

**SYNOPSIS**  
**OF**  
**THE INTERPLAY OF IDEOLOGIES IN THE SELECT**  
**NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH**

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BY  
**MEENAKSHI DE**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**  
**FACULTY OF ARTS**  
**VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY, MIDNAPORE**  
**WEST BENGAL, INDIA**

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## THE INTERPLAY OF IDEOLOGIES IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH

‘Ideology’, a very complex and intriguing term, encompassing all spheres of human knowledge, works as an essential constitutive factor for the real existence of human beings in society. Of course, the term ‘ideology’, its role, the interplay of ideologies in fiction are highly provocative. The present study concentrating on Amitav Ghosh, one of the most enchanting novelists of recent times, wants to engage itself in an exploration of ideology-fiction interface. Amitav Ghosh has to his credit nine novels — *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *In An Antique Land* (ethnography in narrative), *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*, each of which has drawn enormous critical attention. Ghosh is not just a prolific writer but one of the most written about novelists and studies have been undertaken on different aspects of his novels. However, one of the relatively less touched upon areas is the way Ghosh’s novels present the interplay of ideologies in them. Ghosh’s perception of reality and his ideological beliefs of language, culture, human relationship, nation and geographical boundaries greatly influence his novels and determine the forms and content of his novels. This study proposes to explore how ideologies influence literary production and how again do literary productions enjoy autonomy. Concentrating on five novels of Ghosh — *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *River of Smoke* — it seeks to examine how much they can liberate themselves from the dominance of interplaying ideologies.

The study, laid out in five chapters, attempts a chronological survey of ‘ideology’ from historical perspective in **Chapter I**, entitled “**Concept of Ideology Down the Ages**”. The origin of ‘ideology’ can be traced back to the classical literature, though ‘ideology’ *per se* did not quite exist at that time. The line of conceptual development from Aristotle to Destutt de Tracy, with whom we can say ‘ideology’ as a critical term emerged, is traced.

The subsequent debate has brought in contributions from Karl Marx, Fredrick Engles, V.I.Lenin, Georg Lukács, Karl Manheim, Lucian Goldmann, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, Jurgan Habermas, Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey, Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Žižek, and Peter Sloterdijk. The list is dominated by the ‘Marxist’ critics/theorists since they have been particularly instrumental in continuing this debate over ideology and its role in life and literature.

The thrust of **Chapter II, “Ideology and Literature”**, is the theoretical discussion of ideology from the point of view of literature. According to Althusser, a real and authentic art does not give us knowledge in the strict sense. What art gives us, it does in the form of ‘seeing’, ‘perceiving’, and ‘feeling’. The work of art is to ‘make us see’, ‘make us perceive’, ‘make us feel’ something which alludes to reality. This form is ideology, from which art is born, in which it bathes, and yet from which it detaches itself as art and to which it alludes.

The study explores Ghosh’s thoughts of history, ideology and fiction as revealed in interviews, non-fiction and articles in **Chapter III, entitled “Amitav Ghosh vis-a`-vis History, Fiction and Ideology”**. A detailed go-through of Ghosh’s personal interviews and non-fictional works reveals Ghosh’s personal attitudes and views about history, fiction, nation, economy, empire and many other issues relating to human existence and human beings in this world.

**Chapter-IV, entitled “Amitav Ghosh’s Novels and Interplay of Ideologies”**, is devoted to the analysis of the works of Amitav Ghosh in the light of the theoretical grounding made in the preceding chapters. An exploration is attempted in the chapter to bring out how ideologies play an apparently determining role in controlling the characters’ views on reality and imagination, their response to the incidents happening in reality, their

relationship with others as shown in *The Shadow Lines*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *River of Smoke*. It also presents how ideology seems to play a role in selecting the setting of the novels as manifested in *The Hungry Tide*, *The Glass Palace* and *The Sea of Poppies*. This chapter also projects how ideology is apparently connected to the events of the novels as seen in *The Shadow Lines*, *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*.

The penultimate chapter, **Chapter-V**, entitled “**Autonomy of the Novels: Absence of Any Over-arching Ideology**” discusses the intensity and nature of enjoying aesthetic ‘autonomy’ in the works of Ghosh. These five novels are viewed from a standpoint whether they have reached a state of autonomy defying the ideology(-ies). Though ideological concerns appear to be a determining force in the choice of literary forms in these novels, the forms have their own structure and own logic, making its own artistic demand(s). This logical structure of the form of the text acts as complementary to the development of the ideological content of the text, but a moment comes when the logic of the form and the logic of the ideological structure begin to make contrary demands. This chapter elaborately analyses how fiction having its instinctive power of defending itself from the constitutive ideology enjoys autonomous status.

The concluding part, apart from summing up the arguments put forward in different chapters, attempts a comparative study of the five novels of Ghosh focusing on the ‘tension’, resultant of the interplay of different ideologies and the liberating force of text over that ideology. The relationship, as it is viewed, between ideology and the text is loaded with many possibilities and provides opportunities for further researches.

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