
**AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE CALCUTTA CHROMOSOME*: A PLURIVERSAL
NARRATIVE TO DECOLONISE THE PAST AND CONFRONT UNIVERSAL
EUROCENTRISM**

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ABSTRACT

The Calcutta Chromosome takes readers on a convoluted journey through time and space. At once a work of science fiction, a medical mystery, and a history of malaria research, this hybrid novel sets into rivalry India's old-time wisdom and spirituality against Western science and English colonial presumptuousness, thus advocating transmodernity and the pluriversality put forward by critics such as Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo, among others. This study will analyse the way in which this novel denies the existence of a universal scientific method by deconstructing the certainties of an exclusively rationalist discourse whose discoveries have often gone hand in hand with exploitation, unequal power relations and colonization. Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance* and Emmanuel Levinas's ideas about the ethics of silence and knowledge will also be used to analyse silence as an alternative epistemological framework through which the dominant discourse can be undermined and the subaltern heard, and as a means to make amends for the injustices of the past by reclaiming the histories written by those who were made 'others' by the English imperial power.

KEYWORDS: Amitav Ghosh, transmodern narratives of the limit, pluriversality, English/Indian colonial power relations, history of malaria, Derrida's *différance*, Levinas's ethics of silence and knowledge.

RESUMEN *The Calcutta Chromosome* de Amitav Ghosh: una narrativa pluriversal para reescribir el pasado colonial y confrontar el eurocentrismo universal

The Calcutta Chromosome lleva a los lectores a un intrincado viaje a través del tiempo y el espacio. A la vez una obra de ciencia ficción, un misterio médico y una historia de la investigación sobre la malaria, esta novela híbrida enfrenta la sabiduría y la espiritualidad de antaño de la India con la ciencia occidental y la presunción colonial inglesa, abogando así por la transmodernidad y la pluriversalidad propuesta por críticos como Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, Enrique Dussel y Walter Mignolo, entre otros. Este trabajo analizará la forma en que esta novela niega la existencia de un método científico universal por medio de la deconstrucción de las certezas de un discurso exclusivamente racionalista, cuyos descubrimientos han ido

muchas veces de la mano de la explotación, las relaciones desiguales de poder y la colonización. La noción de *différance* de Jacques Derrida y las ideas de Emmanuel Levinas sobre la ética del silencio y el conocimiento también se utilizarán para analizar el silencio como un marco epistemológico alternativo a través del cual el discurso dominante puede ser socavado y el subalterno escuchado, así como un medio para reparar injusticias del pasado, reivindicando las historias escritas por aquellos que fueron hechos 'otros' por el poder imperial inglés.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Amitav Ghosh, narrativas transmodernas del límite, pluriversalidad, relaciones de poder colonial inglés/indio, historia de la malaria, el concepto de *différance* de Derrida, ética del silencio y del conocimiento de Levinas.

Introduction

The Calcutta Chromosome is a novel that, according to Claire Chambers, “defies categorization and resists any easy summary” (2003: 57). Ghosh’s fourth novel takes readers on a convoluted journey through time and space as Antar, an Egyptian computer programmer of the Life Watch organization in the New York of the near future, becomes absorbed in the strange life of Murugan, a man obsessed with the medical history of malaria, and in a complex world to which there is more than meets the eye. Antar’s sophisticated computer, AVA, shows him the remnant of an identity card that has been lost in the system. Antar eventually finds out that it belongs to an old-time colleague of his, Murugan, who had disappeared in Calcutta many years before while researching the life and deeds of the Nobel prize-winning scientist, Ronald Ross (1857-1932), who had discovered one hundred years earlier that malaria was transmitted by the bite of a mosquito. Although the Calcutta of Ronald Ross is well separated in time from the Calcutta that Murugan visits, the New York of Antar and the Calcutta of Murugan seem to overlap in time, notwithstanding the fact that, as the novel clearly states, they are separated by many years.

Antar’s thorough research into old and lost documents and phone messages makes him reach the conclusion that Murugan may have been right in believing that Ross’s discoveries had been secretly enforced and guided by an underground counter-science/mystical group whose ultimate goal was to find the secret of immortality. This movement, Murugan finds out, is led by an enigmatic woman or Demi Goddess called Mangala, who is helped by Ross’s favourite servant and assistant, who goes by the names of Lutchman, Lakshman and Laakhan. The disciples of this cult can transfer their chromosomes into another, and gradually become that person or take over that person.

The reason why they helped Ross to reach the conclusions for which he became famous was that they believed that to know something is to change it. These Indians “systematically interfered with Ronald Ross’s experiments to push malaria research in certain directions while leading it away from others” (*TCC*, 37). To put it differently, they provided Ross with clues because they thought that, at the very moment that Ross made this discovery, the parasite would change its nature and a new variant of malaria would emerge. As they saw it, “if you wanted to create a specific kind of change, or mutation, one of the ways in which you could get there is by allowing certain things to be known” (*TCC*, 217). This mutation would allow the group’s research using the chromosome-transfer technique to make further progress towards achieving their ultimate goal: immortality.

The Calcutta Chromosome: A Transmodern Pluriversal Narrative

In this bewildering world, nothing is what it seems to be. And the same could be said of the novel itself, whose complex structure, according to Ruby S. Ramraj (2012: 195), “creates a montage effect, dizzying at times, which [...] accounts for the subtitle [...]: *A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery*”. Furthermore, *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a hybrid text that, by blending such different genres as science fiction, the thriller, the detective novel, historiography and Indian pre-colonial folklore and ghost stories becomes a good example of Transmodernity, the term coined in the late eighties and further developed in the following decades by the Spanish philosopher Rosa María Rodríguez Magda (1989: 2017) to designate a paradigm shift that inaugurated a new global mentality. The prefix ‘trans’ takes up Modernity’s utmost ethical and political challenges and values (equality, justice, freedom, etc.), but assuming postmodern criticism, which will in turn allow for the integration of some formerly discarded values from premodern cultures. Furthermore, in keeping with the distinction that later on this philosopher established in “The Crossroads of Transmodernity” (2019) between ‘narratives of celebration’ and ‘narratives of the limit’, it is clear that Ghosh’s novel can be seen as an excellent illustration of the latter: whereas the narratives of celebration reiterate the dominant discourse and make it hegemonic, the narratives of the limit attempt to resist dominant Eurocentric assumptions to offer the other side of Western official history and consider what has not been conceptualized yet.

Furthermore, it is also clear that *The Calcutta Chromosome* abides by Walter Dignolo's decoloniality project, as this is predicated on the assumption that "Eurocentrism is not a geographical issue, but an epistemic and aesthetic one" (2018: 125), and with the literature that Enrique Dussel (2012) labels as pluriversal, on account of the fact that it advocates a paramount project of cultural synthesis which implies: firstly, self-affirmation and self-valorization of one's own [Indian in this case] debauched cultural identity; secondly, a critique from within the dominant globalized culture; and thirdly, a dialectic proposal that blends borders and encompasses post-modernity and precolonial (or pre-modern) worlds and cosmovisions. In line with this new ideological and aesthetic trend, then, Ghosh's novel pits India's old-time wisdom and spirituality against Western science and English colonial presumptuousness. The existence of a 'universal' scientific method is denied by deconstructing the certainties of an exclusively Eurocentric rationalist historiography of science, whose discoveries have often gone hand in hand with exploitation, unequal power relations and colonization. It is therefore suggested that the boundaries of knowledge should be expanded by having recourse to insufficiently explored, and often despised, pre-modern forms of non-Western knowledge because, to rely on Letizia Garofalo's words (2022: 149), these can "have equal if not better chances to get to revolutionary discoveries". In keeping with Dussel's aforementioned theories, Austrian philosopher Paul K. Feyerabend's seminal work *Against Method* (1975) also speaks in favour of taking into consideration non-standard/ pre-modern forms of knowledge such as esotericism, magic and mythology. As Garofalo goes on to explain (2022: 151), Feyerabend postulates the logical need to put forward a theoretical anarchism in order to raise the conviction that a method that rejects universal rigid standards and prompts multifarious opinions is not only beneficial for scientific progress, but also the only one compatible with a humanitarian outlook, as it can alone "preserve and increase liberty, [and] allow the cultivation of cultural individuality as well as a full and rewarding life".

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the underground group is the anarchic element that "avail[s] [itself] of hypotheses, which were either imaginary or in contradiction with experimental results formerly considered unquestionable" (Garofalo, 2022: 157). As a matter of fact, as Ghosh explained in an interview with Paul Kincaid in 2013, it was the esoteric movement of the Egyptian Gnostics that actually inspired him to introduce in

the novel the idea of a secret society with a view, among other things, to denouncing the foolishness and arrogance of the colonial scientist who, like colonial officials, uses absolute power to relegate the colonized to the back burner, thus ignoring the fact that, when subaltern Indians are made to assimilate Western knowledge, they are by no means obtuse and passive, but rather active agents in the process. As Murari Prasad contends (2022: 142), “Ghosh turns the table on the colonizers and indicates their alienation by way of underscoring their discursive failure” and enforcing “a para-colonial domain of perceiving and scribing the indigenous culture”.

Science vs. Religion

In order to achieve this aim, *The Calcutta Chromosome* shows religion and the epistemological nature of god/goddess as counterparts of science and scientific methodologies, as the underside of rational and discursive knowledge (Huttunen, 2011: 51-4). To put it differently, as the counterpoint to that “spirit of knowingness” which, according to Cora Diamond, “is reductive in its idea of our relation to the world, and [...] eager to re-order human lives in accordance with its rational plans” (1998: 51-52). Moreover, in her study on the human need to reach transcendence, Marta Nussbaum (1990: 365-391) reminds us that the life of a god/goddess would be decidedly non-human. In other words, the concept of divinity implies the idea of human transcendence into an existence without the constraints of human life. However, Nussbaum goes on to argue, gods and goddesses, unlike humans, are not political beings: “politics is about using human intelligence to support human neediness; so to be truly political you have to have both elements. Beasts fail on one count, gods on the other” (373).

Mangala is depicted as an in-between Christ-like figure: she shares human and godly features, but has somehow experienced a non-transcendent life, and therefore knows the meaning of suffering and death. Furthermore, the project of this Indian mystical group brings together gods, humans and animals; it conflates archaic Indian and indigenous religious rites with technological knowledge and biological life’s capacity for reproduction. Significantly enough, as Safoora Arbab points out (2022: 176), the figurine that Mangala uses when performing her bloody ritual of the malaria transference (the blood of slaughtered infected pigeons is the vehicle whereby the interpersonal transference takes place) has prominent eyes, a chubby shapeless body, and holds a microscope in one hand and a pigeon in the other. As Arbab concludes, “the

figurine then represents not only a seamless incorporation of the Oriental/Colonial framework into the indigenous/subaltern but also the integration of technological prowess and biological fecundity” (176-177). Moreover, according to Suchita Mathur (2004: 136), this figurine could also be seen as a new “Cyborg Goddess”, as it “combines the artificial with the natural *and* the supernatural” so that it represents an alternative, not only to the binary science vs. supernatural, but also to the impotence and submissiveness usually attributed to the subaltern woman. Mangala is thus described as a “hybrid” and “postcolonial new human” that is not only “present-future” oriented like the cyborg, but also conflates all temporality, “past, present and future”, together with the condition of “goddess, human and machine”. Last but not least, it is very difficult to say whether Silence is the Goddess and Mangala some kind of high priestess, or whether both are manifestations of the same divine entity, sharing godly and human features.

In the same way, the novel relies on dualistic doctrines, such as the Manichean one. As John Thieme argues, the novel challenges artificial “shadow lines”, tracing its allusions to Manichean philosophies and relating this to postcolonial critics’ arguments that colonial discourse sees ‘East’ and ‘West’ in terms of Manichean binaries. In Thieme’s words, these dualistic systems function as “an Eastern challenge to the exclusiveness of Western discourses that deny the other’s capacity for utterance” (2000: 286). This idea is further corroborated in the religion of silence and the discursive omnipresence of the Western history of science in the narrative. As the novel clearly suggests in its critical treatment of Ross’s discovery, science, technology, and medicine were not exclusively brought to India by the British. Indian knowledge also contributed to making many of these breakthroughs possible. This was not, to quote Claire Chambers’ words, “a one-way process of transfer”, but rather “a complex series of cross-cultural exchanges, translations and mutations” (2003: 58). Finally, these religious doctrines are brought to the fore in the context of the archaeological excavations carried out by the Hungarian Countess Pongrácz, who follows the teachings of Valentinus, the Gnostic philosopher from Alexandria who brought dualistic religious beliefs to Rome in the second century AD. According to this ancient Valentinian cult, “the ultimate deities are the Abyss and the Silence, the one being male and the other female, the one representing mind and the other truth” (*TCC*, 214).

Science and Historiography vs. Fiction

In addition to questioning the borders between gods and scientific methodologies, the novel also experiments with the genres of science fiction and historiography in order to undermine the boundaries between reality and fiction, and to put to the test the discourses of science and history. As is well known, science has often been described as a superior form of knowledge that is rational, systematized and culturally neutral, and whose main aim is the search for objective ‘truth’. Contrary to these optimistic assumptions, many recent theorists and historians have demonstrated that science is, more often than not, culturally located, and has its own biases and interests. Moreover, some scientific advances were the result of lucky and unfounded guesses, and theories that had been discredited and drastically discarded in the past eventually proved to be right. Ghosh makes this very clear in the novel, particularly in his references to Julius Wagner-Jauregg, who won the 1927 Nobel Prize for his accidental discovery that the malaria virus could cure the symptoms of syphilis, and to Alphonse Laveran, whose initially rejected hypothesis that the malaria vector was a protozoan parasite was revived and corroborated years later. Scientific knowledge is not at all definitive. On the contrary, it is provisional and ever-changing.

Ghosh’s peculiar use of the science fiction genre should also be taken into consideration. As Claire Chambers explains (2003: 58), *The Calcutta Chromosome* plays with the notion of science fiction in three ways. Firstly, as is often the case in these stories, the novel depicts a society in the near future with technological advances that we can only dream of at the present moment. Secondly, it fictionalizes the lives of actual scientists, with the result that the official science of Ross is confused with the dubious (pseudo)scientific activities of Mangala and her followers. Thirdly, with its subversive use of the notion of science fiction, the novel seems to point out that many of the grand claims made by science are nothing but fictions, and that the rhetoric of science is not that different from that of fiction. *The Calcutta Chromosome* also corroborates Patrick Parrinder’s contention that the most important feature of science fiction is a combination of fantasy and realism. As this critic explains (1980: 11), most science fiction organizes its main narrative around current scientific theories, but also includes at least one impossible ‘premise’ which allows the plot to move into the realm of speculative scientific fantasy. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the main premise is the fictional creation of a “technology for interpersonal transference”, whereby “when your

body fails you, you leave it, you migrate [...] You begin all over again, another body, another beginning" (*TCC*, 107, 109). Following Parrinder's definition of this genre, Ghosh supports his premise of interpersonal transference with existing scientific knowledge, such as the discovery of the malaria virus's ability to mutate and the newly discovered cloning technologies, to simultaneously relate all this with the ancient Hindu belief in reincarnation, which could thus become a material reality in the near future. Once again, Ghosh is blurring the boundaries between realism and fantasy, between truth and fiction.

Similarly, the novel draws heavily on Ross's *Memoirs*, published in 1923, some twenty years after his discovery, in order to offer a realistic/historical frame for its fantastic/fictional narrative and, most important of all, to question the validity of such autobiographical/official/historiographical account, which Ross wrote with the mercenary purpose of telling the world that the merit was exclusively his. Whereas all the quotations directly attributed to Ross in the novel have been taken from his *Memoirs*, the novel also highlights the fact that Ross made very few references to Lutchman, the Indian patient and servant without whom he might have never been able to do what he did. In other words, *The Calcutta Chromosome* takes its own revenge on the British scientist by turning this marginal character in his official text into one of the its main characters, that is, by giving voice and agency to the formerly silenced colonial subject. Besides, Ross made great efforts to keep his experiments on Lutchman secret, the main reason for this being, not so much Ross's concern about Lutchman's health, but rather the fact that Lutchman was a valuable government employee. Ross's egotism and lack of sensibility are ostentatiously brought to the surface, together with the fact that, if not for his Indian helper's indigenous knowledge, he might never have made that discovery. Not in vain is Ross often described as a blind idiot, totally unaware of whatever is happening around him. Furthermore, the greatest irony of all is that, however important this discovery may have been, and despite the triumphant tone of the poem that Ross wrote to celebrate it, malaria keeps on killing thousands of third-world people every year. Once again, Western achievements are nothing but fallacies, and scientific facts are shown as just another fiction.

The Calcutta Chromosome launches a postcolonial critique against the British colonial enterprise, which is therefore equated with exploitation, profit, blindness, and

deceit. Contrary to the colonial assumption that British rule led to the modernization, development and technological advance of the sub-continent, critics like Shashi Tharoor in his seminal work *Inglorious Empire* make it clear that “one of the regrettable consequences of British rule was how colonialism suffocated any prospect of a revival of India’s traditional spirit of scientific enquiry, whether by neglect or design” (2016: 200). While the British thrived in science and technology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they did not have any interest in founding any relevant institutions in India, thus neglecting the great potential of the subcontinent in these fields and bringing about the exodus of the brightest Indian minds.

The solution that the novel puts forward is some kind of egalitarian cooperation between East and West. To put it in Chambers’ words, this novel speaks in favour of “a radical alternative to the hegemony of Western scientific knowledge [...]. The implication is that this challenge will only be made if the knowledge and beliefs of third-world countries, such as India, are fused with scientific concepts from the West” (2003: 64). As a matter of fact, as critics such as David Arnold have argued, many middle-class Indians who became interested in Western science from the late eighteenth century onwards had no difficulty in negotiating and integrating religious tradition and scientific modernity, to the point that they, far from being passive, “subvert[ed], contaminate[d], and reorganize[d] the ideology of science as introduced by Europe” (2000: 13).

Language vs. Silence

The reason why the ‘fusion’ of western science and third-world countries was ultimately possible was no other than language itself, that is, the fact that, however different our cosmovisions may be, we all rely on language and discourse to articulate and organize our knowledge. If we agree with Donna Haraway that “any scientific statement about the world depends intimately upon language, upon metaphor” (1989: 4), then it follows that knowledge, like language itself, is ever-changing, and that there is no such thing as absolute knowledge for, as Murugan affirms in the novel, “knowledge [can]’t begin without acknowledging the impossibility of knowledge” (*TCC*, 105). As was argued before, the search for knowledge inevitably implies accepting the existence of unexpected gaps and silences that will inexorably stand in our way.

Not in vain is silence another recurrent theme in the novel. As was mentioned earlier the main premise upon which this secret Indian “counter-science” (*TCC*, 104) movement works is that to know something, or rather, to say something, is to change it. Its members operate through means kept secret from the Western characters, and it is only after having been told about some of their mysterious meetings and activities that the reader can finally become aware of their plan. I agree with Tuomas Huttunen when this critic affirms that “silence in this novel represents the kind of unattainable experience that transcends the level of language, or knowing” (2008: 30-1). Furthermore, it can also be argued, in keeping with Safoora Arbab’s opinion (2022: 164) that silence, like Jacques Derrida’s *différance*, encapsulates an alternative system for the interpretation of life and meaning-making; silence should be thus seen as a counter-code that topples the ‘word’ off its pedestal to create an alternative epistemological framework that allows the subaltern to be heard. As Derrida explains in his seminal work “Différance” (1982: 4-5), ‘différance’ with an ‘a’ is postulated as both its negation and as the space of difference. Since it is impossible to tell the ‘a’ in ‘différance’ from the ‘e’ of ‘difference’ through sound or speech, the former signifies the “mute mark” that “remains silent, secret and discreet as a tomb” and announces the death of the latter. ‘Différance’ thus encapsulates an order that resists the binaries upon which Western philosophy is founded; it neither endorses these binaries nor strives to bring them together, but forwards instead a different possibility altogether. In this novel, it is silence that occupies this polysemic space that allows so far discarded subaltern and indigenous knowledge to be finally acknowledged. Silence consequently restructures our ways of understanding to radically alter the present paradigms and make room for the aforementioned fruitful theoretical anarchism advocated by Feyerabend.

On the other hand, Emmanuel Levinas’s thoughts about the philosophy of religion and the ethics of silence and knowledge could also contribute to further explaining the methodology of this secret group. As this philosopher argued, the existence of something contains in itself a nothingness, a possibility of not-being, and this does not mean that things do not exist, but rather that their mode of existing contains precisely the possible negation of itself. In keeping with this argument, in his seminal works *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being* (1974), Levinas concluded that the infinite, the void, language, and silence are bound together in an inescapable

dialectical process whereby they imply and deny one another. To quote his own words (1991: 172), “language does not belong among the relations that could appear through the structures of formal logic; it is contact across a distance, relations with the non-touchable, across a void”, which in turn implies relations with the infinite, across silence. Jeffrey L. Kosky explains and summarizes this conundrum as follows:

As impossible to speak, the infinite is ineffable and unutterable, but it is so precisely insofar as there is language, precisely insofar as one attempts to utter it. The infinite is not ineffable, not unutterable, before the awakening of the language that designates it –it crumbles away or is dispelled in the actual attempt to say it. As paradoxical as such a statement is by itself, it has an even stranger consequence for Levinas’s thought since, for him, the presence of the infinite is the very awakening of language. On the one hand, there is no language without the presentation of the infinitely other in the face; but, on the other hand, as soon as there is language [...] the infinitely other vanishes, is no longer present, or is present only as a negative. In other words, the awakening of language is the betrayal of the infinite which calls language forth. Language thereby dispels the dream of a purely nonviolent metaphysic of the Infinite. It is for this reason that the very discourse in which Levinas declares the peace of the Infinite, God, negates that peace, for it designates the infinite as having vanished. (2001: 91)

Similarly, Levinas goes on to argue, the Other remains an absolute Other insofar as it exists outside the main Western ontological postulate, which conceives of all beings as objects that can be internalized by consciousness or grasped by adequate (linguistic) representation. In Levinas’s words:

The silent world is a world that comes to us from the Other –be he an evil genius. Its equivocation is insinuated in a mockery. Thus silence is not a simple absence of speech; speech lies in the depths of silence like a laughter perfidiously held back. It is the other side of language: the interlocutor has given a sign, but has declined every interpretation; this is the silence that terrifies. Speech consists in the Other coming to the assistance of the sign given forth, attending his own manifestation in signs redressing the equivocal by this attendance. (1991: 91)

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas further elaborated on this paradox by distinguishing between language as the pre-original ethical Saying that signifies as a one for the other, and language as the Said that merely communicates meaning and thus betrays alterity by bringing it into disclosure. As Dorota Glowacka explains (2012: 21): “Levinas construes Saying—an aptitude to listen with an ear always turned toward the other—as a translinguistic horizon, over and beyond its disclosure as a linguistic phenomenon. Saying, which signifies responsibility and marks my own speech with the trace of the other, can never be reduced to the Said, to that which, as Levinas *does not say*, always takes place in a particular national tongue”. However, since my voice

carries the trace of radical alterity and bears witness to it, the Said is necessary, and also is silence, because in this ethical/Levinasian conception of language, to quote Glowacka's words again, "silence itself belongs to speech and signifies by its effacement of the communicating word" (17). It is only by keeping in mind all the ideas so far explained that the reader can understand Murugan when he affirms that

the first principle of a counter-science would have to be secrecy [...] because to communicate, to put ideas into language, would be to establish a claim to *know* – which is the first thing that a counter-science would dispute. [...] Maybe this other team started with the idea that knowledge is self-contradictory; maybe they believed that to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something, you've already changed what you think you know so you don't really know it at all. (TCC, 104-5)

According to this, it is clear that silence should not be understood as the mere underside of language. Silence transcends language, insofar as it stands for the kind of inaccessible occurrence, the infinite, and also the void, that goes beyond all kinds of discourses and all forms of knowledge. It is silence, and the liminal space dwelling in the gaps within discourses, that can ultimately hold the answer, should there be any.¹ George Steiner reached a similar conclusion when he stated that "[l]anguage can only deal meaningfully with a special, restricted segment of reality. The rest, and it is presumably the much larger part of it, is silence" (1998: 21). That is why Murugan knows he is not the one 'they' have been waiting for. As he explains: "for them the only way to escape the tyranny of knowledge is to turn it on itself. But for that to work they have to create a single perfect moment of discovery when the person who discovers is also that which is discovered. The problem with me is that I know too much and too little" (TCC, 307).

As *The Calcutta Chromosome* seems to suggest, if the Other remains an absolute Other, which can be neither fully apprehended by consciousness nor properly represented by discourse, if the human search for knowledge is an impossible never-ending task, which should nonetheless be pursued ad infinitum on strictly ethical

¹ Significantly enough, it is in liminal spaces, either non-places (the Web and the railway stations) or intermediate spaces (outhouses, anterooms, ramshackle houses, etc.), that different realities can be crossed and the rituals of silence can be performed in Ghosh's novel. As is well known, liminality is often described as a period of transition, as a threshold state of ambiguity, openness and indeterminacy, and it is only after going through this process that one may enter into new forms of identity and relationship. Gaps, either temporal or spatial, are the ultimate manifestation of productive liminality in Ghosh's novel.

grounds, then it follows that there is no way in which universal, and by extension colonial truths can be formulated, let alone enforced.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it can be said that *The Calcutta Chromosome* clearly contributes to accomplishing some of Amitav Ghosh's main targets, namely, to question the preponderance of Eurocentric discourses, in particular those ruling science and technology, to disclose the negative side of British rule and its concomitant colonial assumptions and classifications, to reclaim and revise history, and to reconstruct and give voice to the occluded, silenced, marginalized and defeated in the dominant representations of the subaltern experience. Western traditional notions of science and culture should therefore be deeply questioned and expanded so that other unconventional non-Western forms of knowledge, so far discarded and relegated to oblivion, can be taken into serious consideration. It is only this conflation that will make it possible to boost knowledge and progress, better approach the complexities of life, and make amends for the injustices of the past by reclaiming the histories written by those who were made 'others' by the English imperial power.

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