



Cultural Encounters and Identity in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh and Marcel Theroux: An Anthropological Exploration

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Abstract: This research paper delves into the captivating realm where anthropology and literature converge, analyzing the novels of Amitav Ghosh and Marcel Theroux. Through comprehensively exploring their works, this study uncovers the intricate interplay between cultural encounters, identity formation, and anthropological perspectives. By examining the narrative portrayals of characters, settings, and social dynamics, this paper elucidates how these authors use their literary canvases to evoke anthropological themes, inviting readers to contemplate the multifaceted aspects of human interaction, adaptation, and self-discovery. This investigation sheds light on the transformative power of storytelling as a medium to navigate the complexities of cultural diversity, ultimately revealing the nuanced relationships between individuals and their environments.

Keywords: Anthropology, literature, cultural encounters, identity, Amitav Ghosh, Marcel Theroux.

Anthropology has also been termed the science of man. The Greek philosopher Aristotle used the word 'anthropologia' to convey a sense of a fanciful, visionary view of civilization. However, modern anthropology aims at the research of all men and societies, comparing one society with others and linking past societies to the present in an evolutionary sequence. The modern anthropologist endeavours to synthesize a comprehensive science of man as well as his behaviour from all specialized fields of inquiry dealing with the development of man and his work. Anthropology is in itself an amazing feat. In the 1600s, Magnus Hundt was using the word 'anthropologium,' in a restricted meaning of 'anatomy', and in the seventeenth century, the word 'Anthropologie' was used to refer to an inherent 'human nature' organically rooted in the human mind and body. The nineteenth-

century academics inherited the word anthropology in a context analogous, and today it is termed 'physical anthropology' as the study of human biology. However, for Darwin, anthropology had become much more closely concerned with the work of fossils and their connection to living men. The nineteenth century saw the rise of sociology, dealing with the development of man.

The early social scientists cast their net widely and tried to discover their basic discovery of man on even a basis of empirical knowledge. The primary issue of these social scientists would be the origin of man and his different looks of life. At this juncture, anthropology started to replace sociology by synthesizing the science of man. The social anthropological, as well as sociological literature assured that perhaps the theoretical ideas, as well as textual explanations, haven't yet gone hand in hand. Such writings total absence a glance of such a theory. A most popular pattern is the commentary of cultural and social truths, and a large percentage of works that entail summaries of one or the other societal inequalities. The forms a significantly less academic as well as scientific, so if we arrive at a straightforward narration of the society and culture of life. Both anthropology and sociology have been studying the very same phenomena - man and his works - or the two disciplines should've never separated. Anthropologists saw the essential relevance of the past and that of the living traditional cultures. They made anthropology the science of man which social commentators had initially envisioned sociology to be. The study of anthropology develops an attitude of respect towards one's culture and other cultures. It also has a liberating effect on the consumer. Anthropology meets the need for a new and improved topic, matter, and orientation alignment. As a discipline, anthropology provides competent knowledge of humanity to gain a humanistic perspective. Anthropology is the only academic discipline that can offer this balanced viewpoint. Anthropology is a unique academic subject that combines humanistic and scientific perspectives. "Various other sciences, which must be considered as subsidiary to anthropology but hold their separate positions in the field of knowledge," Tylor correctly stated in his first general description of anthropology.

The Anthropocene Era was coined by Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul J Crutzen to describe this human-dominated period. According to him and his colleagues, the term Anthropocene implies: (I) that the Earth is now exiting its current geological epoch known as the Holocene, and (ii) that human activity is largely responsible for this exit from the Holocene, implying that humanity has become a global geological force in its own right (843). Climate change during the Anthropocene epoch is causing species loss and habitat degradation. Because of natural disasters, humans and nonhuman species are compelled to move from one

location to another to survive. As a prologue to the United Nations Climate Conference, which will take place from December 2 to December 13, 2019, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated, "The world's efforts to stop climate change have been utterly inadequate thus far, and there is a danger that global warming may pass the point of no return."(<https://www.thehindu.com>) The latest wildfire in the Amazon rain forests drew worldwide attention. In recent years, frequent fires have been common in the Amazon, and environmentalists are concerned about the possibility of a planetary crisis in the near future.

The Amazon is home to at least 40,000 plant species, 427 mammals, 1,300 birds, 378 reptiles, more than 400 amphibians, around 3,000 freshwater fishes, and 100,000 invertebrate species. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the Amazon is home to over half of the terrestrial species of animals, plants, and insects and 420 indigenous communities that play an important role in conservation (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in>).

Dipesh Chakrabarty, a prominent subaltern historian, felt that while global warming and globalization began in the 1990s, globalization garnered immediate attention. Academics, literature, international politics, and other fields have ignored the slow pace of global warming. The situation began to alter in the 2000s when people began to notice actual warming. Aside from that, signs of a climate crisis, such as wildfires, cyclones, melting ice caps, and sea-level rise, are already obvious. The old theories, language, politics, economic practices, and literature needed to be revised. According to Chakrabarty,

As the crisis grew in intensity in recent years, I realized that all of my readings in globalization theories, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the previous twenty-five years, while extremely useful in studying globalization, had not adequately prepared me to make sense of the planetary conjuncture in which humanity now finds itself (199).

He believes that the rising temperatures and dramatic shifts in weather patterns are unprecedentedly impacting people and other species. The ultimate concern, climate disaster, is addressed in contemporary fiction. Amitav Ghosh and Marcel Theroux's writings are prominent in this endeavour. This article focuses on Amitav Ghosh and Marcel Theroux's texts. Anthropology approaches human relations scientifically while maintaining the human significance that no account of human beings will be complete without. A structural anthropologist states, "Anthropology has its feet planted in the natural sciences, its back against humanistic research, and its eyes

pointed towards the social sciences." Anthropology encompasses the preliterate past, prehistoric behaviour, and the systematic study of language as part of its main emphasis on society and culture. Culture and anthropology emphasize the constant interaction between human biology and culture because man is a product of nature. So it is fitting that a discipline like anthropology teaches the deepest human beliefs and attempts at a systemic understanding of human existence with the evidence of the stereotypes of ethnic, legal, linguistic or cultural superiority. Various authors have contributed to anthropology, but Amitav Ghosh and Marcel Theroux are credited with important contributions. Amitav Ghosh speaks English, Bengali, Hindi, French, and Arabic fluently. His wandering life has brought him from India to England and the United States. During his travels in many parts of the world, including the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, Europe, and America, his literary works reveal a profound insight into the study of man. Even though Bengali is his mother tongue, he prefers to write novels and other literary works in English. In *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh recognizes no different national or cultural facts because, for him, every such demarcation is shadow lines arbitrary and invaded divisions. Amitav Ghosh claims that men in positions of power have erected artificial barriers between countries and people, which they have then dismantled according to their consistency. From the socio-anthropological as well as philosophical fictional stories of Amitav Ghosh is that one can quickly find that: trying to stand inside his constancy, specialist, and devoted, he had also pursued to interpret in terms of art, the moves about his person, most of all, he has kept insisting about the need for principles values that also help to nurture all enlighten as well as human society for freedom of man from Political, Cultural and Religious barriers.

In English literature, Amitav Ghosh is the most contemporary and persuasive Indian voice. Amitav Ghosh has established himself as the most important novelist working today. Perhaps no other Indian author has received such a warm reception in so many parts of the world. Amitav Ghosh is also regarded as the most famous of contemporary Indian novelists. He has received several literary awards, including France's prestigious Prix Medici Estranger and India's prestigious Sahitya Akademi Prize for literature. Amitav Ghosh as an anthropologist, has developed as well as brought entirely fresh type novels, namely, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *In An Antique Land* (1993), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *The Glass Palace* (2000) and *The Hungry Tide*, that also depicts various themes of cross-cultural perspectives, of violence, of contrasting streams of political nuances besides historical background of various cultures. The study of these selected novels will aid us in comprehending the anthropological aspects of his socio-political, cultural, religious, and historical history in work with a particular focus on anthropology, especially *The Hungry Tide*. This novel is based on the Tide country

called the Sunderban and explores the field of human contact, cross-cultural, postcolonial or trans-cultural literature, the micro-culture and historical aspects. Amitav Ghosh explores historical, geographical, environmental, mythological, religious, cultural, technological, political, and social aspects in this novel.

Marcel Raymond Theroux is a writer from the United Kingdom. He received the Somerset Maugham Award in 2002 for *A Stranger in the Earth* and *The Confessions of Mycroft Holmes: A Paper Chase* and his other novels include *A Blow to the Heart* (2006), *Far North* (2009), and *Strange Bodies* (2013). Marcel Theroux also hosted *The End of the World as We Know It* on Channel 4 in 2004 as part of the *War on Terra* television series about climate change. Initially, he thought that all environmentalists were anti-technological development. However, during his studies, he became persuaded that the world was confronted with a global crisis of such magnitude that expanding nuclear energy is likely the best solution (choosing the lesser evil). He came to this conclusion partially as a result of his discussions with many experts. He also took those very issues throughout his novels, particularly *Far North*, in which he concentrates on things like climate change, global warming, and geographical and social aspects. Consequently, it could be said that Amitav Ghosh and Marcel Theroux concentrate on various aspects of anthropology whilst also focusing on environmental and climate change aspects in their novels, particularly *The Hungry Tide* and *Far North*, respectively. In his work, he studies anthropology, focusing on environmental and climate change issues, focusing primarily on the novels *The Hungry Tide* and *the Far North*.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the novels of Amitav Ghosh and Marcel Theroux serve as captivating arenas where anthropology and literature intersect, offering readers a profound exploration of cultural encounters and identity dynamics. Through the lens of these authors' narratives, we have embarked on a journey that transcends geographical and temporal boundaries, delving deep into the human experience and its intricate connection to the world around us. With his meticulous attention to historical detail and cross-cultural interactions, Ghosh immerses us in vibrant settings that become crucibles for characters to negotiate their identities. His narratives unravel the complexities of colonial legacies, migration, and hybridity, showcasing how individuals grapple with the collision of cultures and the quest for self-discovery in an ever-changing world. Conversely, Theroux offers a more contemporary perspective on cultural encounters, often depicting characters traversing physical and metaphorical borders. His exploration of identity shifts in response to displacement and the search for belonging emphasizes

human identity's fluid and malleable nature, mirroring the anthropological understanding that identity is not fixed but a construct shaped by circumstances.

Collectively, these authors underscore the power of storytelling to function as a bridge between anthropology and literature. Through vivid characters and thought-provoking settings, they facilitate an engagement with anthropological concepts that transcend the academic realm and resonate with readers personally. These narratives prompt us to reflect on the multifaceted nature of cultural encounters, the nuances of identity negotiation, and the adaptive mechanisms humans employ in response to change. As our journey through these literary landscapes ends, we are reminded that anthropology is not confined to academia; it is a living, breathing exploration of what it means to be human. Ghosh and Theroux have, in their distinct ways, harnessed the power of storytelling to illuminate the interplay between cultures and identities. Their novels invite us to see the world through an anthropological lens, inspiring us to recognize the richness that emerges when we embrace diverse perspectives and engage in the complex dance of cultural encounters.

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