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A Scientific Fantasy: Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*

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Abstract

This paper discusses The Calcutta Chromosome by Amitav Ghosh as a work of scientific fantasy. The narrative follows several personalities and jumps around in time, all of which are expertly woven together. Antar, an Egyptian clerk in New York City (NYC), encounters a misplaced ID card in the book. Antar met a weird man named Murugan a long time ago, and he owns it. He is the man renowned to be the foremost expert about Ronald Ross, who was responsible for the 1898 Malaria mystery in Calcutta. As Antar investigates the man's true fate, a tangled web develops, and by the time Antar becomes embroiled in it, already too late to escape. With multiple storylines from various eras, the book has multiple layers. Naturally, the goal is for them to eventually blend together nicely.

Keywords: Chromosome, colonialism, fantasy, Malaria, turmoil.

The Indian English Literature is currently dominated by the subsequent generation of postcolonial writers, who emerged after independence. Compared to colonists, these writers, who were born in India, write in English with more vigor, dynamism, boom, and independence. Authors like Salman Rushdie, Rohintan Mistry, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Arundhati Roy, and Amitav Ghosh are well-known in today's era. These people freed Indian English literature from colonial restraints. They have also won major prizes, amazing royalties, and recognition on a national and worldwide scale. Among these authors, Amitav Ghosh is arguably the best. He is the author of five non-fiction books and seven fiction books. The majority of his books ended up being best-sellers. Personal, unconventional, subaltern issues and elements, precolonialism, colonialism, post-colonialism, modernism, and post-modernism

form the basis of his works. Stated differently, the striking themes of travel, opium war, migration, historical truths, communal brutality, political unrest, corruption, caste politics, love, loss, travelers, diasporic exiles, struggle, and strife form the basis of his novels' main thematic preoccupations. He took eight years off after finishing his first two novels to write "The Calcutta Chromosome." The issue of colonialism is explored in his first two books. His third book, "The Calcutta Chromosome," is primarily a work of science fiction, while the plot also includes detective and ghost stories. The book meets the criteria for being classified as science fiction. The narrative of Ronald Ross's revelation of the malaria mosquito's entire life and how it infects humans is being rewritten. Because he conducted his groundbreaking study in Calcutta alone, the British bacteriologist has a closer relationship with the locals.

Sir Ronald Ross's brief lyric, "His secret deeds," which alludes to a scientific discovery, opens the book. The book is split into two parts: "August 20: Mosquito Day" and "The Day After". The novel's tile and even the section titles suggest that the main focus of the story is "the Discovery" on the origin of malarial fever.

Antar, an Egyptian programmer and International Water Council employee, is introduced at the start of the book. Working on the AVA/II e' system, a supercomputer, he is a computer programmer. Despite being Egyptian, he works in New York in the 21st century. He unintentionally finds the ID card of a Life Watch staffer, with whom he had previously worked, on Ava's screen. He gradually learns that the ID card belonged to L. Murugan, who he had been employed at "Life Watch" and vanished in Calcutta on August 21, 1995.

While working for "Life Watch" in New York, L. Murugan was eager to find the missing piece in Ronald Ross's discovery. "Certain Systematic Discrepancies in Ronald Ross Account of Plasmodium B" was the title of a paper he had published. Ronald Ross and his instructor Patrick Manson had determined that drinking water was the means by which mosquitoes spread the malaria parasite. Ronald Ross, however, abruptly had a change of heart and concluded that Plasmodium zygote and Anopheles were related. Since Ronald Ross's perspective to the origin of malaria changed so quickly, L. Murugan was perplexed by the abrupt shift in his thinking. L. Murugan believed that some indigenous people purposefully obstructed Ronald Ross's research and steered the study in a specific way. Naturally, he was curious to learn more about this and was eager to visit to Calcutta, where Ronald conducted his study. This notion was L. Murugan's obsession. In this regard, he told Antar, “You could find a thousand people no, two thousand, may be ten who could do what I’m doing now. But you won’t find another person alive who knows more than I do about the subject, I specialize in”. (p.43) When L. Murugan arrived in Calcutta in 1995, his hunt began. Everything he accomplished after that was related to Ronald Ross. He learned about him from Ross's "Memoir," as well as from his diary, papers, and correspondence. He pictured Ronald Ross as a cheerful teenager who watched movies, played polo, drank whisky, and composed poetry. He was a European who had finished medical school. Ross stood out from the others since he was very interested in science. Additionally, L. Murugan learned a thorough explanation of Ronald Ross's involvement in the investigation of the reason of malaria. The very first bacteriologist to try to determine the reason of malaria fever was Ross. Alphonse Laveran, a French army surgeon, had previously told the Academy of Medicine that malaria was caused by a worm that resembled a bug. The bug theory was contracted by Ronald Ross. Ross began his experiment after arriving in India. Despite his willingness to part with cash for a few droplets of malarial blood, he received no response. He contracted malaria for the first time on May 17, 1895. Ross approached a patient named Abdul Kadar and conducted a study on him. L. Murugan claims that it was abnormal for a portion of Abdul Kadar to ask Ross because the locals were extremely afraid to do so. L. Murugan tells Antar that Ross never had

questions such as “Why this guy Abdul Kadar here, if no one else is?” Where’s he from?, “What’s he doing here”? And “What’s his story” (p.62). L. Murugan’s research commences with these queries in his mind.

Murugan is adamant that this entire process of investigation and learning might be the work of "another mind." Thus, Murugan presents his counter-scientific theory. The fundamental tenet of counter-science is confidentiality.

Lutchman was an enigmatic individual who assisted Ross with his experiment. He was Ross's devoted servant. Actually, Lutchman was the one who told Ross about the existence of a particular species of mosquito (Anopheles) which causes malaria.

Another significant player who contributed significantly to Ross's study was Mangala. She was actually a sweeper woman. She did, however, appear to be knowledgeable about science, specifically microorganisms. She treated syphilis with malarial bacteria. It was a method of curing one illness with another. She also discovered that the treatment had adverse effects, such as personality disorders, and she discovered what would be known as the Calcutta Chromosome. She had no idea what it was, but it had to do with personality change. The Calcutta chromosome is therefore discovered as a result of the finding of malarial bacteria. As we will see later, this Calcutta chromosome is a freak chromosome. It is unique as conventional methods are unable to isolate and identify it. In contrast to our normal chromosomes, it is not found in every cell. It isn't even paired in a systematic manner. It is not passed on from one generation to the next. According to Ghosh's fantasies, each person's chromosome is created through a process of recombination. Only the brain's non-regenerating tissue contains it. It can spread by way of malaria. Murugan refers to this errant DNA carrier as "The Calcutta Chromosome." Murugan's thesis of counter-science in malarial research is therefore validated. It is mostly a science fiction work that causes delirium and fever.

The mystical element of the book, which stands for a scientific and counter-scientific philosophy, is referenced in the subtitle "A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery."

Therefore, the finding of the Calcutta Chromosome follows the discovery of the malarial bacterium, and L. Murugan concludes that Abdul Kadar, Lutchman, and Mangala were purposefully planted in order for Ronald Ross's discovery to aid in the discovery of the Calcutta Chromosome. Naturally, L. Murugan was unable to demonstrate its existence.

The book is classified as scientific fantasy due to a number of enigmatic events that are typical of the genre. Murugan drops his bags at the Robinson Street guest house upon his arrival in Calcutta on August 20, 1995. He then goes to Ronald Ross's memorial, a British scientist. Reading an inscription on the discovery of malaria spread by mosquitoes makes him very happy. He is forced to seek cover under the Rabindra Sadan auditorium's gates as it starts to rain, and it is there that he meets two women who are reporters for the magazine "Calcutta." Sonali Das and Urmila Roy are their names. Later on, Murugan finds out that Phulboni, a writer, is celebrating his 85th birthday with an award ceremony. A man by the name of Saiyad Morad Hussain goes as Phulboni. Sonali Das, a reporter for the magazine "Calcutta," who is the daughter of Saiyad Morad Hussain. She is wed to Roman Haldar, while Urmila Roy, who stands in for "Calcutta," is still single for the sake of her family. These characters became "diseased" when we met them and were forced to participate in the malaria narrative.

As Urmila chases a fishmonger's boy to give back the rotten fish, she runs into Murugan once more. With the aid of the old train schedule where Urmila's fish was wrapped, Murugan deciphers Cunningham's (an Englishman studying malaria in the late 19th century) story. Murugan explains to the bewildered Urmila, “Someone’s trying to get us to make some connections; they are trying to tell us something; something they don’t want to put together themselves”. (p.216)

The plot suddenly comes together when Murugan and Urmila learn that Lutchman or Laakhan is actually the same person (or Phantom)

who assisted Cunningham's apprentice Mangala. Together, they experimented with pigeons by injecting them with malarial germs and then using their blood to treat syphilitic patients, thereby producing the "Calcutta Chromosome." Characteristics and traits could be transferred between species thanks to this addition to the conventional Mendelian chromosomes. The reader may see that Mangala and Lutchman have undergone another reincarnation as Urmila and Murugan piece together history. As the story comes to a close, Antar revisits Murugan's, but his neighbor Tara and her companion Maria take Urmila and Sonali's places. This implies that the story can never truly finish because fresh stories are always starting as each character wraps up theirs. It indicates that Murugan's position has evolved and that Antar will now take its place. The book draws to a close. "The Calcutta Chromosome," a book by Ghosh, is a prime example of the conflict between science and counter-science. The concept of absence and discovery serves as the foundation for the book. The contrast between science and reason (the West) and magic and irrationality (the East) is one of the novel's main themes. The relationship between private and public history is one of the book's other main themes. It is immediately apparent that the book is one of discovery rather than one of fever and madness when it is read aloud from these perspectives. The novel's themes are hints that the reader must use their imagination to deduce a likely solution.

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