

The Creative Launcher

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The Calcutta Chromosome: Mystery of the Discovery

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Abstract

Studious investigation of the socio-cultural ethos in the selected novels is discussed systematically listing the novel in order of their publication. While discussing the main issue of the research, objectives of the study are always kept in mind to present the study methodically and limited by including only those issues that the present scholar aims to highlight. As any work of great significance contains multiple meanings and it is not at all possible to cover all those in single work of analysis. Thus a sincere attempt is made to present studied opinions on the selected issue of the study.

Keywords- Mystery, Discovery, Fantasy, Social Aspects

What do we call a book that narrated almost all aspects human society, psyche and culture? The present investigator is compelled to answer The Calcutta Chromosome, though at the same time it cautioned not to take it a infatuated answer because this novel deals with science, myth, religion, philosophy, Indian social superstitions, and at the same it also touched upon rationality. All this weaved by Ghosh very significantly to create the socio-cultural ethos of the India and its people sometimes touching upon even across the borders. On the surface it is the story of the discovery of the malaria vaccine. Ronald Ross is known to every Indian student of medical science. This British Nobel winner is well known to the people of Calcutta for he has achieved success in discovering the vaccine in this city.

We read the book in two parts: one August 20: Mosquito Day and second The Day After. Ghosh has given the fact only in the form of the date of discovery that is 20th August 1897. The rest is all novelist's own creation. The L. Murugan arrives in Calcutta on World Mosquito Day 20th August 1995 to find out all the facts about malaria case. The writer has given totally fantasized picture of the development of malaria bacteria. Murugan calls it 'The Calcutta Chromosome' - 'a unique, biological expression of human tracts that is neither inherited from the immediate gene-pool, nor transmitted into it.'

Basically the narrative covers 1995 Calcutta history where Murugan has arrived to find everything possible about malaria. The laboratory of the P.G. Hospital of Calcutta is the place where

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Ronald Ross discovered the bacteria in Calcutta. This place had large number of mosquito due abundant dirt and filth, garbage and stuff that nurtured mosquitos. That is why Calcutta stands for the filth, dirt and garbage. There is comment on the Western attitude on this phenomena in India, which writer exposes and lays open the power politics. Murugan is in India to investigate the fact for his article 'An Alternative Interpretation of Late 19th Century Malaria Research. Is There A Secret History? When Murugan was in New York he had prepared a summary of his research captioned 'Certain Systematic Discrepancies in Ronald Ross's Account of Plasmodium B.' This article was not accepted by the science journal and he was condemned for being eccentric. And this provoked him to embark on an adventure to find the truth in the place where things have happened. Murugan believed 1906 Nobel winner Ronald Ross is not the real man behind discovery of the malaria and someone else might have put that idea in his mind. Ronal Ross and Patrick Manson both were doing there research in wrong direction for they believed that malaria parasite was transmitted from mosquitos to humans orally, possibly through drinking water. But soon afterwards Ross changed his direction of research and found the connection between Plasmodium Zygotes and Anopheles, Stepheasil. Here is the point where the issue becomes indigestible to Murugan and the rationalist pursue his search for what actually happened. Ghosh suggest that Ross had two assistants, Mangla a sweeper woman and Laakan a dhooley-bearer. Murugan is convinced that there was a conspiracy behind malaria research. The conspirators are, as he believes, society writers, journalists, film stars, and businessmen of the then so-called upper class. The story goes to form a clash between middle class and upper class.

Ghosh has weaved the main narrative with the another story of Anta who is an Egyptian computer clerk. He works on his upper intelligent computer named Ava. When L. Murugan arrives in Calcutta in 1995 the very next day he disappears, Anta tries to find out the reasons for it. On the other hand there is an episode narrating the story of Mangala and Laakhan. Antar works in New York for the International Water Council. Here one day Antar's Ava produces an identity card with a chain to it. The card is damaged and it is not easily recognizable. Antar input certain commands and his super computer reproduces the card. We come to know that card is made in Calcutta for L. Murugan. He has worked for a not-for-profit organization that served as a global public health consultancy and epidemiological data bank. L. Murugan is very energetic character in the novel and through this character Ghosh wants to voice the injustice done to real men involved in the discovery of malaria. In an attempt to unravel the mystery of the discovery L. Murugan and Antar are trapped in a conspiracy by the so-called public agents. Through the episode of L. Murugan Ghosh wish to relate the fact that the aim of science is not only to reveal yet to create also.

In this narrative Ghosh reveals that the Austrian Clinical Julius Von Wagner was actually doing the research in malaria and was on much advanced stage of it reaching its goal. As is already

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mentioned that Mangala had developed the way of planting the malaria from pigeon to the human patient of syphilis. She was using the skill to treat patients of malaria in Dr. Cunningham's laboratory without his knowledge. But this treatment produced tremendous side effects in patients called as personality disorders. The cause of this was the pigeons. Pigeons had a chromosome called Calcutta Chromosome which caused this disorder in humans because the malaria was transferred from pigeons to humans. When Murugan finds it he was excited to tell it to his friend Antar,

Just think, 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. (TCC, 91)

Murugan continues his extensive research of many years and had come to understand that Ross's research is only a small part of what, on large scale Mangala had been doing. But at certain stage of the research she was facing problem and she understood that she had to change the 'religion of silence' and speak out her objectives to achieve them. She needed more information on malaria bug because she believed there is a close link between the bug and human mind. And for this information had to break her silence. She planted some crucial ideas into the mind of Ross. Laakhan was himself the bearer of Calcutta Chromosome. In this novel Ghosh has asserted the importance of secrecy in the matter of intellectual property. In this book there is a strong sense of theft or deceit in matters of such research. Laakhan is projected as the agent of secrecy in malaria research. For there are more than three instances in the novel where Laakhan intervenes and maintains the secrecy of the work being done in Dr. Cunningham's laboratory. Elijah Monroe, J.W.D. Grigson and Phulbano whose real name was Saiyad Murad Hussain. All permanently disappear due to the intervention of Laakhan, except Phulbano. The novelist uses the case of Phulbano to reassert the social ethos, as we see in the society everyone everywhere has duality of self and Phulbano has two names which create confusion in the one's mind. Murugan on his arrival in Calcutta in 1955 found that the people worshipped the image of Mangala called 'Mangalabibi'. That denotes transferring the soul because no one dies and soul transfers from one body to another and finally merges in the super soul. Sol is controlled by God. Mangala is the follower of this path though she tries to transfer the soul and wish to be like God. But on the other hand there is Ross who adopts the way of logic and science. Though on the surface these two ways may seem contradictory but in core they are not so Ghosh claims that they are complementary to each other. Logic without intuition is incomplete.

Indian cultural class system is at overturned by the novelist deliberately in the case of Mangala. Because she belongs to the lower class of the society even then she is worshiped as an image. Her superiority is established on grounds of knowledge. We come across one very important in the novel that Laakhan is depicted as the torch bearer that symbolizes him as the bearer of knowledge.

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Thus this novel is an excellent work on creating the authentic picture of past society also it does comment on the cultural aspect of Indian society. Ethos becomes concrete with the illustrious narration and wishful reversal of traditional roles.

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