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## Calcutta Under the Skin: Image, Space, and Tension in Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*

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### Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) is at once a postcolonial thriller, a science fiction novel, and a layered meditation on urban space. Set across temporal registers - Victorian Calcutta, late twentieth-century New York, and a speculative near-future - the novel deploys the city of Calcutta not merely as setting but as a living epistemological field, dense with historical memory, subaltern resistance, colonial anxiety, and uncanny energy. This article undertakes a multi-theoretical analysis of the image and tension of Calcutta as constructed in the novel. Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity and the third space, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern studies, Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, Fredric Jameson's political unconscious, and elements of New Historicism and Gothic literary theory, the article argues that Ghosh's Calcutta functions as a palimpsest of power - a city whose surfaces conceal subterranean circuits of knowledge, resistance, and transformation. The novel systematically deconstructs the colonial production of scientific truth by relocating epistemic agency in the margins of the urban underclass, thus revealing the city as a site of perpetual ideological and ontological tension.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Urbanism, Heterotopia, Subaltern, Spatial Theory, Gothic, Palimpsest, Hybridity, Science Fiction.

### 1. Introduction: The City as Critical Category

Cities in postcolonial fiction are never merely geographical coordinates. They are archives of power, repositories of memory, and theatres of ideological contest. In the tradition of urban fiction - from Dickens's London to Zola's Paris to Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo - the metropolis functions as both subject and structural force. Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery* (1995) belongs to this tradition while simultaneously exceeding it. Calcutta in this novel is not the familiar colonial city of Raj nostalgia, nor the postcolonial city of poverty and resilience popularised in global media representations. It is something more unsettling: a city that thinks, plots, and resists - a city that possesses, in the most literal sense of the word, an agenda of its own.

The novel's central conceit - that Ronald Ross's 1898 discovery of the malaria parasite's life cycle in the body of the Anopheles mosquito was in fact orchestrated by an invisible subaltern network working through the margins of colonial Calcutta - is not merely a clever inversion of historical fact. It is a systematic rethinking of where knowledge resides, who produces it, and how urban space mediates between official history and its suppressed counter-narratives. The tension between these two epistemic orders - colonial science and subaltern counter-science - is inscribed upon the body of the city itself.

This article reads Calcutta in *The Calcutta Chromosome* through multiple theoretical frameworks: Lefebvrian spatial theory, Foucauldian heterotopia, Bhabha's postcolonial hybridity, Spivak's subaltern critique, Freudian uncanny, Jamesonian political unconscious, and the conventions of the Gothic. By bringing these frameworks into dialogue with one another and with the novel's text, it argues that Ghosh constructs Calcutta as a site of productive tension - a city whose very geography enacts the struggle between hegemonic knowledge and subaltern resistance.

## 2. The Production of Colonial Space: Lefebvre and the Urban Calcutta

Henri Lefebvre's foundational argument in *The Production of Space* (1974) is that space is not a neutral container but is socially produced - the outcome of material practices, representations, and lived experience. He distinguishes between *conceived space* (representations of space by planners, cartographers, and institutions), *perceived space* (the spatial practices of everyday life), and *lived space* (the spaces of representation - imaginative, symbolic, inhabited by the dominated). In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, these three modalities of space are in constant, irresolvable conflict.

Conceived space in the novel belongs to the colonial administrative apparatus. The Calcutta of Ronald Ross - the British military physician stationed at the Secunderabad Barracks but frequently visiting Calcutta - is a city rendered through the grid of imperial taxonomy. It is a city of laboratories, dissecting rooms, missionary compounds, and official residences. Ross's Calcutta is conceived through the logic of sanitary reform and biological surveillance; the city's bodies - human and mosquito alike - are objects of scientific management. The famous Cunningham correspondence, which Ghosh fictionalizes with meticulous historical texture, represents the effort to impose epistemological order on a notoriously disordered urban environment.

Against this conceived space, Ghosh erects a *lived space* that belongs to Mangala, Laakhan, and the unnamed subalterns who inhabit the city's underside. This subaltern Calcutta is not the Calcutta of Raj guidebooks or colonial dispatches. It is a city of tank, ponds and temple courtyards, of the Sealdah railway terminus and anonymous slum lanes, of sites that carry no official cartographic significance, but that pulse with alternative meaning. The subalterns do not contest the official map; they inhabit a spatial register that exists beneath its notice. As Lefebvre argues, lived space is always in excess of conceived space - it cannot be fully captured by institutional representation. Ghosh's fiction enacts precisely this excess.

The tension between these spatial registers is dramatized through the novel's treatment of disease. Malaria is not simply a biological phenomenon in Ghosh's text; it is a spatial phenomenon. The mosquito crosses the boundaries that the colonial city tries to enforce - between European and Indian quarters, between the laboratory and the street, between the body of the scientist and the body of the coolie. The parasite that Ross believes he is studying is, in the novel's logic, itself an instrument of Mangala's subaltern project, circulating through the city's spatial networks in ways that colonial mapping cannot anticipate or prevent.

Lefebvre's concept of *rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (1992) - the study of the rhythms, cycles, and temporal textures of urban life - is equally applicable here. The Calcutta, that Antar accesses through his computer terminal AIDS A in the novel's framing narrative, is a city recovered through archival fragments, timestamps, and institutional records. But the Calcutta that the subaltern network inhabits operates on entirely different rhythms: the rhythms of the Indian religious calendar, of epidemic seasonality, of the slow time of rumour and oral transmission. The clash of these rhythms constitutes one of the novel's deepest formal tensions.

### 3. Heterotopia and the Counter-Site: Foucault's Spatial Other

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia - spaces that are simultaneously real and other, that juxtapose several spaces in a single real place, and that exist in a relation of opposition to all other spaces - is powerfully illuminating when applied to Ghosh's Calcutta. In his lecture "Of Other Spaces" (originally as *Des espaces autres* in French in 1967), Foucault distinguishes between utopias (unreal, idealized spaces) and heterotopias (real but counter-sites that exist outside and in tension with normative social space). He offers as examples cemeteries, prisons, museums, brothels, and ships.

The Calcutta of *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a city dense with heterotopic sites. The railway terminus at Sealdah functions as a classic Foucauldian heterotopia - a place of transition and convergence, where bodies from across the subcontinent pour into the city, carrying information, disease, and desire. It is here that Murugan tracks down the elusive figure of Laakhan, and here that the subaltern network's invisible communications circulate. The terminus is neither origin nor destination; it is pure transition, a space that exists in a relation of opposition to the ordered city around it.

The tank ponds of Calcutta - those ancient urban water bodies around which Hindu ritual life has organized itself for centuries - represent another heterotopic formation. They are simultaneously sacred sites (spaces of religious significance), historical sediment (remnants of a pre-colonial urban geography), and biological habitats (breeding grounds for the *Anopheles* mosquito). In the colonial conceived space, the tanks are sites of unsanitary risk, to be drained and managed. In Mangala's lived space, they are sites of deliberate cultivation - places where the life cycles of mosquito, parasite, and human body intersect in a managed ecology of subaltern knowledge.

Perhaps the most elaborately heterotopic site in the novel is the ruined building - the old Renupur estate - where the subaltern network conducts its experiments in chromosomal transfer and soul transmission. This site exists outside official city mapping; it is a space of temporal layering (old aristocratic architecture, colonial-era rubble, contemporary squatter occupation) and of impossible juxtaposition (science and mysticism, the biological and the spiritual, the living and the dead). It functions, in Foucault's terms, as a heterotopia of deviation - a space where bodies and identities deviate from the social norm in ways that the dominant order cannot assimilate.

The novel's deployment of heterotopic space is not merely descriptive; it is epistemological. Ghosh suggests that alternative knowledge - knowledge that challenges colonial and positivist orthodoxy - can only be produced and transmitted in spaces that exist outside and against the normative order. The heterotopia, in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, is not just a spatial form but a cognitive one: a space of thinking otherwise.

### 4. The Third Space and Hybridity: Bhabha's Postcolonial Calcutta

Homi Bhabha's theorization of colonial discourse in *The Location of Culture* (1994) offers another productive lens for reading Ghosh's *Calcutta*. Bhabha's concept of the *third space* - the interstitial space of negotiation between colonial authority and subaltern resistance, where both are transformed - describes precisely the epistemic terrain that *The Calcutta Chromosome* inhabits. Colonial knowledge and subaltern counter-knowledge do not meet in a simple binary opposition; they produce, in their encounter, a third form of knowledge that belongs fully to neither.

The figure of Mangala is the key embodiment of Bhabha's third space in the novel. She is not simply an opponent of colonial science; she works through and within it, using Ross as an instrument of her own project. Her knowledge is hybrid - it draws upon ancient Indian medical traditions (Ayurveda, the concept of *jīva* or life-soul), upon the material practices of colonial laboratory science, and upon a speculative biology that the novel suggests is more sophisticated than anything Ross or his contemporaries could produce. This hybridity is not a compromise or a contamination; it is a form of epistemic power that operates precisely through its refusal of purity.

Bhabha's concept of *mimicry* - the way colonial subjects imitate the colonizer in ways that subtly undermine colonial authority - is also relevant to the subaltern characters in the novel. Laakhan and the other members of Mangala's network mimic the postures of colonial subservience - Laakhan is literally Ross's laboratory assistant - while carrying out an entirely different agenda beneath this surface of compliance. This mimicry is not false consciousness or mere survival strategy; it is, in Bhabha's terms, a form of camouflage that turns colonial surveillance against itself. The colonizer watches the subaltern closely and sees nothing of what is actually happening; the subaltern's visibility is itself a form of concealment.

Bhabha's notion of the *uncanny* as a feature of colonial discourse - the way the colonized other returns to haunt the colonizer with an image that is familiar yet terrifying - connects to the Gothic dimension of Ghosh's *Calcutta*, which will be explored in greater detail below. For the moment, it is enough to note that Ghosh's city is a space of colonial unease - a city that refuses to stay within the representations that colonial power imposes upon it, that continually exceeds and disrupts these representations, and that confronts the colonizer with the inadequacy of his knowledge.

The multi-temporal structure of the novel - with its three narrative strands set in different historical periods - formally enacts Bhabha's third space. The novel refuses the linear temporality of colonial historiography (progress, discovery, civilizational advance) and instead produces a temporal hybridity in which past and present coexist, interfere with one another, and produce meanings that neither could generate alone. *Calcutta* is the site where this temporal hybridization is most fully felt: it is a city in which the colonial past is not past, in which the bodies and sites of 1898 continue to exert pressure on the present.

## 5. Can the Subaltern Speak? Spivak and the Silence of Mangala

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (published in 1988 in the edited volume, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg) poses a challenge that Ghosh's novel both engages and transforms. Spivak argues that the subaltern - particularly the subaltern woman - cannot speak within the epistemic frameworks of colonial and postcolonial discourse; to speak is to be translated into a discourse that distorts or erases the specificity of subaltern experience. The subaltern who enters the representational field of dominant discourse necessarily loses her subalternity.

Mangala in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a figure who enacts and contests this predicament simultaneously. She is, in one sense, a figure of radical silence: she communicates through intermediaries, through ellipsis, through material traces rather than direct speech. She never appears directly in the narrative; she is known only through the accounts of others - Ross's letters, Murugan's reconstructions, Antar's archival searches. This formal strategy of mediated representation is Ghosh's acknowledgment of Spivak's argument: the subaltern woman cannot be directly represented in the novel's discourse without being co-opted by that discourse.

And yet Mangala is also, paradoxically, the most powerful agent in the novel. Her silence is not the silence of exclusion but the silence of strategy - the deliberate withholding of speech from a discourse that would misrepresent it. She speaks, but she speaks in codes, in bodies, in chromosomal transfers, in the patterns of epidemic spread. Her language is the city itself: Calcutta is her text, written in a script that colonial science cannot read.

Spivak's critique of Western feminism and its tendency to speak for the subaltern woman is also relevant here. The novel's three primary narrators - Antar, Murugan, and the implied narrative consciousness - are all male, and none of them fully comprehends Mangala's project. Their attempts to reconstruct her story are always partial, always mediated by their own epistemological limitations. Ghosh thus builds into the novel's formal structure an acknowledgment of the limits of representation - an awareness that any attempt to tell Mangala's story from outside her own epistemic framework will necessarily distort it.

The city of Calcutta participates in this representational problematic. The Calcutta that official discourse knows - the city of colonial records, scientific papers, administrative reports - is not the Calcutta that Mangala inhabits and transforms. The subaltern city is, in Spivak's terms, a city that cannot speak within the terms of official history, but that nonetheless exists, acts, and produces effects. Ghosh's novel gives formal shape to this paradox: it makes the subaltern city visible without claiming fully to represent it.

## 6. The Uncanny City: Freud, the Gothic, and Urban Anxiety

In his 1919 essay "The Uncanny" (*Das Unheimliche*), Sigmund Freud identifies the uncanny as that class of the frightening that leads back to something known and familiar, something that has become strange through repression. The uncanny arises when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, when something that should have remained hidden returns to visibility. Freud's concept is peculiarly apt for the Gothic dimension of Ghosh's Calcutta - a city that returns, with horrifying insistence, to the repressed traumas of colonial history.

The uncanny in *The Calcutta Chromosome* operates at multiple levels. At the level of character, the repeated appearances of figures who seem to have survived across temporal registers - Mangala and her companions reappearing in different guises across decades - constitute a form of uncanny repetition that unsettles the novel's realist surface. These figures are familiar yet strange, recognizable yet impossible, and their recurrence has the quality of the compulsion to repeat that Freud identifies as a primary source of the uncanny.

At the level of urban space, Calcutta itself is an uncanny city. Its streets and buildings carry the traces of colonial habitation in ways that are simultaneously visible and invisible, acknowledged and denied. The Calcutta that Ross inhabits in 1898 is recognizably continuous with the Calcutta of the 1990s - the same streets, the same tank ponds, many of the same buildings - yet utterly transformed by the passage of historical time and political change. This continuity-in-transformation is classically uncanny: the city is both heimlich (familiar,

domestic) and unheimlich (strange, threatening).

The Gothic literary tradition, which foregrounds ruins, haunting, secrecy, and the return of the repressed, provides the generic framework through which Ghosh channels these uncanny energies. *The Calcutta Chromosome* draws on Gothic conventions - the ruined estate, the mysterious disease, the hidden conspiracy, the body used as site of secret inscription - to produce a mode of urban fiction that is simultaneously realist and supernatural, historical and speculative. Gothic space, as David Punter in his seminal book, *The Literature of Terror* (1980) and others have noted, is always the space of repressed history: the castle is the ruin of feudalism, the manor house the ruin of aristocratic power. In Ghosh's novel, colonial Calcutta is itself the Gothic ruin - a space in which the violence and contradiction of imperial rule continue to haunt the present.

The mosquito, that most Gothic of biological agents in the novel, serves as the vector of this uncanny haunting. It crosses all boundaries - skin, class, race, time - carrying within its body the traces of Mangala's counter-scientific project. The *Anopheles* mosquito is, in the novel's symbolic economy, the Gothic double of colonial science: it does the work of scientific transformation (chromosomal transfer, soul transmission) under cover of the very disease that colonial science is trying to eradicate. The parasite within the mosquito is the repressed other of the scientific enterprise - the knowledge that colonial science cannot acknowledge without destroying its own foundations.

## 7. The Political Unconscious: Jameson and the Novel's Ideological Horizon

Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981) argues that literary texts are not simply reflections of social reality but symbolic resolutions of real social contradictions - that the "political unconscious" of any narrative consists in the way it manages and negotiates the ideological tensions that its historical moment cannot resolve in any other way. Applied to *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Jameson's framework reveals the ideological work that the novel's generic form performs.

The novel deploys the conventions of the thriller and the detective story - genres organized around the recovery of hidden knowledge and the resolution of mystery - in the service of a narrative that systematically refuses resolution. Murugan's investigation, Antar's archival searches, and the novel's overall structure all promise the revelation of a secret that will explain the Calcutta Chromosome. But this revelation never fully arrives; the secret at the centre of the narrative remains opaque, accessible only in fragments and approximations. The thriller's promise of epistemological closure is perpetually deferred.

Jameson would read this formal strategy as a symptom of the contradictions that the novel is managing: the contradiction between colonial science's claim to universal knowledge and the actual partiality of its knowledge; the contradiction between the postcolonial nation's claim to modernity and the persistence of pre-modern, subaltern epistemic traditions; the contradiction between the novel's own desire to represent Mangala's project and its awareness (following Spivak) that such representation is impossible. The detective genre's promise of knowledge is the ideological form through which these irresolvable contradictions are given temporary, provisional shape.

The novel's science fiction dimension performs a related ideological function. Science fiction, as Jameson argues in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), does not predict the future but estranges the present - it makes the ideological assumptions of the present visible by projecting them onto an imagined future or alternate reality. The near-future framing of Antar's

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narrative strand - a world of global surveillance databases, AI-mediated research, and rapid genomic science - estranges the present in precisely this way. It reveals the continuities between colonial biopower and contemporary biotechnological capitalism: both involve the extraction of biological information from bodies (particularly non-European bodies), the centralization of this information in institutional databases, and the use of this information to manage and transform human life.

The city of Calcutta, in this Jamesonian reading, is the site where these ideological contradictions are concentrated and made visible. It is the city where colonial extraction, subaltern resistance, postcolonial modernity, and global capitalism intersect and collide. Its tensions are not incidental to the novel's narrative but constitutive of it - without Calcutta's particular historical and spatial character, the contradictions that the novel manages could not be given the form they take.

### 8. New Historicism and the Archive: The City as Text

New Historicism, as developed by Stephen Greenblatt in his phenomenal book, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) and others, insists on reading literary texts in close relation to the non-literary documents of their historical moment - the diplomatic dispatches, medical reports, administrative records, and private letters that constitute the archive of a period. It attends particularly to the way power operates through cultural forms, and to the way texts participate in the circulation of social energy. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is, among other things, a meditation on the archive and on the relationship between the historical record and historical truth.

Ghosh is meticulous in his incorporation of actual historical materials - the correspondence between Ronald Ross and Patrick Manson, the records of the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine, the annals of colonial medical administration. But he uses these materials not to confirm the official historical record but to expose its gaps, silences, and ideological investments. The historical Calcutta of 1898 is recovered through its archive, but the novel constantly draws attention to what the archive excludes: the lives of Indian laboratory assistants, the oral traditions that circulated through working-class Calcutta, the non-European medical knowledge that colonial science appropriated without acknowledgment.

This archival critique is itself a New Historicist move: Greenblatt and his colleagues argued that canonical texts could only be fully understood in relation to the "subordinated knowledges" that the dominant culture suppressed or marginalized. Ghosh extends this argument to the level of the city: Calcutta's official history - the history of colonial administration, scientific achievement, and urban management - can only be fully understood in relation to the subaltern history that it suppresses. The city is a text, and like all texts it is constituted as much by what it excludes as by what it includes.

The character of Murugan - the obsessive researcher who devotes his career to reconstructing Mangala's hidden role in the malaria discovery - embodies the New Historicist method at its most extreme. He reads against the grain of the official archive, tracking down marginal figures, anomalous data points, and inexplicable coincidences that the official narrative dismisses or overlooks. His methodology is, in essence, that of the New Historicist critic: recovering the social energy suppressed by canonical (in this case, scientific-historical) texts.

### 9. Narrative Theory and the Palimpsestic City

The formal structure of *The Calcutta Chromosome* - with its multiple temporal layers, its parallel narrative strands, and its refusal of linear chronology - can be productively analyzed through the lens of narrative theory, particularly Gérard Genette's concepts of anachrony (temporal displacement in narrative) and metalepsis (the transgression of narrative levels). Ghosh's Calcutta is a palimpsestic city - one in which different historical layers coexist, interfere with one another, and create a text that can never be read as simple or singular.

Genette's concept of anachrony in his phenomenal work, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1972) - the various ways in which narrative time can deviate from story time - describes the temporal logic of Ghosh's novel with precision. The novel moves freely between 1995 New York (Antar's narrative), 1995 Calcutta (Murugan's narrative), and 1898 Calcutta (the historical reconstruction), creating a temporal structure in which effect precedes cause, future and past illuminate one another, and the boundaries between historical periods become permeable. This temporal palimpsest corresponds to the spatial palimpsest of the city: just as the 1898 city underlies the 1995 city without being fully superseded by it, so the historical narrative underlies the contemporary narrative without being reducible to background or context.

The concept of metalepsis - the passage between different levels of narrative - is particularly relevant to the novel's treatment of Mangala's project. The subaltern counter-science, which works through the mechanisms of the realist narrative (colonial administration, laboratory science, epidemiology) to produce effects that exceed that narrative's explanatory framework, performs a kind of diegetic metalepsis: it operates on a different level of narrative reality from the colonial story in which it is embedded, and its effects register as ruptures in the realist surface. The moments when the novel's realism breaks down - when characters seem to recognize one another across temporal registers, when the mosquito's movements seem guided by something other than biology - are moments of metaleptic transgression that point toward Mangala's counter-narrative.

## 10. Image and Tension: Calcutta as Epistemological Battleground

Having surveyed the theoretical frameworks through which Ghosh's Calcutta can be productively read, it is now possible to synthesize these perspectives into a more comprehensive account of the city's image and tension in the novel.

The image of Calcutta in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is fundamentally double. On one surface, it is the image familiar from colonial and postcolonial discourse: the city of the Black Hole, of the Bengal Famine, of the Raj's administrative anxiety; the city of disease, of poverty, of unmanageable human density. This is the Calcutta of Ross's letters, of official medical reports, of the colonial imagination. It is a city that the imperial order can name and map, can subject to sanitary reform and biological survey, can represent in the confident language of positivist science.

But beneath this official image - under the skin of colonial representation - is another Calcutta. This is a city of extraordinary subaltern sophistication: a city where Mangala and her network have developed, over generations, a knowledge of the human body and its parasitic relations that far exceeds anything colonial science has achieved. It is a city whose most apparently marginal spaces - tank ponds, ruined estates, railway termini, roadside shrines - are nodes in a counter-scientific network of immense complexity. It is a city that has, in the novel's speculative logic, solved the problem of consciousness and personal continuity in a way that Western biomedicine, with its individualist assumptions, cannot even conceive.

The tension of Calcutta in the novel is the tension between these two images - or rather, between the epistemological orders that produce them. This is not simply a tension between colonizer and colonized, or between modernity and tradition, or between science and religion. It is more fundamental than any of these dichotomies: it is a tension between two entirely different conceptions of what knowledge is, where it resides, who can produce it, and what it is for.

Colonial science - as represented by Ross, by Cunningham, by the apparatus of the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine - conceives of knowledge as the property of named, credentialed individuals (almost always European, almost always male) working within institutional frameworks. Knowledge is produced in the laboratory, verified through peer review, and published in journals that circulate among a transnational community of credentialed experts. The body of the Indian laboratory assistant is instrumental to this knowledge production - providing labour, providing mosquitoes, providing blood - but has no claim to epistemic status.

Mangala's counter-science operates on entirely different epistemological premises. Knowledge, in her framework, is not individual property but collective practice - accumulated, refined, and transmitted across generations through networks that have no institutional existence. It is not verified through peer review but through the repeated enactment of its techniques on the bodies of initiates. And it is transmitted not through publication but through the biological medium of the mosquito's bite, through the chromosomal inscription that the novel calls "the Calcutta chromosome." Knowledge, in this framework, is literally under the skin - encoded in the body rather than recorded in the text.

The tension between these two epistemological orders is also a tension between two conceptions of the self. Colonial science's model of knowledge production requires a stable, bounded individual self - the scientist whose authority derives from his unique insight, whose discoveries bear his name, whose credit cannot be shared or transferred. Mangala's counter-science is premised on the fluidity and transferability of self - on the possibility of transmitting consciousness across bodies, of surviving the death of any individual instantiation, of maintaining continuity through collective rather than individual existence. The Calcutta chromosome is the biological mechanism through which this alternative selfhood is enacted: it is the material substrate of a way of being in the world that colonial science must, on pain of self-destruction, declare impossible.

## 11. Conclusion: The City That Resists Reading

*The Calcutta Chromosome* ends, famously and frustratingly, without resolution. Antar is translated into Mangala's network, his identity apparently transformed or supplemented by the chromosomal technology that the novel has been tracking across temporal registers. But the meaning of this translation - whether it represents liberation, co-optation, or something for which existing vocabularies are inadequate - is left radically open. The city of Calcutta, too, remains open: neither fully known nor fully resistant to knowing, but perpetually in the process of exceeding the representations that are brought to bear upon it.

This openness is not a failure of the novel but its deepest achievement. By refusing to resolve the tension between its competing epistemological orders, between its multiple theoretical frameworks, between its historical and speculative dimensions, Ghosh's novel models a mode of engagement with the postcolonial city that resists the closure of any single critical perspective. No single theory - not spatial theory, not postcolonial theory, not narrative theory, not psychoanalysis - can fully account for the city that Ghosh has constructed. The

novel requires all of them, and even their combined resources fall short of the city's complexity.

What the theoretical frameworks developed in this article collectively reveal is that Ghosh's Calcutta is a site of productive tension - a city whose image is constructed through the conflict of multiple, incompatible representations, and whose spatial logic enacts the epistemological contradictions of the colonial and postcolonial condition. Lefebvre's spatial theory reveals the clash between conceived and lived space; Foucault's heterotopia identifies the counter-sites where subaltern knowledge is produced and transmitted; Bhabha's hybridity and third space describe the interstitial epistemological zone where colonial and subaltern knowledges encounter one another; Spivak's subaltern studies trace the structural impossibility of adequate representation; Freud's uncanny illuminates the haunted quality of colonial urban space; Jameson's political unconscious exposes the ideological management of irresolvable contradictions; and New Historicism reveals the archive as the site of suppressed social energy.

Together, these frameworks constitute not a unified reading of Ghosh's Calcutta but a reading adequate to its complexity - one that acknowledges the city's multidimensionality without reducing it to any single explanatory scheme. Calcutta in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a city that resists reading, that exceeds representation, that perpetually generates new meanings from the tension between its official image and its subaltern reality. It is, in the most precise sense of the term, a city under the skin: alive beneath its surface, insurgent beneath its silence, and always already more than what any single pair of eyes - colonial, postcolonial, or theoretical - can see.

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