

## **Amitav Ghosh's *the Calcutta Chromosome* is The Celebration of Indian Subaltern's Victory**

**SENTHIL MITHRA J**

Assistant Professor of English

The Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam College for Women, Sivakasi

### **Abstract**

*It is an agreeable fact that, Indian Writing in English has won for itself an international distinction. Fiction being the most powerful form for the exploration and recording experiences in the contemporary context, Indian English fiction occupies a notable place in the field of literature. Post modernism in Indian history, flourished because of few indigenous and profound writers like Amitav Ghosh. Ghosh has successfully wiped out the definition and the colonial myths about the Indians, that were filled with insecurities and absurdity of human existence, by exposing to the readers about the already existing unmatched, imbibed effortless knowledge and talents of the common 'coolie' or the Subalterns in India. He is successful in opening the third eye of every Indian reader through his novel *The Calcutta Chromosome*, a novel of fevers, delirium and discoveries. In this novel we Indian readers are made to rethink about our insightful rituals and our indigenous culture with a deep respect than superficially following them, than labelling and mocking as superstitious believes. Post Colonist fictions in India recorded the chaotic condition but the post-modern fictions reflected the western values, beliefs, ideas, norms and cultures. In India, the lack of evidences, sophistication and modernization hindered the growth and created a 'maya' about the westerners, who were projected to the world as knowledgably superior and are monopolists in the field of research. As a knock out, he tries to undo the aura of Western supremacy through the story of a British scientist, Sir Ronald Ross who had his breakthrough and was recognised to the world, for his research work on the transmission of malaria, in 1898. With the theme of conspiracy in the mosquito story on one hand, Gosh talks about the planned excavation of profoundly educated doctors and scientists like Ronald Ross, DD Cunningham and Farley in western nation acknowledged to the public, and on the other hand deep in sight ful practical knowledge of ordinary coolie subaltern network of Indians like - Murugan, Mangala, Lutchman, Urmila, Tara etc network, who work behind secretly for generations without any recognition in India.*

**keywords:** Research, Laboratories, Scientist, Calcutta, Chromosome, Message.

Amitav Ghosh naming his work, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, a novel of fevers, delirium and discoveries, he takes credit to a place Calcutta, which is located in India where, he acclaims as an acquainted geographical location he have had spent his childhood days. His story has autobiographical glimpses too. This novel took its full form in the year

The course of this historical fiction is built on the ideology of the combination of the facts of history, scientific knowledge and religious beliefs. The novel centres on the conspiracy about the discovery of malaria transmission in Western Nation, the history and the silence of Subalterns in India. Basically Ghosh is well known for his interest in the Indian Colonial history and the contribution of English language during such times. Emerging as a post-modern fiction, *The Calcutta Chromosome* doesn't idealise or sabotage the superiority of the Western people, culture, knowledge and advancements, yet Ghosh wants to give

recognition to the least acknowledged mediocre society, the meaningful rituals, marginality against those who are genuine and original indigenous subaltern Indians. Those Subaltern Indians who have worked beyond more than an invention regarding this Mosquito Story.

Probing into the roots about the impacts of post colonialism in India, we are able to trace the cause inferiority complex we have, even after seventy five years of independence. Because we are following the Educational System designed by a man Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1835, who said the single shelf of a good European's library was worth a whole native literature of India and Arabia together. He taught that the Indian knowledge and the languages are completely worthless and the western science was far superior to Indian knowledge. He said that the purpose of English education was to create a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and

intellect. He wanted to create a pool of Indians, who would be able to serve the Britishers and be loyal to them and that's the kind of education system, we are still following, which makes us to look down on our own culture. Unless we change this there is no way to stop us from becoming half-baked Britishers.

### **Murugan's Search for the Subaltern Network**

The fatal diseases attacking different communities of people, had created a seeking for a cure and quest for immortality. The British Bacteriologist Ronald Ross's discovery of the life cycle of Malaria Mosquito and the way it infects human beings and causes death was the most curious talk of his times. Ross's was recognised for finding out that the noxious female mosquito that was responsible for the transmission of Malaria on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1897 and was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1902. It is the only historical fact Ghosh takes his lead from.

The story opens at New York in an undisclosed time in future, introducing to us Antar, an older man who works for the International Water Council as an analyst, using the updated computing system called Ava. Ava is found scrutinising an ID card captured in the system. Antar was involved in excavations his childhood with his parents in Egypt and had his graduation in Moscow. With help of Ava, Antar identified that was L. Murugan, in Calcutta who had gone missing on August 21, 1995 from New York and the card is supposed to be the broken piece of his ruined ego. It is here from the holograph of card, Antar tracks from sudden disappearance of Murugan many years back. The transfer is insisted by Murugan himself and he remembers how strongly he objected it. On world Mosquito Day 20<sup>th</sup> August 1995, Murugan arrives in Calcutta in the pursuit of Truth on Ross's discovery on the cause of Malaria.

Ghosh throws light on the Indian subalterns through Murugan, he is a lively character throughout the novel, who is unstoppable to unfabricate the conspiracy tale about the Calcutta chromosome, who at last writes a research article about Ross's discovery, on the title, "An Alternative Interpretation of late nineteenth century Malaria Research: Is There a Secret History?" Murugan's findings establishes a counter thesis against the western scientific inventions, discoveries and researches. Ghosh proves that the indigenous knowledge of the Indian Subalterns are superior than the super computer Ava. Antar and Murugan

keep in touch discussing his thought processes about the events surrounding Ross's malaria research could have unfolded. Ross's was having trouble in finding an assistant for his lab during research while he was guided by Doc Manson advises. Manson wanted Ross to go in a different direction from his research, it is at this time Lutchman volunteered to assist his research. It was Lutchman who pushed Ross in the right direction by showing a fortuitous breed of mosquito seated on the wall responsible for Ross's breakthrough defending Doc Manson's ideology. Lutchman was a dhoolley-bearer who worked for Ross and Dr Cummingham.

Further Murugan expresses that he has some hints he has to work on the mutation of the parasite. Murugan believes his hints are not pointless and he comes to know a group of people are working still beyond this invention, for the 'concept of immortality'. Antar also receives some hints about Elijah Monroe Farley, a young Indian scientist who is from John Hopkins university in Baltimore involved in this research. Farley in his charitable trust at the foot hills of Himalayas has been working on the parasite of Malaria.

There are more unfortunate Indian people in this novel. In a chapter later from the conversation of Phulboni and the station master of Renupur, we come to know that Laakhan was a stray orphaned child of a prostitute, with a deformed left hand. Murugan says during his conversation with Urmila and Sonali about himself abused as a child by a stranger. Murugan also says he was infected by Syphilis who was forced to leave Calcutta with his family. From his experience about Syphilis is a curable and not a contagious disease.

According to Murugan, Mangala a common sweeper women working for the government and was a lab assistant of DD Cunningham's laboratory, who have already invented that the cause of Malaria is due to the mosquito bites and its cure. As Mangala's team were striving for the 'quest for immortality', than looking for more than this invention, people like her have not spoken about it. The counter-intelligence of Indian subalterns is so superior that each task the Indians have encountered has been changed by the encounter, as their part in itself has become their life history. Mangala is called as a Demi-God and has been living through ages. She is also called as

Mamgalabibi, a girl who comes before Murugan's workshop, informs him about her entering a new body that day. She is the one who discovered Syphilis can be treated with the Malarial Parasite. She has also crafted a form of asexual reproduction and reincarnation of humans that gives Mangala and Lutchman the power to stay alive forever. The unpatronised network and Mangala's counter-science is responsible for the overall success of the Mosquito story.

Many times the world worshiped success, while the deserving go unnoticed. Mangala is one such person in the Mosquito mystery. And Murugan also dared not to agree with the truth he have excavated in India because of his self-doubts. Murugan concludes, the mystery about the Calcutta Chromosome only a frame is discovered by Ross, a network of Indians provided the clues while he presented his discovery to the world. They nailed the mutation leads to a unique parasite in different persons and the ultimate cure for it is chromosome transfer. Without this network, British Bacteriologist's Ross's ideology would have been wrong. The success of the story is the victory of the Subaltern Indians Victory.

### Take away from the Novel

Many of the discoveries don't have patron rights. The discovery of fire, the five booths – Fire, Water, Earth, Air and Space controls the Cosmos, Gurukul educational system, Naturopathy medicines – Kasayams and Chooranams, religious cults etc. Things are practised as

lifestyle. We don't claim rights as Western practitioners do. Indians don't keep anything locked for us and materialise them. Also the modern age fails to commemorate the ancient culture, rituals and tradition nor celebrate the victory of discoveries. The mad pursuit for western transformation without any purpose.

This problem can be fixed only when we have our very own indigenous uniform education system. Different languages, cultures, ethnicities have made edifices in developing a harmonious home-grown curriculum that can cater to the education appetite from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. New advances in Science and Technology at rapid pace makes it difficult for vernacular educationists to catch up with lingua franca that is globally in preach and practice. We have to come at par with modern world, to become globally recognized.

Anyway Ghosh must be credited for the way he debugs the western supremacy and his narrative skill. The novel is enhanced by his past knowledge, human history and memory about Calcutta makes the novel complex yet original.

### References

1. Amitav, Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Penguin Books, 2009.
2. Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh A Critical Companion. Third Impression*, Permanent BlackD-28 Oxford Apartments, 11, I.P Extension, Delhi 110092 , 2008.