Analysis of *the Calcutta Chromosome*

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Abstract
The present article is an attempt to analyse the various aspects of postmodernism in The Calcutta Chromosome. The elements of idealism, consumerism, alienation, new narrative structure, Quest for truth and the elements of territorialism are found in the science fiction. The novel has a positive hope despite it being a postmodern novel.

Chromosome is structured around the quest of the findings of the truth and the idea of the early history and the career of Ross and the belief in the mind of Ross. The mystery magnifies its spell when Murugan says: "You know all about matter and anti-matter right? . . . and Christ and anti-Christ and so on? Now, let us say there was something like science and counter-science? Thinking of it in the abstract, wouldn't you say that the first principle of a functioning counter-science would have to be secrecy" (*Chromosome* 88).

Murugan believes that there would be a secret procedure. The main aim of the counter science is to cut off communication, to keep everything in secrecy. Murugan explains the argument so that he could make Antar understand its very essence: "may be they believed that to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something, you've already changed what you think you know so you don't really know it all : you know its history" (88). Ghosh postulates that, at times science holds reality-about what is known as knowledge, but on the other hand, there's also the unarticulated truth. Science is mixed up with philosophy, literary theory and fantasy. There is a group of secret researchers who just want to conceal their inventions from the world which is exactly opposite of Michael Foucault's dictum that knowledge is power.

Murugan is very much convinced that the extensive research of Ross is only a branch of study of Mangala bibi. In 1897, Mangala's research ran a dead end. After a series of attempts, Mangala wants Ross to figure out the correct breakthrough as: "She actually believed that the link between the bug and the human mind was so close that, once it's life cycle had been figured out, it would spontaneously mutate in directions that would take her work to the next step" (208).

Murugan discovers that Mangala has hampered Ross's research. Mangala has been trying to find out a: "technology for interpersonal transference . . . (so that) information could be transmitted chromosomally from body to body" (90-91). In the view point of Murugan, the relationship of Mangala's counter science and that of Ross is the one: "between matter and anti-matter . . . rooms and ante-rooms . . . Christ and anti-Christ and so on" (88).

Ross becomes a tool in the hand of Mangala. Mangala is the resurrection of a female power and Laakhan is her support. As Murugan suggests: "he was the point man for whoever was the real brain behind the scheme" (74). Mangala bibi, as she is beyond time, is depicted through different ages in innumerable bodies. She is the supreme power in the affirmation of the authority to control the human body in all generations.

Mangala also finds a way of transmitting the chromosome to the pigeons and secretly starts treating the patients of syphilis in Cunningham laboratory and her treatment often ends in personality disorder. She has successfully discovered that the disorders are just transpositions: "a cross–over of randomly assorted personality traits, from the malaria donor to the recipient" (206) through pigeons. It is a sort of freak chromosome as it goes way away from the normal modes of detection. It is found only in the brain, the non-generating tissue that could be transmitted only through malaria. It is this DNA carrier, which Murugan labels as: "the Calcutta Chromosome–a biological expression of human traits that is neither inherited from the immediate gene pool, nor transmitted into it" (207).

The society of secrecy--Mangala and others are successful in the ultimate transcendence of nature in a nutshell--immortality, through a series of inter-personal transference of human traits. As Murugan explains to Antar: "Just think, a fresh start: when your body fails you, you leave it, you migrate--you or at least are a matching symptomology of your self. You begin all over again, another body, another beginning . . . a technology that lets you improve on yourself in your next incarnation" (91-92).

Mangala is an example of powerful presence. Farley observes that "the woman Mangala was seated at the far end of the room, on a low divan, enthroned . . . on the floor . . . clustered around the woman's feet, were some half–

dozen people in various orders of supplication, some touching her feet, others lying prostate" (125). Mangala bibi is the representation of Ma Shakthi, the creator and the destroyer. The ideology of motherhood is evident throughout the novel. Murugan celebrates the symbol of motherhood through Mangala.

An illiterate like Mangala questions the very notion of science and discovers divine notions. She has real talent, which makes her come up in life. She does not require a study in zoology regarding the difference between *culex* and *Anopheles.* She has a real skill and: "she wasn't carrying a shit–load theory in her head, she didn't have to write papers or construct proofs" (203). She could even cure the last of dementia through malaria. She has come to know what scientists could detect only later: "every major VD hospital had its little incubating room where it grew a flock of anopheles. Think about it: hospitals cultivating disease! . . . This is the only instance known to medicine of using one disease to fight another" (205). The decision turns down the division between conscious and unconscious, the sane and the insane modes of the human mind. Here, Ghosh tries to exemplify that science not only belongs to the educated, but, also to the uneducated. Ross could only discover the malarial parasite. But, Mangala bibi finds out a method for the transmigration of souls.

Urmila is a typical middle class woman who sacrifices her life for the sake of her family. She struggles in her life and is considered a symbol of mother Kali. Her re-incarnation is soon to take place. She never knows her new powers. Murugan too pleads with her to save him from the impending madness: "Don't forget me", he begged her: "If you have it in your power to change the script, write me in. Please" (254).The mother figure who is further celebrated as woman who is considered to be made for man achieves a standard of self-respect.

The real woman exists even in the story of Phulboni. Murugan's fantasy comes to reality when he sees a series of images in Kalighat. A small girl informs them that: "Today is the last day of the Puja of Mangala bibi. Baba says that tonight Mangala–bibi is going to enter a new body" (194). Murugan's theory is correct and he could definitely come across the end of the quest. But, this end is just another beginning. Thus, Murugan's search for truth in finding out the real brain behind the discovery of malarial parasite is achieved.

The Hindus (Murugan, Sonali, Urmila and Tara), Muslims (Antar and Phulboni), the Christians (Mrs. Aratounian and Countess Pongracz) accept the concept of the transmission of the souls. Antar can view semblances between Tara and Urmila, Maria and Sonali. He could hear the voice telling: "Keep watching; we're here; we are all with you . . . we'll help you across" (256). Mangala bibi displaces Ross as the discoverer of the malarial parasite. She helps others achieve immortality, and, thereby, becomes a symbol of motherhood.

Ghosh's *Chromosome* resembles Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, an absurd drama. Like the latter, the former too attaches a tag of silence and sets about a quest for a new world. Both are circular in form where the past is co-existent with the present.

Sayid Murad Hussain--Phulboni is a famous writer and the National Award Winner. Like Urmila, he too disappears after performing his role. He voices Ghosh's inner voice: "Silence herself. I see the signs of her presence everywhere I go, in images, words, glances, but only signs, nothing more . . . By every means I have sought her, the ever-elusive mistress of the unspoken, wooed her, begged to join the circle of her intiates" (189).

The terms, 'Secrecy' and 'Secrets' dwell deep in the novel. Phulboni is the chief exponent of this trademark of silence. They begin with the idea that knowing something is changing it, in a nutshell - ordering mutation. Secrecy is the main motive and silence is their religion. However odd it may sound, these people have developed: "the most revolutionary medical technology of all time" (90). They were in fact very much ahead of Ross's contemporaries such as Julius Von Wager. Jauregg, who had won the Nobel Prize for the seed of an idea that artificially induced malaria could cure syphilis. But, in a time, more remote, in 1890, the secret team, which comprised Mangala, had already been successful in this field of research. Mangala bibi had, in fact been a victim of hereditary syphilis. D.D.Cunningham had found her at the Seldah station and had trained her as a lab assistant. She is so successful, that even Murugan believes that Mangala is a genius and she is ahead of Cunningham in resolving the puzzle and has a sort of intuitive power regarding the solution for the problem of malaria. She uses a different combination of the Wagner–Jauregg process and finds out that Malaria has spread through a different channel--the brain, malaria is likely to cause "a kind of spirit-possession" (205) through a different chromosome. It is more hallucinating and powerful than a stimulating drug. This is one of the major reasons why the primitive people have always thought of malaria as the possession of the spirit. This knowledge is concealed by the secret society.

Phulboni knows that Calcutta is the hub of many secrets. The secret comprises the story of Ross. Phulboni

gives life to Laakhan through the depiction of Laakhan in his stories. Mrs. Aratounian has a firm opinion that these are nothing but messages to someone to remind them of something--a kind of shared secret. Laakhan is, hence, portrayed as the rich guardian of secrets. But, Phulboni wants secret. His stories provide the key materials and they were published in an obscure little magazine and were never republished and every one forgot about them. Mangala bibi is a restorer of the branch of counter–science:

> Wouldn't you say that the first principle of a functioning counter science would have to be secrecy? The way I see it, it wouldn't just have to be secretive about what it did it (it couldn't hope to beat the scientists at that game any way); it would also have to be secretive in what it did. It would have to use secrecy as a technique or procedure. (88)

Ghosh also depicts the teachings of Valentines, the philosopher Alexandria who belongs to the early Christian era. In the cosmology of Valentine, the ultimate concepts are Abyss and Silence, the one represents male and the other female--one representing the mind and the other portraying the soul. Abyss and silence are not the same, yet both indulge in a quest to reach the beyond. Ghosh seems to conclude that the knowledge which is unspoken or unwritten is concealed and hence a secret. The secret society conceals the idea of the technological transmigration of souls and it remains hidden forever.

Every character in *Chromosome* is alienated from the immediate surroundings. Antar hails from Egypt and is a Coptic Christian who is an orphan and a widower, working alone from home in New York and Murugan is a Hindu and a South Indian, who is brought up in Calcutta, calls himself Morgan. He is a divorcee and his life is very lonely as a researcher with life watch. Urmila Roy and Sonali Das, the Bengali Hindus of Calcutta are as alone as Murugan and Antar. Urmila searches for the significance of Laakhan's story and Sonali searches its meaning. Sonali's up-bringing and upper class life style leaves her alone. Urmila is exploited at home. She is accepted as a family member only due to her money. Phulboni too is immersed in the 'Mistress of Silence' that he vows to forget family life.

The foreigner Mrs. Aratounian, the American Christian and owner of the nursery shop and the guesthouse in Calcutta is alone by herself. The scientists Ross, Grigson and Cunningham are so much engaged in the world of science that they seem to forget home. Madame Liisa Salminen is so immersed in the spiritual experiences, Pongracz in her teachings, Antar in the study of Valentines that silence and Abyss are the main devotees. These alienated characters continue to remain the same until the end.

In *Chromosome*, the interrogation of the history of the discovery of the malarial parasite is carried out. Murugan rewrites history by finding the other mind, behind the discovery. The other postmodern traits like metaphors, alienation shape *Chromosome*. Every man is found to be solitary in the game of life.

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