initially taken an academic interest in the subject. In 1960s Indian academia, materialism prevailed and Shoma was frightened of being professionally ridiculed if she courted reincarnation studies. But reading Dr Booth’s paper, written in the droll, empirical, statistical manner so familiar to Express readers, persuaded her this wasn’t occultism, but organized inquiry.

Shoma also remembered driving with Dr. Booth through Bengal. There was one perfect case in Baruipur that stood out: A 5-year-old boy correctly picked out a dead stationmaster’s house, his hidden signal flag, and the nicknames of his children. The boy also had a severe phobia of water and motorcycles, just as he died the stationmaster’s death, he was knocked off a motorcycle into a river and drowned by a speeding motorcycle. A great round of dinner table discussion between Monty and Dr. Booth: Monty’s Stance: Monty thought science consisted of only that which could be seen, felt, or experimentally tested in a laboratory. If you couldn’t tell me how it worked, it was close to superstition. Dr. Booth’s Position: Dr Booth, on the other hand, maintained that science is a process of unbiased inquiry, rather than a dogmatic set of predetermined knowledge.

She invoked physicist Niels Bohr, quipping that quantum waves weren’t stroking either. To her, it was the collection of facts that was important: “There’s so much stuff in the world we don’t understand . . . all I’m interested in is collecting the evidence and seeing if it holds up.” As Shoma listened to Monty her mind, trained in psychology, went to work. She would have none of it Varsha was a textbook case: Children generally begin to express these memories from the ages three to five. Varsha had extraordinary, inexplicable linguistic powers – she spoke fluent Bengali in a Hindi-centric home. Two birthmarks on her ribcage matched the placement of a deadly snakebite wound, providing a physical anchor to her story. The date gave an amazing opportunity scientifically to Shoma, we were so fortified.

What are you looking at, Doctor?’ whispers the patriarch, craning over Monty’s shoulder. ‘Do you see these spots?’ says Monty, tapping the magnifying glass..... Monty turns to look at the birthmarks again. ‘What’s puzzling,’ he says, ‘is that the marks are on the ribs and not on the legs, as is usually the case with snakebites.’ ‘What are you saying, Doctor?’ cries Dipika, her voice rising to a wail. ‘How could Varsha have been bitten by a snake? (17 GE).

In general, scientists only learn of such children years later, when memories have dimmed or when parents may have unintentionally shaped them. Shoma’s is the incredibly rare opportunity to

interview a child fewer than 24 hours after her very first proclamation. Shoma canceled her clients for the morning right away. Now everything was perfectly in place for her to walk through the locked gates of the Gupta house and conduct a professional psychoanalysis of Varsha's alternate self. This arrangement establishes a huge dyke for the overall mystery of the novel. It brilliantly connects three generations, two global crises (1969 and 2020), and seemingly unrelated storylines: the wealthy Guptas of Calcutta, the intellectual cosmos of Tavoy, and the wild mangrove jungles of the Sundarbans.

And then there are the Guptas: An Indian-born family from the Marwari community of businesspeople who are now among the richest families in South Africa, besieged in an opulent, fortlike home in Kolkata by the strain of the city's grime. Their lives are based on Jain principles, which is why they follow a very strict diet as vegetarians even killing an insect in a garden is not allowed. For them, meat and fish are not just dietary items but culturally and spiritually "polluted, smelly," and the thought of consuming them is abhorrent. Then there's the other side of the coin: three-year-old Varsha's inexplicable outbursts of anger. She starts behaving like a Bengali villager for whose diet the rice and fish are hugely important: *Machhe bhate Bangali*. This is not a simple toddler tantrum.

Varsha exhibits mature anger, speaks fluent Bengali a tongue she only uses with her nanny and demands to be known by a completely different name. This entire narrative is suggestive of reincarnation or regressive past-life remembering, motifs very common in Indian spiritual ideology. But it's genuinely disturbing when a phenomenon is so clear in a child. Varsha is convinced this mansion is not her real home and Dipika is not her mother. Rather, she says her "real" mother is a woman named Jhorna. This Jhorna had lived in a modest, mud-walled hut with a thatched roof by the river, and she fished, cooked, and ate fish as a way of life. Varsha even claims she died after a snake bite. The first explanations that crossed their minds were: "the whole family thought it was a medical emergency some kind of 'brain fever' (meningitis)". But there's nothing wrong, pediatrician Dr. Monty Bose is looking at her. Varsha is lucid and mental, she knows everything and remembers well in this life. So, this isn't your garden-variety medical delirium or cognitive issues.

When Varsha says she died of a snake bite, Dr. Bose questions her about where the snake bit her. She has two tiny round birthmarks which she points to on the left side of her ribcage. The doctor leans with a magnifying glass. In parapsychology and reincarnation lore something that researchers like Dr. Ian Stevenson studied extensively people often associate birthmarks with fatal wounds or injuries from a previous life. Dr. Bose holds the magnifying glass as he/ she considers if these two dots could really be recognizable as two dots in the form of snake fangs (two in a row: a double puncture wound). The family come to understand that unless the birthmarks correspond with her story then they are not dealing with a medical condition, or the fanciful notions of a toddler. Instead, they face the frightening realization their daughter recalls her past life as a fish-eating Bengali villager.

Dr. Monty Bose, the Guptas' family pediatrician, confirms the three-year-old's birthmarks correspond with the puncture wounds of a snakebite. Since this phenomenon is beyond the realm of conventional medicine, he terms it a parapsychological case of a child recalling a previous life. A deeply traditional and terrified family, he sends them to his wife, Shoma Bose, an accomplished psychologist who has encountered similar cases. The twentieth century was revolutionary for India. The generation which lived under the pre- Independence rule, Dinu's mother's generation, had experienced war, famine and colonization.

Inevitably her experiences had left deep psychic scars on Husna and there were days when she was so moody and difficult that Shoma felt the woman was as much her client as her employee. This could also have been said of many others who worked at Tavoy, for Calcutta still teemed with people struggling to come to terms with their violent displacement from the places they had once called home (GE 60).

For them, going off to college before an arranged marriage was usually the safest, most sensible option. But for the post-Independence generation, Shoma and Monty, empowerment was a whole different kettle of fish: a love marriage, proud atheism, and unshakable faith in science. Shoma and Monty lived for six years in the racially segregated United States, residing in Charlottesville and Washington D.C. during the Civil Rights era. When they went back to Calcutta, they introduced a contemporary, countercultural influence to Tavoy. Amitav Ghosh firms up something many others have tentatively been advocating for: You simply can't separate the economic narrative of the last few centuries from the ecological." He also employs ESRC-funded multidisciplinary research on precolonial cultures, histories, and societies to resist Eurocentric history and to deconstruct precolonial cultural exchanges, including the making of Orientalism.

Through social myths, Ghosh exposes subtle portrayals of lukewarm cultural interactions in the medieval times. He calls his slave character "Bomma," a decision motivated by his research into local Indian name-making. Ghosh gives this slave character a full lineage, personal characteristics, and a role in human history. This way of working is crucial to his decolonial praxis. Since the official discourse has traditionally silenced the voices of subaltern groups, Ghosh is able to use imaginative knowledge and narrative to articulate their silenced voices. Their home was alive with jazz, rock-and-roll and the scent of pancakes, symptomatic of a radical, no- punishment style of parenting that shielded Dinu from the academic pressures of his parents. Then came the harsh reality of March 2020.

Dinu came to Brooklyn, the "epicenter of the epicenter," where refrigerated trucks were packed with bodies. The virus's horrifying effect hit home for him when his longtime friend and neighbor, Amanda a restaurant critic mourning the loss of her wife withdrew from a simple hug, fearful of "no-touch zones." India quickly went into a sudden lockdown. Strangely, the suspended traffic cleaned up the skies over Calcutta, well known for its air pollution. The frail, respiratory-crippled Shoma was

momentarily revived as she sat in the first-floor verandah. During a video call with Piya, a marine biologist and leader of the Badabon Trust in the Sundarban mangroves, we are introduced to Tipu and Rafi.

Tipu is the son of a Dalit fisherman who passed away years ago while working with Piya to track Irrawaddy dolphins. Traumatized and defiant, Tipu is an ex-migrant who has just made it across the dangerous-migrant route to Europe. He had risen to become a well-known climate and human rights campaigner in Italy before fleeing back to India just prior to the European lockdowns. What ensues when Dinu narrows Shoma down with Tipu's discovery? Set over three generations and two global crises in 1969 and 2020. A simple look online shows this research circle has since transformed in to the real-world Division. Now the vision is moving from the spiritual to geopolitical and environmental law.

A high-profile Rights of Nature lawyer, the guild petitions the Calcutta High Court for a corporate coal-burning plant to be immediately stayed. Their filing cites international models, including Ecuador's 2010 constitutional recognition of Pachamama (Earth Mother) and New Zealand's 2017 recognition of the Whanganui River as a living ancestor. It also refers to Indian judgments that recognized the Ganga, Yamuna and entire ecosystem of Tamil Nadu as living legal entities. An unusual, arsenic-free water drew protesters to believers aged 15 to 75: It was gushing from a spring in ruins of the Manasa Devi temple. Activists discover a spring running through the Manasa Devi temple ruins, a source of unusual, arsenic-free water.

Once Dinu is able to walk again, he catches an Amtrak train to the Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS) in Charlottesville. Assisted by Tarun's associate Ted, Dinu finds 1966 letters from Dr. Cathy Booth to his aunt, Shoma Bose, that had been archived. The letters unveiling an extraordinary revelation: Dinu's childhood "psychotic episodes" violent outbursts always provoked by anything aquatic weren't psychiatric breakdowns at all. Rather, they have an account of metempsychosis (trans-species transmigration of souls). Then, a long distance call to Devbhai reveals all about Dinu's former life: The little girl's desperation grief had resulted in her incessant prayers to Manasa Devi. The goddess granted the otter human rebirth, on the condition that he would assist her in fulfilling her divine purpose when they would meet once more. When the girl tragically died a few years thereafter, her spirit sought out young Dinu in Calcutta and instigated his violent childhood relapses. Then, during a trip to Southern Avenue with Uncle Monty, her soul finally left Dinu and found a new body: Varsha (Monsoon), who was born into a rich family nearby at that very hour.

Conclusion

Dinu drops his phone and looks up to see Varsha herself making her way across the Charlottesville park to sit beside him. And the novel ends with this quiet, reassuring note. Everything

Dinu did his obsessive research, writing the serpent legend, hunting invasive fish, and grounding the past was part of an age-old vow: to shepherd the Goddess's vessel back to her place at the edge of the world. Amitav Ghosh has a sharper sense of the historical, sociological and cultural, than most Indian novelists. He moves between cultures as a tender-hearted historian, calling for a 'third space' in social studies. "They understand that the job of a historian is to separate the present from the past, and to make some sense of the disorder that history and narrative of history bring." He is at his best when writing about cultures as a humane historian and in this respect, Amitav Ghosh insists on a "third space" in the social sciences and studies of culture. The two sides of nationalism are clashing so hard today that globalization seems to be erasing cultures to make them vanishing all the more visible. When interaction between cultures is confined to between-nation exchanges, those who occupy this 'third space' so to speak find themselves as travelers between dominant cultures. Amitav Ghosh has received numerous awards for his fiction, which is deeply connected to history. His novels, which often read like historical fiction, address issues of emigration, exile, cultural displacement and migration. He exposes the basic ironies, profound ambiguities, and existential predicaments of being human.

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