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Cultural dislocation and diasporic identity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

This study investigates the works of Amitav Ghosh – one of the foremost Indian diasporic writers in English – to examine the challenges of constructing nationhood in the context of diasporic experiences. This paper, adopting a qualitative research approach, takes up three novels by Ghosh: *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Glass Palace* (2000), and *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Drawing attention to the psychological and cultural disharmony incurred by individuals while negotiating the complex nature of diasporic life is the major thrust of this study. In addition to the primary texts, the study adopts a variety of secondary works and critical perspectives in order to deepen the investigation into the themes. It depicts how many characters are unable to reconcile the cultural gap between their homeland and the host countries, and most do not adjust easily to their new environments. In *The Shadow Lines*, the characters Tha'mma and Ila embody this cultural tension: Tha'mma is very much disturbed by the westernized lifestyle that Ila is carrying on, while Ila, having grown up abroad, rejects the conservative values of her Indian heritage. In *The Glass Palace*, King Thebaw feels bewildered by the behaviors of colonial administrators as he is unable to acclimatize to this unusual socio-cultural world of India. In *The Hungry Tide*, Piya has trauma due to cultural displacement as it takes time for her to come to terms with new surroundings. Analyzing the protagonists' view of these three novels, this paper critically examines how a diasporic life triggers cultural disorientation for the protagonists, offering new viewpoint and analysis from a postcolonial perspective.

Keywords: Diaspora; Identity Crisis; Cross-Cultural Environment; Cultural Dislocation; Amitav Ghosh.

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Introduction

Diaspora, a term widely discussed in contemporary intellectual discourse, has garnered significant attention, particularly among scholars in the arts and humanities. To exist within the diaspora signifies living in a cross-cultural environment characterized by inevitable change, fusion, and expansion (Hussain, 2017). This phenomenon has far-reaching implications for contemporary literature, especially within the realm of postcolonial narratives. The experiences of diasporic individuals are profoundly reflected in the extensive corpus of Indian literature written in English. Revered writers such as Salman Rushdie (1947-), Amitav Ghosh (1956-), Jhumpa Lahiri (1967-), and Anita Desai (1937-) have made notable contributions to the development of Indian diasporic literature. Their works often explore the nature and origins of diaspora, its causes and consequences, as well as the burdens and opportunities it presents, alongside various challenges and crises.

Diaspora, characterized by the voluntary or forced movement of peoples from their homelands to new territories, represents a fundamental aspect of colonization (Ashcroft, Griffith, & Tiffin, 2004). In colonial and postcolonial India, the diaspora emerges as a commonplace reality, driven by numerous factors. The dislocation or displacement of individuals from their places of birth can occur for various reasons—sometimes voluntarily, other times forcibly—often resulting from political and economic circumstances. Nevertheless, the repercussions tend to be strikingly similar. Migration can lead to the erosion of national identity, as individuals assimilate into new identities that they may struggle to embrace. When distanced from their home countries and cultural settings, many find it challenging to feel a sense of belonging to any particular nation. This dislocation proves problematic not only for the new citizens of the host country but also creates significant challenges for the indigenous populations, who may perceive their homeland as increasingly unfamiliar in terms of national and ethnic identity. The prevalence of a multicultural environment complicates the existence of any singular national or ethnic identity, rendering such distinctions difficult to maintain in a diverse setting.

Background: Cultural Shock and Diasporic Dislocation

Cultural shock is an unavoidable outcome of the diaspora. When individuals migrate from their homeland, they carry the remnants of their culture with them, despite leaving their familiar environments. As they encounter a host culture that may differ significantly from their own, every cultural practice in the new setting can appear foreign and, at times, perplexing. This dissonance often triggers a pronounced sense of cultural shock for migrants. When comparing the customs and traditions of their new country with those of their native culture, they perceive a substantial gap, making cultural shock an inevitable response during this transitional phase. In essence, cultural shock refers to the emotional distress and anxiety many experiences when adapting to a new social and cultural environment (Irwin, 2007). It can also be defined as the level of social difficulty encountered during cross-cultural interactions (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Naik (2019) explores the development of identity in the South Asian diaspora, underlining how dislocation in the postcolonial contexts inflects negotiations around identity. Kaur Gagneetpal (2018) examines displacement and its effects on the Indian diaspora, focusing on the challenges of preserving cultural identity through the process of integration into strange societies.

Within the context of Indian postcolonial literature written in English, and apparently in the works of Amitav Ghosh, the phenomenon of cultural shock contributes greatly to the shaping of literary and political discourses on postcolonial India. Ghosh's fiction works very well to represent how individuals negotiate cultural shock in trading off their received cultural forms for new ones, more so in the context of massive migration during colonial and postcolonial times. In each of the selected novels, characters facing the challenges of diaspora must often grapple with identity crises, voicing their confusion regarding their belonging and national affiliation. Their loyalties to any given country oscillate across the various countries they have lived in during different stages of their lives. Whether their conditions of diaspora are self-elected or dictated upon them by circumstances beyond their control, the outcome is singular: such individuals can hardly recognize themselves in any one

clear concept of nationhood. They are commonly outsiders in all the countries and feel the alienation in all social and cultural situations.

Srivastava (2015) did a doctoral study of five novels by Amitav Ghosh. The study looked at how language is used in his stories and how the experiences of individual characters with political and historical events are different from official history. Srivastava also analyses the representation of contemporary society and social structures in Ghosh's works. Another important examination by Huttunen (2011) explores the ethical framework Ghosh employs in crafting his fictional worlds, emphasizing his objective narrative style. Huttunen argues that "Ghosh depicts the world as socially constructed and creates discursive realities to examine the movement of power while seeking to transcend the narratives dominated by the hegemonic Western mode of knowledge production" (2011). Furthermore, Sanzum (2012) explores the female characters in Ghosh's novels, investigating their roles in forming history and the effects of historical events on their lives, as well as examining gender and sexuality. Yesapagu (2016) addresses key postcolonial themes such as diaspora, decolonization, nationalism, and globalization, discussing how these factors influence the narratives within Amitav Ghosh's fiction. Although numerous critical works have explored various dimensions of Ghosh's writing, there remains a gap in research specifically focused on understanding the phenomenon of cultural shock resulting from diasporic experiences in his narratives. Thus, this study is significant as it contributes new perspectives to literary discourse and seeks to provide fresh insights into the selected texts.

Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* examines India's political and economic development through the intertwined lives of "two families Bengali and English" (Kumaran & Tandon, 2022, p. 24). The novel captures the impact of "time and events that bring people together and hold them apart." An unnamed narrator recounts his own experiences along with those of his uncle, Tridib, who is considered the central figure. Ghosh's work provides a valuable resource for exploring "both the challenges of diaspora as well as the strategies of negotiation" (p. 24). The narrative presents various interconnected characters bound by kinship, family, or friendship. The narrator's grandmother, Tha'mma, plays a significant role, and his parents live alongside Mayadebi and her husband, who reside in England.

The Glass Palace is an ambitious and expansive narrative that combines public and private events to depict the ascent and decline of the British Empire in Southeast Asia, an area of imperial history that has received limited scholarly focus. The novel's structure broadly revolves around two significant, parallel upheavals: the British conquest of Mandalay in 1886, which resulted in the Burmese Royal family's exile and the establishment of British dominion; and the 1947 Japanese invasion of Burma and Malaya, leading to a large-scale displacement of vulnerable Indian migrants (Priya & Sultur, 2005, p. 165-66). The story reflects the degradation of Burma, once considered a "golden land" untouched by poverty and illiteracy, into a state of poverty and political decline. By examining the rise and fall of dynasties, the novel emphasizes the inherent instability and transience of political power (p. 162).

The Hungry Tide chronicles the traumatic impact of partition on the people of the Indian subcontinent, presenting how political upheaval turns individuals into refugees or immigrants, often leaving them with a sense of an "imaginary homeland" (Kundu, 2014, p. 78). The character Piya Roy, who is studying freshwater dolphins, symbolizes this dislocation as a second-generation immigrant, feeling rootless and without a true place of belonging. Ghosh's central focus in *The Hungry Tide* is on the "uprising of Morichjhapi," an "event" directly linked to the partition (p. 78). This division of the Indian subcontinent creates widespread dislocation, pushing refugees to the borders of India and Bangladesh. These refugees experience profound social displacement and political marginalization. When relocated to Dandakaranya, they endure social, political, and cultural alienation, and the pain of rootlessness compels them to remember their homeland.

To investigate the relationship between diaspora and cultural shock, we have selected three of Amitav Ghosh's major works: *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Glass Palace* (2001), and *The Hungry Tide*. We seek to take a close look at these novels in order to reveal the cultural shock and emotional pain

that naturally result from moving away from one's home. People in diaspora are compelled to move between various places and, as such, some of them fail to feel settled and sure about any particular place. This distance makes it challenging to develop a sense of national belonging. People need to share standard cultural, social, religious, and linguistic practices in certain communities or localities. Because of their dispersal, the members of a diaspora cannot work on a feeling of unity or identity in a specific cultural setting. So, it is a very big challenge for creating a nation today because people live away from their home countries. In Ghosh's stories, this problem is very important as it connects with modern global and national politics. This study will examine the ways of presentation and expression of cultural shock and feeling out of place emerging from living in a diaspora through the major characters in the selected texts.

Methodology

This academic and research-based study seeks to contribute to academic conversations on the selected literary works while undertaking in-depth analyses of the three novels under consideration. The work draws on a wide range of secondary literature, including journal articles, books, book reviews, interviews with the author himself, and other reliable print and digital sources. To avoid missing any relevant literature, this research drew on several scholarly databases and platforms, including but not limited to EBSCOhost, Scopus, Google Scholar, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, JSTOR, and ProQuest.

The methodological framework of this research is based on wide library resources and assessment of relevant literature that has been critically analyzed and synthesized into the main discourse. In achieving this, the research aims at developing a multi-faceted understanding of the themes, ideas, and critical positions embodied in the selected works of Amitav Ghosh through a synthesis of these various academic resources. These collected materials form the foundation of the analysis that is presented in the latter parts of this paper, ensuring that the work is concretely grounded within the extant body of scholarly literature.

Diasporic Narratives: Exploring the Complexities of Migration:

Diasporic literature reveals a wide variety of experiences faced by those who move from one country to another. Cultural dislocation or shock is one of the distressing challenges that often typify these experiences and is one that certainly needs exploring in relation to the selected literary texts. As discussed before, migration involves not only a spatial move from one country to another but also a corresponding shift from one cultural space to another. The very core differences between various cultures can cause cultural shock to people who are part of diasporic communities.

The literary contributions of Amitav Ghosh, particularly his postcolonial narratives, provide a very important insight into the complex nature of identity and cultural dislocation faced by the Indian diaspora. According to Bhatt (2023), characters in Ghosh's writings are always negotiating the schism between vestiges of colonialism and their postcolonial identity, facing estrangement in their country of origin and in their adopted new environment. Such disorientation arises not only from being dislocated geographically but also through the psycho-cultural metamorphosis that occurs as one migrates. Anjana and Shakil (2023) go further to explain the representation of Orientalism as portrayed by Ghosh through *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Glass Palace*—how the characters' encounters with colonial history represent broader cultural dislocation experienced in diasporic communities. In a related study, Sathya (2024) turns his investigation to the Ibis Trilogy, which encapsulates the tremendous impact of migration and intercultural interaction process. Ghosh's historical narratives illustrate the manner in which migration, although promoting hybrid identities, frequently results in emotional fragmentation as individuals explore various cultural realms. These literary pieces emphasize that the diasporic experience transcends mere geographical relocation, representing instead a significant transformation of both personal and communal identities. In the final analysis, Ghosh's Indian diaspora offers us an insight into the perpetual negotiation between past and present, self and other, in a world forged through colonial history and global migration.

In the novel *The Shadow Lines*, many characters experience cultural shock while going through their diasporic experiences. Most of them find expression through irrational reactions to strange situations whenever they fail to adjust to a new set of cultural norms. A very good example is the character Tha'mma, whose reaction to cultural behaviors that are different from hers unveils how deep her cultural shock can be. Her vehement disapproval of Ila's Westernized lifestyle serves as a poignant illustration of this dislocation. This a common tendency in Indian subcontinent to condemn girls for their lifestyle (Ahsan, Saiyara & Hasan, 2022). Tha'mma's disdain for Ila's adoption of Western cultural practices is so profound that she refers to her as "a whore," indicating the depth of her traumatic experience stemming from cultural shock.

It's not freedom she wants, said my grandmother, her blood shot eyes glowing in the hollows of her withered face. She wants to be left alone to do what she pleases: that's all that any whore would want. She'll find it easily enough over there; that's what those places have to offer. But that is not what it means to be free. (Ghosh, 1988, p. 89)

Tha'mma's reflective shock regarding Western cultural habits and practices, which starkly contrast with Indian traditions, fuels her intense animosity toward those who express fondness for Western ways. She perceives such individuals as embodiments of Western culture, often at the expense of their native roots. Deeply ingrained in the moral and religious values of Indian society, Tha'mma ardently upholds these ideals, unable to tolerate any deviation from them. For her, India epitomises greatness; she believes that Indian culture encompasses the highest ideals a society can embody. Consequently, she holds a simplistic view that the norms, practices, and values of Indian culture should serve as the global standard.

This naïve perspective leads her to hope that others will embrace Indian cultural traditions to experience an ideal life. She feels a sense of satisfaction when individuals distance themselves from Western culture, which she considers a primary source of evil and discontent. Tha'mma's disdain extends to Maya Debi's husband, Shri Himangshushekhar Datta Chaudhury, whom she views with contempt for his attraction to Western cultural elements.

Having settled in Calcutta for an extended period after the death of her parents, Tha'mma is often haunted by nostalgia for her birthplace. She reminisces about her childhood with a sense of longing, reflecting on the cherished memories of her early years.

In the years that followed, living in Calcutta in a one-room tenement in Bhowanipur, she would often think back on Dhaka- the old house, her parents, Jethamosai, her childhood- all the things people think about when they know that best part of their lives are already over. (Ghosh, 1988, p. 125)

When she goes back to Dhaka, many years later she is quite shocked with the changed and new look of Dhaka. Although she confesses that Dhaka is now a more developed city than before but never fails to show her disappointment about the new look as she cannot find her old Dhaka in its new form. She utters several times that, it is not that Dhaka which she can remember from her past. While she watches beautiful scenery of Ramna Race Course and the Golshan Palace Hotel and so on, she says, "It's all wonderful. But where's Dhaka?" (Ghosh, 1988, p. 206)

Her version of the image of Dhaka exists no more. This incident shocks her very much which is actually the outcome of her diasporic displacement. Everything that are familiar to her are no longer in its existence as they were before. Most of the things are changed and she feels a deep sense of alienation; consequently, she cannot adjust herself with the altered version of Dhaka. This is how cultural shock comes to her as the byproduct of her diasporic life.

Moreover, we also see Robi, Mayadebi's youngest son and also Ila's uncle, is extremely shocked when he sees Ila to practice Western culture in Indian setting. His drastic feedback towards Ila's attempts to enjoy freedom in nightclub through dancing with businessmen and drinking alcohol shows us how much shocked he is with that cultural conflict. The following quote indicates this

notion: "...Girls don't behave like that here... You can do what you like in England, he said. But here there are certain things you cannot do. That's our culture; that's how we live" (Ghosh, 1988, p. 88).

In the Indian context in which the novel is set against, it was traditionally considered unacceptable for a girl to drink alcohol and dance freely with strangers. In contrast, such behaviour was commonplace in Europe. Consequently, Robi disapproves of Ila's eagerness to embrace freedom within the Indian milieu. Ila, having grown up immersed in Western culture, struggles to comprehend the necessity of curtailing her desire for enjoyment. She harbours a strong resentment towards Robi's conservative outlook. Her vehement reaction to Robi's authoritative demeanour accentuates her cultural shock, as she expresses her sentiments to the narrator, who was also present during the exchange: "Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? Do you see? It's only because I want to be free... free of you!... Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you" (Ghosh, 1988, p. 89).

As the study reveals, such conflicting issues significantly contribute to cultural shock. The diaspora fosters multicultural environments, leading to interactions between diverse cultures within the same region. This confluence of cultural traits often results in visible conflict, serving as a source of cultural shock among individuals from various backgrounds. Amitav Ghosh adeptly demonstrates the nature of cultural shock experienced by diasporic individuals through the portrayal of characters such as Tha'mma, Ila, and Robi, each signifying drastic reactions to the new cultural settings of their host lands.

In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh manages to weave a complex narrative of cultural shock the Burmese royal family underwent while being exiled in India. He portrays the enormous sense of disorientation that comes with the immense cultural disparity between the two societies. Although close geographical neighbors, India and Burma depict very distinct social and cultural systems, especially in their outlooks on gender. According to Bhatt (2023), the turmoil the royal family undergoes serves as an example of the bigger problem of postcolonial identity, where vestiges of colonialism clash with the evolving social norms of the host country. In Burma, women are relatively more emancipated, with independence in economic decisions and social roles. In contrast, the deeply entrenched caste system and patriarchal norms of India serve to restrict women's autonomy, creating a stark difference that results in the royal family, particularly the women, contending with their diminished status. Anjana and Shakil (2023) further elucidate that this cultural clash can be examined through the lens of Orientalism, wherein the royal family, regarded as representatives of the "Orient," experiences alienation within a society molded by colonialism and traditional gender norms. Sathya (2024) furthers that Ghosh's narrative also reflects the way cultural exchange in diasporic contexts leads to identity transformation. The royals, being compelled to fit into India's highly rigid social structure, highlight the emotional and psychic pains of treading juggling acts between conflicting cultural identities; therefore, this makes their journey quite poignant, reflecting the larger diasporic experience.

There is no caste system in Burmese society, and they do not follow the religious rituals as they are in India. There are a few traditional practices, although they do not mean that they stick to them. Because of this reason, some people in India think that anyone who goes to Burma might lose their religious identity. They may be financially successful, but people see them as unable to keep their religious rituals and values. These cultural differences are the cause of cultural shock when Indian and Burmese people interact with each other.

This phenomenon is evident in the experiences of the Burmese royal family. Although they face restrictions in Outram House at Ratnagiri during their exile, encounters with Indian culture often leave them shocked. King Thebaw, for instance, is taken aback when he is mistreated by Indian officials under the British government. His astonishment deepens when he discovers the thievish behaviour of these officials, who have pilfered valuable royal stones and utensils. When he inquires about the missing items, the officers respond with arrogance. They sidestep accountability by forming a committee of inquiry that accomplishes little. As the narrative reveals: "He had realized that for all their haughty ways and grand uniforms, they were not above some common thievery" (Ghosh, 2001, p. 50).

King Thebaw struggles to adjust to this new social and cultural environment in India. Alongside the officials, the local populace complicates their lives in Ratnagiri, undermining the royal family's dignity and prestige. The cultural divide between Burma and India aggravates their challenges; the local people do not fully understand Burmese customs and find it difficult to accept the royal family within their community.

Accustomed to receiving respect and honour in the Burmese royal manner—referred to as “Shiku”—the King, Queen, and Princesses are disheartened to find that their newly hired attendants and maidservants fail to observe these customs. This lack of deference comes as a shock, particularly to Queen Supalayut. Despite Dolly's best efforts to instruct the attendants in performing “Shiku” properly, they struggle to grasp this cultural practice. The broader cultural differences create significant obstacles to normalizing their lives in Ratnagiri.

Consequently, the royal family experiences homesickness, often reminiscing about their memorable days in Burma's royal palace, known as ‘The Glass Palace’. In an effort to bridge the cultural gap and ease their living conditions, the princesses attempt to adapt to Indian customs. This is evident in their decision to don Indian attire instead of their traditional Burmese clothing and their efforts to learn and communicate in Hindi, the local language.

In their early years in India, the Princesses usually dressed in Burmese clothes—*aingyis* and *htameins*. But as the years passed their garments changed. One day, no one quite remembered when, they appeared in saris— not expensive or sumptuous saris, but the simple green and red cottons of the district. They began to wear their hair braided and oiled like Ratnagiri schoolgirls; they learned to speak Marathi and Hindustani as fluently as any of the townsfolk— it was only with their parents that they now spoke Burmese. (Ghosh, 2001, p. 77)

In this narrative, we observe a significant cultural gap between Indian and Burmese traditions, which creates a cultural shock for both the Indian and Burmese royal families. This cultural dissonance impedes their ability to accept one another in a friendly manner, thereby hindering the establishment of meaningful connections between them.

Similarly, Rajkumar and Dolly confront the phenomenon of “cultural shock” as they engage with cultures markedly different from their own. Rajkumar, who arrives in Burma as a foreigner, is initially taken aback by the unique cultural practices he encounters. Over time, he gradually adapts to these cultural differences, which alleviates his sense of disorientation and facilitates his successful business endeavors in Burma. His journey toward success is fraught with challenges, yet he persistently strives to assimilate Burmese culture, ultimately embracing it as his own. This commitment is reflected throughout the novel, as he repeatedly expresses his affection and passion for Burma, especially when faced with the prospect of leaving.

In contrast, Dolly experiences a more profound cultural shock. Although she makes concerted efforts to embrace Indian culture and begins to regard India as her home, the memories of Burma and ‘The Glass Palace’ continually conjure feelings of nostalgia and homesickness. She confides in Uma about her thoughts regarding a potential marriage to Rajkumar, stating, “Oh Uma...I couldn't sleep, I kept thinking of home—Mandalay, the palace, the walls of glass” (Ghosh, 2001, p. 161).

Dolly's decision to marry Rajkumar is influenced not only by her affection for him but also by her desire to escape from India. When she perceives an opportunity to address her cultural dislocation through the prospect of marriage, she seizes this chance as a means to alleviate her sense of estrangement. Her diasporic existence has instigated a cultural shock, as her relocation to India exposes her to its distinct cultural practices, which serve as a substance for her feelings of disorientation.

Moreover, Uma Dey's experience as a diaspora member affords her an instance of the cultural shock characteristic of the immigrant experience. Having spent the first half of her life in India, she is deeply grounded in its culture. However, upon the death of her husband, her move to

Burma places her into a foreign culture for the very first time. The cultural trends and practices encountered in Burma initially elicit a sense of surprise for her, revealing a marked divergence from her Indian upbringing. Her astonishment further escalates during later visits to London and America, where she remains for almost two decades.

Despite her efforts to adjust to her new circumstances and her active engagement with her community through political activism, Uma ultimately chooses to move back to Calcutta, where she spends her remaining years until her death. Though she tries to adapt to those new social and cultural environments through a series of professional and political involvement, she increasingly feels a strong sense of homesickness, which does not let her ignore the major differences between her Indian identity and the foreign cultures she witnesses. This psychological unease is an evident example of the cultural shock that occurs within her mind while facing the complexities of life in a foreign country.

On her way back to Calcutta, Uma stops in Malaya to visit "Morningside," the settlement established by Matthew, Elisa, and Saya John near their rubber-planting venture. This stop allows her the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and acquaintances, like Dolly and the family of Saya John. When she finally reaches Rangoon, after a long time away, she is deeply disturbed by the extent of the changes that have taken place in the city—changes that have almost rendered it unrecognizable to her.

Cultural Shock and Diasporic Displacement:

Living a diasporic life often means that people experience strong cultural shocks. A prolonged separation from one's homeland may make the familiar appear as the strange; it may make the previously familiar places and loved areas seem foreign and interesting. Other than the apparent changes in the social situation, changes also take place within the same community over time. Consequently, when one returns to one's country of origin after a long time, one is likely to find the physical environment and cultural norms and practices greatly changed, a fact that might engender deep cultural disorientation. This is particularly true for Uma, whose long absence from the land of her birth has led to a progressive loss of touch with its culture, with the result being that the culture is now strange to her.

In addition, other important characters in this novel also undergo diasporic experiences that manifest as cultural disorientation. Characters like Saya John, Matthew, Elisa, Dinu, Manju, Jaya, Arjun, Hardy, and Kishan Singh all face the dilemma of diasporic dislocation, that exposes them to different cultural settings at various points in time, resulting in identity confusion and the need for adjustment.

In the novel by Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, cultural shock is acutely reflected upon several characters. For instance, Piya feels astonished by the lifestyle, visions, and culture of the Sundarbans tide islands that in significant aspects deviate from her socialization in the United States. Indeed, having been an experienced researcher who has studied in various places and cultures, the realities she encounters in Sundarban surpass both her expectations and imagination. Piya is particularly struck by the tenacity and candor of the native people, working assiduously for survival.

Her stereotypes about poor people—they are usually assumed to be mentally dull and content with their meager earnings—are shattered by her experiences with characters like Fakir. In complete contrast to her mental images, the naivety and cooperation shown by Fakir bring to the forefront the greed and evil shown by characters like the guard and the launch owner, known as Mej-da. This juxtaposition creates the need for Piya to reevaluate her views about poverty and people's behavior, further displacing her culturally.

In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, the character Piya experiences a significant cultural shock, even though she possesses an extensive background in various international environments. As an experienced traveler with prior research experience in multiple nations, Piya confronts a marked disparity between her perspective and the characteristics of individuals in her surroundings, including Fakir and the guards. While Fakir embodies kindness, humility, and helpfulness, Piya is disturbed by

the violence and greed displayed by the guards and Mejdā, whom she hires to find river dolphins. This disconnect strikes at a deep level, pointing out a basic clash of values and personalities despite a shared culture. According to Bhatt (2023), Ghosh's examination of cultural identity frequently uncovers the conflict encountered by individuals who, despite sharing comparable backgrounds, are influenced by significantly divergent personal experiences and values. Piya's unease regarding the guards' conduct illustrates the emotional disconnection that may occur when an individual's anticipations of human behavior are disrupted. Anjana and Shakil (2023) moreover point out that Ghosh uses such examples to examine the conflicts within postcolonial societies, where individual and group identities may clash due to historical legacies linked to inequality. Sathya (2024) suggests that Ghosh's portrayal of characters like Piya shows the diasporic experience, where an individual has to negotiate personal and cultural differences, even within the same cultural system.

Still, the incident seriously undermines her belief in her ability for self-defense, almost leading to a deadly outcome from which Fakir rescues her. The harmful local custom of bullying foreigners and extorting money in the Tide Country is a strong intercultural shock for Piya. After this incident, she feels increasingly vulnerable without Fakir around her. Her entire view of the country is transformed within a single night, and she becomes permanently incredulous and skeptical toward the people around her. In effect, as a result of this jarring experience, Fakir becomes the only person whom she can totally trust, whereas the rest of the people around the place are still viewed as objects of suspicion and distrust.

Moreover, Piya's identity as a foreigner—particularly as an American—also contributes to her cultural shock. During her visit to India, she often finds herself treated differently due to her American dress and mannerisms, which draw extra attention and curiosity from locals. Her experience at the railway station in Canning exemplifies this reality. When she meets Kanai in a railway compartment, his remark about her being American highlights the differential treatment that foreigners receive in India. After Piya accidentally spills tea on his papers, Kanai responds, “Do I really have a choice? Does anyone have a choice when they are dealing with Americans these days?” (Ghosh, 2005, p. 10).

As the most powerful nation in the contemporary world, the United States confers upon its citizens a certain privilege and authority that is often recognized globally. Particularly in developing countries, American citizens or those from other Western nations are frequently viewed as superior, engendering a sense of fascination among locals. In many regions, the presence of an American is seen as an opportunity for close observation, attracting public attention toward their distinctive appearance and attire. This cultural element highlights the cultural and racial disparities that inform mutual surprise and discomfort. While locals may marvel at the foreigner's attire and demeanour, the foreigner, in turn, grapples with the unexpected scrutiny and attention, leading to a sense of unease. Piya experiences a similar phenomenon, feeling both astonished and unsettled by the reactions of those around her. It is this diasporic displacement that facilitates their encounters and subsequently catalyses cultural shock between them.

Refugees from Bangladesh experience significant cultural shock when they are relocated to resettlement camps in central India. Originating from the Khulna district, a coastal region, they confront a starkly different natural and cultural environment in central India. Although the facilities are designated as resettlement camps, they often resemble prisons, confining individuals with strict security measures and limited freedom. The dire conditions within these camps contribute to the profound cultural shock experienced by the refugees.

Once we lived in Bangladesh, in Khulna jila [one of the divisions and districts in Bangladesh]: we're tide country people, from the Sundarbans' edge. When the war broke out, our village was burned to Ash; we crossed the border, there was nowhere else to go. We were met by the police and taken away; in buses they drove us, to a settlement camp. We'd never seen such a place, such a dry emptiness; the earth was so red it seemed to be stained with blood. For those who lived there, that dust was as good as gold, they loved it just as we love our

tide country mud. But no matter how we tried, we couldn't settle there: rivers run in our heads, the tides were in our blood. (Ghosh, 2005, pp.164-65)

Broadly speaking, refugees across diverse cultural and geographical contexts find themselves in uncomfortable situations. They struggle to identify any similarities between their past lives and their current realities, which results in significant cultural shock. The oppressive conditions within resettlement camps are intolerable, prompting them to seek a place where they might experience a semblance of peace and contentment. Upon hearing news of the island of Sundarbans and Morichjhapi, they become eager to settle there, even in defiance of government orders to return to the camps. The geographical and cultural similarities between Morichjhapi and their previous homes provide a sense of comfort and belonging, compelling them to take great risks in pursuit of a new life. It can be asserted that this cultural shock is the primary reason they cannot find contentment in the resettlement camps of central India, driving them to seek refuge in Morichjhapi.

Similarly, when examining the characters Nirmal and Nilima, we observe that their diasporic lives on the island of Lusibari culminate in cultural shock, as the culture of Lusibari starkly contrasts with that of Calcutta. Accustomed to the lifestyle and cultural practices of Calcutta, where the comforts of middle-class and upper-middle-class living are readily available, they are confronted with the harsh realities of life in Lusibari, where even basic survival becomes a struggle. Consequently, as they attempt to settle in Lusibari, they are forced to sacrifice many of the comforts and privileges they enjoyed in Calcutta. Adaptation to a new lifestyle and integration into the unfamiliar social and cultural order become essential for their survival. The natural environment, means of livelihood, belief systems, and religious and linguistic practices in the Tide Country differ significantly from urban life. These cultural disparities give rise to cultural shock among individuals like Nirmal and Nilima, who endeavour to leave their urban lives behind in search of a new beginning.

Piya's parents, who migrate to America, also encounter profound cultural shock in their diasporic experiences. American culture is markedly different from Indian culture, and migrants from the Indian subcontinent often find the lifestyle and cultural practices in America surprising or even shocking. What is considered normal in American culture can appear bewildering to many Indians. With Piya's father, we come across a man controlling his emotions and one who does not believe in the idea of returning back to India. He believes that nostalgia worsens the situation of Indian migrants to the United States. He is determined to succeed in American cultural society wherein he is willing to sacrifice much that may be detrimental to his family relationships. Many Indian immigrants experience homesickness and a longing for the comforts of their homeland, making it particularly challenging to adapt to the fast-paced, materialistic American lifestyle driven by a relentless pursuit of success. Piya's mother frequently reminisces about India, feeling nostalgic for the peaceful and joyful moments of her childhood.

Another important element of the cultural shock Indian immigrants experience in the United States is language problems. Learning the English language, with its native American accent, presents a great challenge to many Indian immigrants. Piya's father finds it hard to communicate properly, which brings forth the aspect of language barriers that could intensify feelings of alienation. With these types of experiences of cultural displacement, Amitav Ghosh is adeptly able to address the multi-dimensional challenges faced by those undergoing diasporic displacement in his works of fiction. The lives of Piya, Nirmal, and Nilima testify to the psychological and emotional struggles involved in adapting to new cultures and refer to questions of identity, belonging, and the all-consuming quest for comfort in an alien environment. Ghosh's nostalgia, pitted against the reality of present situations, is a most engaging look into the complexities underpinning the migrant experience and thereby serves to deepen our understanding of the mechanism of cultural shock for those traversing vastly different environs.

Conclusion

Diasporic experiences often cause cultural shock to individuals who find it very difficult to adjust to new or cross-cultural environments. Most of the characters in the three selected novels go through severe cultural shock when they are exposed to the vast differences between their new cultural situations and their original cultures. Characters such as Tha'mma, Ila, the king, Saya John, Matthew, Elisa, Dinu, Manju, and Piya experience intense emotions of alienation as they face their new and unknown surroundings. The new found cultural society brings along different languages to communicate with, strange ways of dressing, and different perceptions of socializing and adapting to.

Besides the visible forms of cultural shock, the protagonists face another serious challenge in the form of a persistent feeling of rootlessness and dislocation. This chronic feeling of dislocation further aggravates their plight, thwarting their attempts to develop a sense of identity and belonging in their new environment. The selected texts depict the powerful emotional impact of transnational dislocation and a sense of rootlessness on individuals, showing highly complex process of managing multiple identities in an ever-changing environment. Using these accounts, the authors shed light on the deeper implications of diasporic dislocation that implore readers to reflect on the emotional and psychological battles that are faced in the process of searching for a sense of belonging in new environments.

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