POSTMODERN TECHNIQUES IN THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH

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Abstract: The aim of the present paper is to analyse the role of myth and magic realism in the select novels of Amitav Ghosh. The real is inter-mingled with the fantastic and the mythical is fused with the magical. In *Calcutta Chromosome*,Ghosh experiments with magical realism which continues to penetrate through the various layers of the story in the form of Laakhan. In Circle of Reason, Ghosh signifies the trend of magic realism through the characters of Alu where imagination is also applied to the maximum extent. Myth is clearly represented through the various names of the characters such as Nachiketa, Balaram, Alu, Maya and Shombu. The symbolical and the metaphorical significations are multi-layered in the works of Amitav Ghosh. The myth of Parasuram, Bon-Bibi also signifies the rich cultural aura of India.

Keywords: Myth, Magic Realism, fantastic, mythical, magical

Magic realism is a dominant component of postmodernist technique. The term was introduced by Frank Rohn in 1925; it was improved by Nikolai, Gogol, Dickens, Balzac, Kafka, Calvino and Marquez. Magic realism combines the lyrical and the fantastic. It probes into human character. It critiques the society too. The real is coupled with the fantastic, the mythical and the magical. Pietre comments: "What came to dominate the story and to leave a lasting impression was the view of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic data – a poetic divination or denial of reality. Something that for lack of a better world could be called magic realism" (1944 32).

Ghosh experiments with this technique in *Chromosome*. Laakhan is not dead as his spirit continues to hover in different forms. When Phulboni is young, he was recruited by the British company and in 1933, he was deputed in Renupur. He arrives by train in the deserted station which is flooded by monsoon rains. In spite of the efforts of the station master, he decides to spend the night in the signal room. A night of terror is about to follow. Objects move by themselves. When Phulboni falls asleep and awakens to find that the signal lantern has its place some fifty yards down the railway track. He imagines that the station master is carrying the lantern. He follows the signal and falls, about to be killed by a train even though he could spot no train. Phulboni is afraid as an unusual feeling of horror haunts him. He falls asleep and wakes up the next morning only to find that the lantern remains unmoved. The third time, he falls asleep and awakes only to find himself thrown in the tracts of the station. When Phulboni asks the strokers of the train, he is horrified at the reply that the tracts have grown rusty and overgrown. When Phulboni tells that the station master might have: "pulled the switch by mistake" (279), the chief engineer informs him that there has not been a station master in Renupur for a period of thirty years.

Next, Lutchman is a representative of magic realism as he is portayed with a thumbless left hand in the Phulboni episode. Phulboni has also seen the impression of a hand without the thumb in the signal box at Renupur. It is unbelievable that the spirit of Lutchman continues to haunt generations after generations. D.D. Cunningham's horrified experience is another example of magic realism, when he is confronted by M.M.Salmein, the student of Countess Pongcraz. She, too, is a member of the Secret society. When D.D. Cunningham communicates the uneasiness regarding Mangala, MM Salmein makes the pigeons fly. She tells that the knowledge which he sought after was dangerous and he would never come to terms with reality. He tries to avoid pigeons. After this incident, D.D. Cunningham disappears from the society for ever.

An aura of magic realism is coupled with a sense of quest when Sonali catches a glimpse of an unusual ritual. The rites are performed on the body of Romen Halder and the woman who conducts this ritual is Mrs.Aratounian. Here, reality is mixed with fantasy:

She caught a glimpse of tops of legions of heads. A figure had come out of the shadows: it was a woman; in her left hand she was carrying a bamboo bird-cage. She seated herself by the fire and placed the leg and bird-cage beside her. She took out two scalpels and a pair of glass plates. Then, she reached out, placed her hands on whatever it was lying before the fire and smiled . . . the woman said to the crowd . . . The time is here, pray that all goes well for our Laakhan once again (139-140).

In *Reason*, Toru Debi thrusts the singer – the sewing machine in unusual circumstances and requests him to get her another. Alu obeys Toru's obligation to throw the machine into the pond. So, he runs unknowingly until his legs carry him. The note of magic realism is evident as Alu makes a sudden turn and wants to enter the house again. Bolai-da saves the situation and makes Alu realize that everyone in the house is dead as he could: "see the flames of the known world surrounding the skies" (149).Ghosh, thus combines elements of the real and the unreal. The magic realist technique gives Ghosh the widest possible scope to exercise his imagination. At the same time, Ghosh does not lose his hold on the structural values of his fiction. Next, Ghosh's use of myth demands attention. Though myths belong to the realm of primitive religion, they are an integral part of literature as well. In classical Greek, 'mythos' signifies any story or plot, whether it is true or invented:

> Mythology is a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which are believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. (Abrahams, 179)

Myth is evident in the name given to a character in *Reason*. Nachiketa, a mythical character goes to the gate of death- the God of *Yama* in order to fulfil the wish of his father. In spite of the obligation by the God of death, he is stubborn to embrace death. Yama is pleased and he offers absolute knowledge to Nachiketa. However, in the novel, the knowledge gained by Alu from Balaram leads him to Tamas (death) which stands in a sharp contrast to the mythological

reference. Shombu represents the form of Lord Shiva who is responsible for the destruction of the evil. Maya represents illusion, but she is realistic. Balaram reminds one of the incarnations of Vishnu, Balarama. However, Ghosh's Balaram makes wrong choices and ends up as a failure in life. Jyoti Das signifies lamp, but instead of the light that should be brought to the society, he spells darkness everywhere.

It is through Ben Yiju's marriage with Ashu that the myth of Parasuram is brought out in *Land* as it: "links her to the matrilineal community of Nairs, who still form a substained section of the population of the southern part of Malabar Coast" (229). The system of devadasi is associated with the myth of Parasuram. Parasuram is also an incarnation of Vishnu. Parasuram slays the head of his mother Renuka on the order of his father saint Jamadagni. Parasuram wants to get her life back. So, the saint orders him to fix the head of a harijan woman who is depicted as goddess by everyone owing to her devout faith.

In *Tide*, the myth surrounding the creation of river Ganges is evident. The legend points out the descent of goddess Ganga from the heavens which would have destroyed the earth if Lord Shiva had not controlled her by tying into his ash-smeared locks. When Lord Shiva's hair is washed into a vast knotted tangle, the river separates into thousands of tangled strands which speak for the existence of the immense archipelago of islands stretching from Hooghly in West Bengal to the shores of Meghna in Bangladesh. Also, tracing Tethys sea to the Greek mother of Ganga, Ghosh presents a theory about the emergence of the Indian subcontinent and then the birth of her twin children,the Ganges and the Indus. The river dolphin "shushuk" is the creature that conjoined the Ganges and the Indus and it is the legacy left to the twin river by their mother Tethys. Ghosh underscores the fact that life is conditioned by beliefs about nature and religion with their allied mythological patterns.

Further, the myth of Bon Bibi, the goddess of the forest who rules over the jungles is represented in *Tide*. Bon Bibi came to Sundarbans with her brother Shah Jhongoli. She had encountered the demon- Dokkhin Rai and had defeated him in a pitched battle through which one half of the jungle went to the demon and the other half was retained by the goddess. Dhona, a trader, goes with his men to collect honey and was in Dokkhin Rai's territory and the innocent

boy Dukhey is proved a victim. When Dukhey was confronted by Dokkhin Rai in the shape of a tiger, the boy cried to Bon Bibi to help him. The legend portrays that Bon Bibi came instantly to save Dukhey. The myth made a point in the lives of the tide country people that: "No man who is good at heart has anything to fear in this place" (324). The people built shrines for Bon Bibi and started to perform rituals too. They believed that 'shushuk-' the dolphins were considered to be her eyes and her ears. The fisherman believed that these messengers of Bon Bibi always did good and if one followed the dolphins, they would find fish to one's bounty. Myths are flexible, adaptable and resilent. Ghosh makes effective use of them by transposing and transplanting them in his narratives.

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