

Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye*: The Natural Supernatural Reinvented

Ananya Dutta Gupta

Abstract

Ghost-Eye, Amitav Ghosh's latest novel, is built upon the author's anxious determination to make many worlds and world-views meet. This essay argues, however, that the novel remains caught in the contradictions that it seeks to resolve. As ambitiously as in *Gun Island*, Ghosh sets out to reconcile the fault lines in the global human psyche that European colonial extractivism and the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment prised open. Be it the alienation of the human from the nonhuman, of the global South from the global North, be it the separation of the civilisational from the planetary, or the subordination of premodern, non-Eurocentric ways of knowing and being in time, space and consciousness, the casualties have been many and momentous.

The story in *Ghost-Eye* interweaves contemporary western scientific research into the phenomenon of past lives with the rich tradition of occult stories in twentieth-century Bengali literature and culture. The result is a fictional foray into the urban uncanny, where Calcutta/Kolkata becomes the site of a fusion of the natural and the occult, the homely and the marvellous. This essay however detects certain latent tensions between the narrative language and the authorial intent, between the author's own "past" yet deeply entrenched academic training and his self-proselytisation to a new planetary ethos and ethic of literary creation. The novel is a very original fable of the author re-writing himself as the Wordsworthian man speaking to men, or an evangelical Ancient Mariner relentlessly warning man against breaking the charmed circle of planetary harmony. As a sophisticated novel of ideas or a profoundly moving story of human relationships, its success is less unqualified.

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