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Motifs of History in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh**Anil Kumar Singh***Research Scholar, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, (M.P.) India***Dr. Qamar Alam** (*Retd. Professor and Head*)**Abstract**

The list of finest contemporary Indian-English writers remains incomplete without the name of Amitav Ghosh. He is the popular and highly respected Indian author, the author extraordinaire, of best sellers like *The Circle Of Reason*, *The Shadow Line*, *The Glass Palace*, *In An Antique Land*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea Of Poppies*. He is a noted novelist, an essayist and a non-fiction writer. The general feeling of universal humanism in Ghosh's writing is caused by the fact that he does not merely deconstruct hegemonic representations but does this on the basis of an ethical dimension based on the relationship between the self and the other. Ghosh's text history and myth flows into each other's domain thereby constructing a fluid wall in the construction of canonical genres since what is myth and what is history depends on the subjective position of the interpreter in terms of the relation he shares related to time and space in the narrative in question. His works often reveals a concern with the idea of borders and the arbitrariness of such borders. In *An An Antique Land*, for example, he describes passages from India to Egypt. *The Circle Of Reason* tells about voyages between the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and North Africa. *The Glass Palace* set again several historical events. *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh focuses on one region- The Sunder bans.

Key Words: Ethnography, history, Post- structuralist understanding of language and textuality, Subaltern Studies

Amitav Ghosh is a talented, innovative and an experimentalist artist in the field of contemporary literature. A novelist with an extraordinary sense of history and place, Ghosh locates an individual's drama in the general, often uncontrollable, sweep of humanity's destiny and actions. Amitav Ghosh's novels reflect a post-colonial understanding of the scientific mechanism. The artistic achievement of Ghosh & his capacity blend both political history with the demand of art and verisimilitude is appropriately remarked by Mita Bose:

"Ghosh's aesthetic is a fictional embracing of historical/political subject, and intellectual exploration of both the major as well as marginalized context of

modern history: nationalism, internationalism, migracy, memory, nostalgia, violence communalism. He is constantly looking for ways in which he can render history into fiction"¹

Ghosh has emerged as one of the most distinguished eminent Indian English novelist in Post - Rushdie period. His ingenious training as a social anthropologist has enabled him to enrich his narrative with the different cultures and histories are the various palaces and its people, revealing the reservoir of his knowledge. He said he writes novels because novels are about people. His works do seem pre-eminently immersed in history, and in not only the

politics of recent decades but those of earlier times as well.

'The Circle of Reason (1986) is a book written in difference of reasons, logic and rationality. It is a complex tale of young Indian boy, Alu and his adventures in India & abroad. In this novel Ghosh provides commentary on the nomadic pro cultures of Southern Asian & Middle Eastern Societies. The idea behind the novel certainly recognises rationality as the driving force of this apparently irrationally structured novel.

'Science does not belong to countries.
Reason doesn't belong to any nation.
They belong to history - to the world'²

However, the ambivalence in the novel's treatment of this reductive character suggests that the novel doesn't entirely condemn Balaram's belief that '[s]cience doesn't belong to countries. Balaram is a product of western education and, despite his fervent Indian nationalism; he has internalized the nation that western science transcends national boundaries in its search for truth.

'[e]ven Reason discovers itself through events and people'³ (p-38)

Ghosh has given a new dimension to the Indian novel in English where the real nature attempts of the writer is give a clear cut understanding in the word of Neelam Shrivastawa who talks of new forms of hybrid culture emerging from colonial experience.

"Ghosh in his writing is at pains to foreground the cultural syncretism of the Indian sub-continent in strategic opposition to the historicism of nationalistic discourse. Ghosh's quest for an alternative history and

ethnography has led him to emphasize the importance of the narrative.'⁴

Amitav Ghosh's novels 'The Circle of Reasons' and 'The Shadow Line' are somewhat difficult to place on the current literary map: they have unusual perspective and cover unexpected territory. In these novels he used different scientific terms such as sociology, history, ethnography.....etc. to depict the real picture of society, national and international relationship.

'**In an Antique Land**' complicates more usual understandings of home and away, positions that have been crucial to earlier anthropological modes .The narrator says:

"Every language assumes a centrality affixed & settled point to go away from & come back to and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for security that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement".⁵

'**In an Antique land**' as a creative exemplar of the subaltern Studies historians attempt to produce fragmentary histories. Ghosh comes close to realizing Spivak's ideal of a self reflexive history that dispute the authority of the historian without lapsing into 'paralyzing' nihilism. It represents a ground breaking comparative study of the Indian ocean world in both the medieval & present-day periods.

As Chaudhari Writes:

"There was a firm impression in the minds of contemporaries sensed also by historians later, that the ocean had its own unity, a distinct sphere of influence"⁶

Amitav Ghosh weaves his magical realistic plot with post modern themes. Self reflexivity and confessionality characterize fictional works of Amitav Ghosh. Displacement has been a central process in his fictional writing; departure and arrival have a permanent symbolic relevance in his narrative structure. Post-modernism gives voice to insecurities, disorientation and fragmentation. Most of his novels deals with insecurities in the existence of humanity which is one of the post-modern traits.

‘**The Shadow lines**’ (1988) is a best read as a novel that interrogates a political consciousness baptized in the curable of national divides. This theme resonates with concern & orientations linked with the emergence of a new world situation brought about by a transformation within the capitalist world economy.

“She has talked to me so often about that house & that lane I could see them myself, though only in patches, for her memory had shame upon them with the uninterrupted brilliance of a light house beam”⁷

The Shadow lines is a novel where invented stories and lived reality coexist, the one as valid as the other historical truth mingling easily with constructions.

Tridib tells the narrator that “Everyone lives in a story[...]because stories are all there to live in, & to was just a question of which one you chose”⁸

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In the list of his famous novels ‘**The Shadow Lines**’ is his best book so far. Ghosh juxtaposes the lives two different yet intertwined families one - Indian and one – English to question the boundaries between their culture and geographical setting. The title alludes to blurring of the lines between nation and the families, as well as the blurred lines within one’s own self – identity. Ghosh depicts the characters of the novels as caught between two worlds and the struggle to come to turn with both there presents lives as well as their past forms the core of the narratives.

‘**The shadow lines**’ interrogate complex themes like political conflict, national identity & cultural dislocation through the use of multiple subject ties. At last we can conclude that the novels of Amitav Ghosh serves special kind of his writing He explores the connection between past and present events and memories, cultures & countries that have a shared history. Ghosh combines his historical and anthropological bent of mind with his skills of a novelist to present a collection like no others.

As Brinda Bose astutely observes:

“he has a keen understanding...of the political historical, sociological and cultural nuisance of his subjects...and it is this sensibility that sets him apart form the culture of Indian novelist in English that are springing form the wood work ever since Rushdie immortalize the genre”⁹

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