

Rewriting History from the Boundaries: A Historical Perspective in the Works of Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract

Because of his groundbreaking role in history, Amitav Ghosh overcomes a specific viewpoint in contemporary Indian English writing. His stories catechise the ways by which history is recorded, recalled, and forgotten compared to merely confirming historical facts. The restructuring of modern and ancient histories, marginalised perspectives, transcontinental timetables, and multidisciplinary study are all considered in this paper's analysis of Ghosh's historical worldview. Focussing on favourite works like *The Shadow Lines*, *In an Antique Land*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *The Glass Palace*, the research highlights Ghosh's challenge to Eurocentric historiography and his attempt to revive suppressed histories of travel, talent, and conventional discourse.

Keywords: Amitav Ghosh, Historical Fiction, Postcolonial History, Colonialism, Memory, Marginalized Voices.

Introduction

Throughout the stories he writes, Amitav Ghosh challenges the idea of history as a fixed, unbiased document by portraying it as a disputed, dynamic arena influenced by memories, influence, and imagination. Inspired by his anthropological training, Ghosh uses meticulous archival research, cultural understanding, and inventive storytelling to reveal the historical record by means of everyday experiences, oral histories, fractured records, and firsthand accounts, undermining the legitimacy of authoritative and historical stories. His study of colonial history is especially significant because it challenges prevailing Western paradigms by charting the intertwined histories of cultures connected by trade, immigration, and intellectual interchange, notably throughout the Indian Ocean region. Ghosh shows how real-world experience shapes the understanding of history just as much as recorded fact by elevating the voices of marginalised groups including migrants, sailors, traders, and indentured workers and by appreciating memories in addition to recorded information. He challenges encompassing historical narratives and emphasises how power, position, privilege, and viewpoint affect how the past is constructed and understood through this creative synthesis of history and memory.

In The Shadow Lines, Memory and History:

By prioritising firsthand recollections despite formal documents from history, Ghosh subverts conventional historical scholarship in *The Shadow Lines*. Events like the partition of India are shown as experienced crises that continue to shape the personalities of individuals rather than as far-off sociopolitical turning points. The book shows how borders have significant psychological as well as emotional repercussions while being democratically established. Ghosh highlights the shortcomings of conventional stories about history, which frequently overlook suffering among people, by emphasising remembering and individuality.

"Ghosh has used memory in all its dimensions not merely as the 'efficient' but also the 'material' cause of the novel. Just as the activity of the carpenter is the 'efficient' cause of the table, similarly the act of recalling done by the author/ narrator is the 'efficient' cause of novel."
(Chowdhary 38-39)

According to the assertion, memory is an important subject in Amitav Ghosh's books and serves as the basis for the narrative. Memory is identified as the novel's "material cause" as well as its "efficient cause." This simply implies that the novel's creation and subject matter are shaped by recollection. An author or narration produces the novel by recalling and recollecting previous events, much like a woodworker creates a table by actively working on it.

“She had no time to go back to Dhaka in the next few years. And then, in 1947, came Partition, and Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan. There was no question of going back after that. She had never had any news of Jethamoshai and her aunt again”.

(Ghosh 138)

Here the writer depict directly about the Indian independence reference through the above statement. However, recollection also serves as the narrative's central theme. Ghosh frequently draws from oral traditions, shared memories, lost moments, and individual recollections to create the situations, people, and feelings found in his books. The tale is constructed from these recollections. As a result, remembrance is the narrative's main source rather than only one of the the writer's tools. In this way, Ghosh demonstrates how memory preserves the past, and his works of literature are an immediate consequence of that procedure.

Recovering Forgotten Histories in *In an Antique Land*

Ghosh's distinctive fusion of cultural studies, ancient history, and literature about travel is exemplified in *In an Antique Land*. Using shards from historical records, the text reconstructs the Indian Ocean trading infrastructure of the Middle Ages. Ghosh turns historical focus from kings and conquerors to common people by concentrating on the story of Bomma, a slave who is all but forgotten. This method offers a more comprehensive and compassionate view of the past, while challenging prevailing conventional wisdom that place a premium on privileged perspectives.

“Ghosh’s work is readily accessible to reading as an intellectual product of the rich dialogue between contemporary poststructuralism and postcolonialism: in particular, their common and collaborative challenge to inherited categories of historical thought.”

(Khair 57)

It is easy to see how postmodernist theory and postcolonialism, which were two contemporary schools of thought, strongly interacted to produce Amitav Ghosh's literature. Both of them challenge conventional notions regarding understanding, reality, and history. While postcolonialism criticises histories produced from the perspective of the colonising nations, postmodernism examines the idea that past knowledge has a singular, unchanging meaning or a single, unambiguous truth. These concepts are reflected in Ghosh's works, which reject simplistic or biased historical interpretations. He depicts history as complicated, ambiguous, and influenced by language, power, and viewpoint rather than as comprehensive and absolute.

Ghosh questions traditional historical classifications like nation-state, power centre, centre, and border by means of this conjoined impact. His narratives frequently centre on common people, immigrants, and marginalised groups whose lives cannot be easily incorporated into established historical accounts. By doing this, he makes it clear that people with histories that are frequently overlooked are just as much a part of history as corporations and governments. To put it simply, Ghosh utilises his fictional narratives to demonstrate that history is made up of many interlocking events rather of just one, and that comprehending historical events necessitates contemplating a variety of perspectives as opposed to relying solely on one dominating interpretation.

Global Trade and Colonial History in the Ibis Trilogy

The Ibis Trilogy, beginning with *Sea of Poppies*, presents a panoramic view of nineteenth-century colonial history. Ghosh situates the opium trade as a central force shaping global politics, economy, and human lives. Through a diverse cast of characters drawn from different social and cultural backgrounds, he portrays history as interconnected and transnational. The trilogy highlights how colonial capitalism disrupted traditional societies while creating new forms of identity and resistance.

“After the image of the founding father, the next stop was a panel that was known to the Fami as “The Parting” (Biraha): there was no inscription or engraving below it, but every Colver spoke of it by this name, and even the youngest of the chutkas and chutkis knew that it depicted a critical juncture in the history of their family—the moment of Deeti’s separation from her spouse.”

(Ghosh 13)

Despite any type of written clarification, the picture "The Parting" (Biraha) functions as a powerful tool of family memories, capturing a crucial emotional and historical occasion. Its significance is preserved through collective memory and intergenerational oral traditions, demonstrating that family history is passed down orally and emotionally rather than through official records. The scene, which shows Deeti's divorce from her husband, represents a pivotal point of loss, transformation, and change that moulds the identity of the family. Because memory is actively taught and internalised, even the youngest members comprehend its meaning. By appreciating personal, lived experiences—particularly those belonging to women—as valid chronological testimonials, the panel questions traditional history.

The Glass Palace: Empire and Opposition

Ghosh explores the effects of British empire in India and Burma in *The Glass Palace*. The story follows the fall of the monarchy, the emergence of colonial power, and the ensuing freedom movement. Ghosh's historical viewpoint emphasises the long-lasting consequences of empire, including as instability in government, artistic deterioration, and immigration. The book also highlights adaptability and resiliency, implying that opposing forces as well as dominance have changed history.

*“Ghosh is a worthy writer, not a scintillating one; and his *The Glass Palace* is important not because it opens new stylistic or thematic door, but because it reopens old ones so effectively.”*

(Khair 174)

When it was stated places “*The Glass Palace*” by Amitav Ghosh in a historical context that prioritises its historical involvement beyond artistic invention. According to this perspective, the novel's value stems from its capacity to reevaluate and shed light on historical events, especially the political and social upheavals in Burma and colonial Southeast Asia, rather than from creative innovation.

“*In the history of the Ratnagiri Club he was the only person who was known to have taken the slim, fragile craft out into the open sea and come back to tell the tale.*”

(Ghosh 174)

Ghosh fosters a more comprehensive of history include experienced daily by revisiting conventional accounts of history so that readers can investigate the societal realities underlying significant incidents such as colonial exploitation, displacement, and transnational relationships. His work emphasises how historical research through narrative is still relevant today.

Amitav Ghosh's Historical Image

Three essential characteristics of Ghosh's historical viewpoint are transnationalism, marginality, and interdisciplinarity. He creates scenarios that challenge nationalistic and chronological interpretations of history by focussing on social science, history, and oral history. His emphasis on under-represented groups—slaves, immigrants, women, and subaltern communities—restores agency to people who are frequently left out of historical discussions. Ghosh also portrays history as a common human experience rather than a collection of distinct national narratives by highlighting cross-cultural ties.

Conclusion

The limits of historical fiction are redefined by Amitav Ghosh's interaction with the past. He challenges prevailing historiographical approaches and retrieves lost stories by fusing painstaking investigation with creative reconstruction. His writings challenge readers to reevaluate whose narratives are kept and how history is constructed. Ghosh is one of the most important voices in contemporary postcolonial literature because, from a historical standpoint, his fiction functions as both a critique of colonial historiography and a potent act of cultural recall.

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Conflicts of interest

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