

THE CALCUTTA CHROMOSOME A POSTMODERNIST TEXT



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Amitav Ghosh is talented and an experimentalist. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* he has tried to give an answer to West's monopoly over scientific discoveries and inventions. It is an experimental work. It has science, religion, myth, transcendental philosophy, Indian superstition, logic, rationality and many more aspects to study. Besides, all this, one could find strong stresses of post-modernism in the book. The most important post-modern feature is the questioning attitudes towards the obvious historical fixities. The protagonist, Murugan, is a science freak. He is obsessed with the idea of finding all the facts about malaria story. As he had some doubts about Ross's discovery, he wanted to discover the malaria story and discovery of Ross. He has a strong desire to present the entire picture of Ross's research career. For that, he is preparing an article, "An Alternative Interpretation of Late 19th Century Malaria Research. Is There a Secret History?" Long back when Murugan was in New York, he had written a synopsis of his research in an article entitled, 'Certain Systematic Discrepancies in Ronald Ross's Account of Plasmodium B'. Because of it, Murugan took a very hostile response from the Scientific Community. All Scientific journals rejected the paper. Murugan had doubts about Ross's greatness because of which he was expelled from the membership of science society. So he came to Calcutta to find out the reality of Ross's research. After few days, he begins to speak openly about his notion of the so called 'Other Mind' or 'Other Voice'. It means ... "a theory that some person or persons had systematically interfered with Ronald Ross's experiments to push malaria research in certain directions while leading it away from other".

Murugan believes that Ronald Ross who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1906 for his work on the life cycle of the malaria vector had been handed the information on a plate. It was not his discovery at all. Someone had planted the idea in his mind that malaria parasite could be found in one of the species of

mosquitoes. Originally, Ross was completely on a wrong path. Ross's mentor Patrick Manson, the noted Scottish Bacteriologist who had written a book on *Filaria* was on a wrong path. Both Manson and Ross thought that malaria parasite was transmitted from mosquitoes to human beings orally, probably through drinking water.

When Murugan knows all these things, he became upset and frustrated at that time. His anger and frustration suggests the postmodernist 'rage against humanism and the Enlightenment Legacy'. This research about malaria is conducted by the trained Scientists like D.D. Cunningham, Elijah Monroe Farley and later Dr. Ronald Ross. There is another team which is against these well known scientists is of Mangala and Laakhan. They are illiterate but they are making their own enquiry into the various strains of malaria and they have different purpose. Murugan calls it 'The Calcutta Chromosome'. It is.... unique biological expression of human traits that is neither inherited from the immediate gene-pool, nor transmitted into it'.

Ross's discovery was only a small part of the overall project of Managala to attain immortality through the Calcutta Chromosome. She got success in transplantation of the Calcutta Chromosome. As-

* fresh start : when your body fails you, you leave it, you migrate you or at least a matching symptomology of yourself. You begin all over again, another body, another beginning'. Laakhan himself is a living example of interpersonal transference of the Calcutta Chromosome. This character with a deformed hand is, "all over the map changing names, switching identities". Post-modernism doesnot follow the meta-narrative or grand narrative. In this text, there are three levels of the narrative. On the one hand, there is Antar an Egyptian Computer Clerk. Antar works day and night all alone on his super intelligent computer named Ava. He is working in the early part of the 21st century. He tries to find out the adventures of an India born American Scientist L. Murugan. He also tries to find

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out the reason behind the incomprehensible fact that Murugan disappeared in Calcutta in 1995. Secondly, story revolves around the British Scientist Ronald Ross, who discovered the manner in which malaria was conveyed by the mosquito in 1898. The third level describes the human powers of Mangala and Laakhan. There is another aspect of post-modernism is its reduction of experience to 'a series of pure and unrelated present.' The past loses its pastness and fused in the present. The story begins in the 21st century. It is fused with the pastness of 19th century and 20th century.

There is alienation in the text which is one of the aspects of post-modernism. The principal characters of this novel live their life isolated. Antar is a widower. His neighbours have a shadow existence for him. Ava, the supercomputer is his only companion. He is connected to other human beings only through his machine. Murugan is a divorcee. He is companionless except for the ghosts from the past. Antar, Urmila, Sonali and Mrs. Aratounian are known to him but they are not his friends. Urmila may have a family theoretically but practically she is an alien. Sonali is an illegitimate child of Phulboni. She is an actress and living her life lonely. Mrs. Aratounian, a lonely person

does not seem to have any family or friend. Phulboni is a typical loner who is roaming in the streets of Calcutta. Mangala and Laakhan work together. They are honoured but are never befriended. They are not treated as close associates. Ronald Ross has a family but only in the background. Thus all the characters lead their lives lonely and isolated. There is not much communication among these characters. All characters are busy in their own working. So there is failure of communication. When we look toward this text from these points like lack of communication, alienation, we get another aspect of post modernism is absurdism.

Another aspect of post modernism is feminism which one can observe in this book. Sonali Das who is tall, elegant and mature and Urmila Roy who is graduated from College are both journalists working for Calcutta. Mrs. Aratounian has her nursery to see. Mangala who was sweeper woman, brings by Austrian Clinician Wagner into his clinic and made her trained as a Laboratory Assistant. Thus we find Calcutta Chromosome depicts and reflects the post modernistic situation as alienation, feminism, lack of communication, absurdity and others. A.G. Khan is of the view that quest is the constant theme in Ghosh's 6 novels. Through this, he attempts to prove the superiority of the East over the West.