

ABSTRACT

The dissertation is intended to examine the representation of colonial modernity vis-à-vis cultural identity in the select novels of Amitav Ghosh. In his novels Ghosh has dealt with various postcolonial issues in the context of Southeast Asia. A particular thread that runs through most of his works is the complex phenomenon known as colonial modernity. Colonialism and modernity are mutually constitutive. Colonialism projected modernity as its justificatory logic for ruling the colonised. Apparently, modernity was supposed to bring progress and liberation in the colonies; but it was actually the tool of the colonisers to subjugate the colonised. Colonialism and modernity collaborated in forming what Walter D. Mignolo calls 'the colonial matrix of power' which exerts strong influence upon the colonised in four fields: epistemology, sexuality and gender, economy and authority. 'The colonial matrix of power' propagates the Western ideas and practices in these four domains as universal paradigm, and at the same time, discredits non-Western ideas and practices. But the implementation of modernity in the colonies is not a smooth, one-dimensional process. Modernity is accepted as well as questioned, resisted, subverted and undermined by the colonised. Even the colonisers themselves violated the much-touted principles of modernity. In his novels Amitav Ghosh has addressed some of these concerns relating to the complex processes of internalisation, rejection, subversion, dismantling and undermining of colonial modernity. In other words, Ghosh's novels offer a critique of colonial modernity. Being a writer who is preoccupied with human predicament, Ghosh has presented his critique through the subjectivity and identity of his fictional characters. An analysis of the subjectivity and identity of his characters shows how modernity is problematised in the Third World scenario. This study aims to unfold Ghosh's critique of colonial modernity in the domains of epistemology and sexuality and gender with reference to his select novels.