

Narrative Style, Myths, Language Code Mixing and Code Switching in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*

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Abstract: *In Postcolonial fiction, the past, the present and the future are fused along with the imperial and colonial cultures, which are made to revolve around transposed time with the intention to subvert the imperial purpose in the ongoing course of narration. Colonization gives rise to freshly shaped transcultural forms known as hybridity. Hybridity takes linguistic, cultural, racial and political forms. Language and culture go hand in hand, but language also has the capacity to accept new cultures and take intense pleasure in it. In his novels, Ghosh mixes up many genres, explores them, merges them and makes the divisions of genres blur and fade away. Amitav uses complex narrative techniques with many layers of meaning displaying power relations. He narrates like a poet, merging family chronicle with personal history.*

Keywords: Postcolonial writing, Myths, Intertextuality, Language and culture

1. Introduction

The dominance of writing and the view that writing is a mode of authority, power and truth is caused to last indefinitely by the Eurocentric cultural presuppositions and their ideas of civilization. This Eurocentric notion of the supremacy of writing has underrated oral culture. In the African societies, the oral form is equally used in accordance with written form. It is considered that verbal and performative arts are artistically abundant and intricate than the written form. This prevalence of Oral form has challenged the theory of the Post-structuralist critic Derrida, which claims that written form has the priority of importance than the Oral form. Eventually Written forms are modified by the popular Oral Forms and Oral culture is getting transformed with it's relation to the written culture in the modern period. Critic Chakraborty comments:

“the Postcolonial texts of the diglossic societies ... use a language which is different from the language of power and give the writer an amplitude of freedom which is in conformity to the metropolitan/ standard variety so far denied.” (9)

Mythic and magical traditions which are the characteristic features of local and national cultures are given expression through Magic Realism. Magic realism acts as a mode of expression of local and national culture's reality. The term refers to the entailment of mythic or legendary source of supply from local written or oral cultural traditions in coeval narratives. Magic realism interrogates Western, rational, linear narratives and includes indigenous metatexts and textual forms that regains the pre-colonial culture. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) are perfect examples of Magic Realism.

Metonymic gap is a nuanced form of abrogation that indicates the cultural gap shown in the colonial language. While appropriating the colonial language, un glossed words,

phrases and passages of the indigenous language, concepts, allusions and references not known to the colonizer gets included. This inserted language represents the culture of the colonized subject in a metonymic way stressing the difference between his culture and the colonizer's culture. Syntactic fusion, neologism, code - switching, code - mixing and using untranslated words in the colonial language emphasizes the cultural differences, yet makes it intact with the narration. Ngugi has interpolated a Gikonyo song in his novel *A Grain of Wheat*. The song reiterates the significance of the postcolonial writer's culture and acts as an interface between two cultures.

Language and culture go hand in hand, but language also has the capacity to accept new cultures and take intense pleasure in it. With the impact of British imperialism, varieties of English developed around the world and this appropriation and abrogation of English is a classic feature of Postcolonial societies and writings. The World has led to the sector of sociolinguistics referred to as World Englishes. The *Journal Worlds Englishes* which has been published since 1984 studies the global spread of English. Englishes are Pidgin Englishes, Creole Englishes, English as a Second Language (ESL) in countries like India where English is taught at school and where it remains as the language of Government and Commerce, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in European countries, Immigrant Englishes which define the variations spoken by immigrants in English speaking communities; Language Shift Englishes which replaced the primary language of a community as in Ireland, Jargon Englishes which are pidgins with widespread use, Hybrid Englishes which is the development of code mixing.

English subsists as polydialectal continuum, passing through three coaxial circles such as UK and it's dominions, colonized and formerly colonized societies, developed and developing nations. Linguistic Imperialism and Language Pragmatics are the valid reasons for the continuing spread of English. Colonial education is the main cause for English to remain as the cultural capital in the colonies. This cultural capital enabled writers to insinuate into the global systems of publishing, distribution and readership and uphold the

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representation of their cultures to the world audience. Thus English language reigns as the unbeaten Global Lingua Franca.

India is a bilingual country as many Indians are well versed in writing in their own Mother tongue language and in English for Indians; English is the language of their cognitive composition. Indians cannot write like the native English people. But the Indian English of the Postcolonial writers wear the method of expression which establishes its discrete, extraordinary, outstanding and scintillating nature. Amit Chaudhari opines that the Postcolonial writer has to deal with two complex languages. He sets out the role of a Postcolonial writer:

“What makes [him] new is the paradoxical confluence within him of two cultures, creating a unique persona and sensitivity. This new sensibility is not an individual talent or gift, it is not the outcome of creative genius, but the result and unwitting by-product of colonialism and history. The postcolonial writer is strange and unique, not primarily, because of his gift, but (because of) his peculiar historic condition, and it is his first creative or writerly function to recognize and be conscious of that condition. (19)

Murari Prasad opines that though Amitav could have used Bengali or any other Indian language for writing his novel, he has chosen the English language to write back against the colonial empire by making it suitable and compatible and by destroying its presumptions by being innovative in the form and the deliverance of the content. Idioms taken from local circumstances and culture are used vitally by Amitav Ghosh. In his novels, Ghosh mixes up many genres, explores them, merges them and makes the divisions of genres blur and fade away. Amitav uses complex narrative techniques with many layers of meaning displaying power relations. He narrates like a poet, merging family chronicle with personal history. As stated by Claire Chambers, Amitav Ghosh upsets the binary structures such as centre and margin, hierarchy and linearity to create an effective impact in the relationship between the dominant and the under privileged people. Amitav Ghosh's novels can be termed as Historiographic metafiction where history and fiction synthesize to represent the colonized world.

The Postcolonial writer Firdaus Kanga renders his observation regarding the new emerging Postcolonial writers and their contribution to literature. He comments:

“In fact, the two most promising fields for writing in English lies in India and South Africa. Both have the richness of two of the richest of cultures to draw from. Perhaps India has a slight edge over South Africa because of two things - the superb language control of Amitav Ghosh's and Vikram Seths, and the inescapable tinge of South Africa's apartheid antecedents. (25)

Myth rooted in memory. Myth and history share a diabolic relationship. The novel is divided into *The Ebb; Bhata* and *The flood – Jowar*. Amitav Ghosh has created the Bon – bibi

myth In *The Hungry Tide*. A person called Abdul Rahim has written the story of the myth. It is often performed as a play by the people of Sundarban Islands. The childless yet faithful and dedicated Muslim man Ibrahim in Madina, the sacred place of the Muslims, is blessed by the Arch angel Gabriel with twin offsprings, Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli. As the twins grow up, the Arch angel informs them that they have a particular mission in life and that they have to move to the country of eighteen tides and make it suitable for people to live. In the Tide Country, Bon – Bibi brings the demon Dokkhin Raj under her controlling power and marks a boundary line to leave one half of the region to Dokkhin Raj and the rest for human settlement. Here, Amitav brings in the effect of magical realism in his realistic narrative.

The people of Sundarban Island always put forth petition for help, support and protection from Bon – Bibi as they enter into the forest. They can claim for such protection from Bon – Bibi, after following certain rules of Bon – Bibi. One such rule is that human beings should not penetrate inside the forest area belonging to Dokkhin Raj. Amitav implies a message through the Bon – Bibi myth. The message is that, in order to have a perfect balance between man and animal genus, the greed and need of man has to be brought under control. Bon – Bibi myth instructs people with this dogma. Myths naturally depict the life and society of people. Amitav has created the Bon- Bibi myth in the novel *The Hungry Tide* to promote the voice of the little narratives of the local and to supersede the grand narratives of the global with the little narratives of the local. The compassion of Bon -Bibi myth is in contrast with the left is government which evacuated and massacred the refugees.

The Bon – Bibi myth is associated with the story of Dukhey. Dhona, who lives in the edges of the Sundarban forest, has taken a fleet of seven ships in search of fortune in the forest. When Dhona's fleet is about to leave, they come to know that one man is in short of the crew to make it complete. So he called Dukhey, a poor young lad, to accompany them in the voyage. Dukhey's dad had died and he lives with his old mother. Dukhey's mother reluctantly sends him for the journey and she advises Dukhey to call upon Bon Bibi if he is in any danger. Dhona's journey goes futile as whatever he wants to obtain from the forest vanishes away. That night Dokkhin Raj appears in the dreams of Dhona and suggested an agreement with Dhona saying that if Dhona leaves the young lad Dukhey for Dokkhin Raj he will be bestowed with wealth beyond imagination and sent home safely. Dhona consents to this pact and leaves Dukhey to the demon Dokkhin raj and moves out of the place in his ships. Dukhey has gone to fetch firewood and as he returns he finds that the ships have gone out. DokkhinRaj pounces upon Dukhey in the form of the Tiger. The poor lad cries out to Bon Bibi to be saved from the clutches of Dokkhin Raj. Amitav Ghosh describes it beautifully:

“Even as Dukhey was losing consciousness, he recalled his mother's parting words, and called out: O mother of mercy, Bon Bibi, save me, come to my side. 'Bon Bibi was far away, but she crossed the waters in an instant. She revived the boy, taking him into her lap, while her brother Shah Jangoli dealt a terrible chastisement to the

demon. Then transporting Dukhey to her home, she nursed him back to health.” (105)

This story is enacted as *The Glory of Bon Bibi* by the people living in the Sundarban Islands. Fokir, Kusum and Horen believe in the myth of Bon Bibi and pray to her in her shrine.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh has made use of intertextuality which is found in the myth of Bonbibi. It has similarities with Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988) in the reference to Medina and the Archangel Gabriel. Bonbibi worshipping is both Sufi and Hindu. Nirmal refers to his favourite poet German poet Rainer Maria Rilke often in his diary. Nirmal's writing style is similar to Amitav Ghosh's. Nirmal's ideology of creating stories is also same like Amitav Ghosh's, especially where he insists on the fact that everything is connected. He states:

“Everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow they did become stories – of a kind. (282- 283)

Amitav Ghosh has uses multiple narratives and points of views in the novel. *The Hungry Tide*. Bernier's *Travels* is the intertext employed in the novel, *The Hungry Tide*. After his retirement Nirmal visits many schools in the Sundarban Islands traveling in the boat of Horen. Once, while moving in the boat of Horen to a place called Kumirmari, Nirmal narrates the travel adventures of Bernier to Horen. Bernier was a Frenchman, a Jesuit Traveller, Doctor, Political Philosopher and Historian. He lived in India for twelve years from 1656 - 1668 and travelled all around the Tide country. Nirmal recounts Bernier's travel experiences to Horen and mentions that Bernier had remarked seeing a rainbow made by the moon in the Tide country in his adventures. Horen immediately responds that Bernier would have visited the place called Gerafitola in the Tide country where the rainbow made by the moon is visible on a full moon day. Nirmal dismisses the statement of Horen saying that such a thing would never happen. But whatever Bernier had reported as his experience is witnessed by Piya as Fokir takes her to Gerafitola and shows her the rainbow made by the moon.

“his fingers described an arc circling around and over the moon. Now, as her eyes grew accustomed to the silvery light, she saw a faint spectrum of coloured light ... Then his finger traced another arc in the sky, a vast one this time, spanning the horizon, and it dawned on her suddenly that he was thinking of a rainbow of some kind. Was that what he had shown her, a rainbow made by the moon? He gave her an earnest nod and she nodded too....” (352)

Amitav Ghosh uses Rainer Maria Rilke's poetic lines as an intertext in the novel, *The Hungry Tide*. Rainer Maria Rilke (4 December 1875 – 29 December 1926) is one of the most renowned German language Poets. His famous poetic works

are *Duino Elegies* (1922) and *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922). His works are said to be ‘mystical’ and ‘philosophical’ bearing the message of beauty and empirical suffering.

Amitav Ghosh makes use of the myth of Goddess Ganga. How Goddess Ganga has extended downwards from the heavens which has led to the formation of the Sundarbans. Kanai reads about this myth while travelling in the train. Kanai reads: “In our legends it is said that the goddess Ganga's descent from the heavens would have split the earth had Lord Shiva not named her torrent by tying it into his ash smeared locks.” (6) This myth bestows the idea that River Ganga has turned to be the “heavenly braid” (6) of Lord Shiva which stretches out and flows into the plain land as enormous “rope of water” (6). It is believed that the Lord Shiva's mass of hair have unfolded into thousand convoluted strands flowing over the land and dividing it into huge archipelago of islands placed between the sea and the plains of Bengal. Amitav describes excellently:

“Lord Shiva's matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle. Once past that point the river throws off its bindings and separates into hundreds, maybe thousands, or tangled strands. Until you behold it for yourself, it is almost impossible believe that here, interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal, lies an immense archipelago of islands. But that is what it is: an archipelago, stretching for almost three kilometres, from the Hooghly River in West Bengal to the shores of the Meghna in Bangladesh. The islands are the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her Sari, the ‘achol’ that follows her, half – wetted by the sea. They number in the thousands, these islands; some are immense and some no longer than sandbars; some have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into being just a year or two ago.” (7)

Intertextuality is used as technical device in *The Hungry Tide*, when Kanai is shown reading the extracts from his uncle Nirmal's journal. Though it is written in English, the reader is asked to imagine Kanai reading them in Bengali. Ghosh has incorporated lot of Bengali terms, italicized certain words and glossed some other words. Code mixing is also employed in the novel. Code is the system of communication between two parties. Code mixing is the amalgamation of two or more languages in speech. It occurs in a multilingual atmosphere. Code mixing and code switching are used by some language expert substitutably. Code mixing stresses upon hybridization and code switching refers to the movement from one language to another. These are a few examples of code mixing “She knew no Bengali: ami Bengali jani na” (04), ‘Are Moshai’ (05), ‘Gamchha’ (107), ‘Bachao’ (109). Moyna plays upon the words ‘gaan’ and ‘gyan’. Kanai says, “She made a funny little play on the word ‘gyan’, which means knowledge, and ‘gaan’ which means song. She said that her life would be a lot easier if her husband had a little more “‘gyan’ and litte less ‘gaan.’” (212)

In the opinion of Helen Tiffin, myth is a narrative strategy plied by postcolonial writers to resist colonial exploitation or

to reinstate the self. Postcolonial writers use myth and as a tool for the destabilization of the most prevailing representations. Amitav has created the Mangala-bibi Myth in the novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome*. The British Scientist Cunningham has met Mangala in the Sealdah Station. Mangala has come from a poor family and has been suffering from the disease called 'Syphilis'. By observing the speed with which Mangala has picked up the slide, Farley is confirmed that regarding the Malaria research she has learnt the absolute details. Cunningham says that she has a "A quicker pair of hands and eyes I had never seen before." (127). Farley quickly steals a glance into the anteroom while moving out of the laboratory and notices how is seated on a low divan with the stance of an enthroned goddess. By her side he watches the bamboo pigeon cages and the pigeons which are shivering in a state of near death. Farley also notices how half - dozen people are around Mangala's feet in different postures of making humble entreaties as if to God, Some touch her feet and others are lying prostrate. Malaria is used as a treatment for Syphilis by Mangala.

The next day in the laboratory, Farley insists that he would not leave the lab until he sees the transformation which was described by Laveran. Knowing how obstinate he is, Lakhaan moves to Mangala who is sitting on her divan, touches her feet and coaxes her to show what Farley has been searching for many days. Agreeing to Lakhaan's view, Mangala beheads the pigeon which is already in a near death state with a scalpel. The blood of the infected Pigeon is shown to Farley in a slide. And to his wonder Farley finds the transformation of the amoeboid forms as described by Laveran.

Murugan finds a small figurine of Mangala - bibi with a tiny pigeon and an old fashioned microscope hidden in a gap of the Ross Memorial. He tells Urmila, "if I had to take a guess, I'd say that was demi - urge of Ron's discovery, ' he said. ' My guess is that Mangala is the one behind the whole experiment." (193). Urmila, the journalist, remembers a story by Phulmoni which tells about a beautiful bathing woman slipping and getting drowned in the pond and was saved by holding a small rock depicting the eyes of Mangala - bibi. The woman kept on telling, "She saved me, she saved me." (195). Phulmoni himself has seen the a little shrine of Mangala - bibi in a park. He goes to Kalighat, where the image was made and finds out that the deity in the shrine is Mangala - bibi. Murugan moves to Kalighat and there he sees a small girl playing with the image of a microscope and on further inquiry the little girl tells that her father has made lot of images like that as that day is the last day of the Puja of Mangala - bibi. The little girl says, "Today is the last day of the puja of Mangala - bibi. Baba says that tonight Mangala - bibi is going to enter a new body." (200). Sonali finds that Mangala - bibi has now entered into the body of Mrs. Aratounian.

Murugan, Sonali and Urmila come to know that Mrs. Aratounian has moved to Renupur from Sealdah. She has called Phulmoni to join in. The trio Sonali, Urmila and Murugan are now moving towards Renupur. Urmila is the next body which Mangala-bibi has chosen to enter. Perceiving this, Murugan begs Urmila to remember him and

not to leave him behind. Urmila promises to take Sonali and Murugan along with her wherever she goes. Antar sees in his system Ava, Murugan appearing near the auditorium approaching two women Sonali and Urmila but gradually they appear as Tara and Maria. Now Antar finds himself taking up the role of Murugan with the voices of Tara and Maria assuring him that they are with him in the process of 'interpersonal transference'. Amitav has created the Mangala - bibi myth with a lot of magic realistic elements.

Coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966, 'Intertextuality' appraises about the interrelationship between a reader and the author as well as between the text with other texts. There are five types of Intertextuality according to Gerard Genette. First type is Paratexts - which refers to Epigraphs, Epilogues, Acknowledgements, Footnotes, Drafts and Illustrations which are linked with the chief narrative. Second type is Intertextuality - Allusions, references to other works, quotes and citations in a text come under this category. The third type is Architextuality which is the relationship of a text to other texts of the same genre. Metatextuality is the fourth type which relates the link between a text and the critical commentaries, biographical commentaries and other references on the original text. Hypertextuality refers to texts that arrive later or after the original text. The original text is referred to as hypotext and the later text is referred to as hypertext. Spoofs, Parodies and Adaptations are associated with the original text by hypertextuality. James Joyce's *Ulysses* is an example of hypertextuality as it is based on the original text *Odyssey*.

In the narrative phase of *The Calcutta Chromosome* Amitav Ghosh is influenced by Rabindranath Tagore's Short Story *The Hunger of Stones*, and by Charles Dicken's story- *The Signalman* which has plenty of supernatural elements. Hypertextuality is used in plenty in the novel, *The Calcutta chromosome* as Amitav Ghosh has made L. Murugan to investigate the diaries and *Memoirs* of Ronald Ross to find out the real source of the scientific discovery of knowing that Malaria is caused by mosquitoes. Architextuality is employed in the novel *The Calcutta chromosome* as the novel's genre replicates the genre of Science Fiction, Cyberpunk and nineteenth century ghost stories. As stated by the computer expert Theodore Nelson hypertext in internet shows how texts are linked with other texts, diagrams and images. The same name hypertext is made use of by both Genette and Nelson as a kind of intertextuality and computer interposed mode of reading. The exercise of architextuality and hypertextuality in the novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome* indicates how Amitav Ghosh attempts to destroy the established structures of Europe such as centre, margin, hierarchy and linearity.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome* Phulmoni has narrated a strange event which has happened to him in the Renupur Railway station when he was a young man. Due to some work Phulmoni has to make a visit to the Renupur Railway station during night time and against the station master's advice he preferred to stay in the signal room as he couldn't move further due to heavy rain. In the night the red light lamp in the signal room started moving and as Phulmoni followed that in the railway tracks, he finally gets the feeling

that he was run over by the train. Amitav Ghosh narrates the movement of the signal lantern in a spooky manner.

“He was fumbling with the safety-catch when the lantern appeared in the doorway. It stepped in and began to approach him; a hand appeared, bathed in the red light of the Lantern. The face was still in darkness but suddenly that inhuman voice rang through the room again. It said just that one word, ‘Laakhan’.” (235).

Phulmoni wakes up from the sleep and is assured by the station master that no such thing has happened since the red signal lamp remains in its place intact. Again he completely wakes up from sleep and finds himself in the railway track with the real train arriving speedily. However, he escapes from being hit as the train stops a mile afar. The engineer who comes there tells Phulmoni that the railway siding has not been used ever since the death of the station master in the railway track long time ago by the power of the young boy Laakhan. Urmila the Journalist has narrated this story to Murugan which she has heard from Phulmoni when he was narrating that to her friend’s mother. The layer of narration in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is in the style of nineteenth – century and the Edwardian ghost stories. Here, Amitav Ghosh seems to have made a parody of the Indian railway stories.

Amitav Ghosh employs an amazing narrative strategy known as imaginative recreation of events based on the foundation of historical facts and has rendered consistent foreground to the cross cultural interrelationship between the entirely different cultures in all his novels

Ghosh’s novels have globalized world view. They don’t have a primal location as the incidents happening in Egypt, India, Myanmar, Burma and Bangladesh as various historical moments come together side by side. Amitav Ghosh’s novels are open - ended and encircled with various points of views, persistently acting as critique of the Eurocentric notions.