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Fictional Voices and Urban Realities – A Postcolonial Perspective on Bishwanath Ghosh's Indian Travel Writing

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Abstract
This paper examines the juxtaposition between orality and fictionality in the travelogues of Indian Travel writer Bishwanath Ghosh, specifically Tamarind City: Where Modern India Began and Longing, Belonging: An Outsider at Home in Calcutta. By examining the texts through a postcolonial lens, the study argues that Ghosh's narrative style subverts the traditional objectivity of colonial travel writing by blending anecdotal storytelling, personal recollection, and fictional elements. In addition to documenting Indian cities, his works reimagine them as living environments, emotional locations that are influenced by voice, identity, and history. With its casual tone, asides, character sketches, and subjective observations, Ghosh's style reflects oral storytelling, which produces a hybrid form that celebrates narrative flexibility while rejecting strict factuality.
The study emphasises how Ghosh's depictions of places like Chennai and Calcutta reveal a profound interest in cultural memory and everyday life. His stories reanimate the city via a uniquely Indian perspective by turning strangers into storytellers and prominent monuments into personal interactions. The claim made by Carl Thompson that "travel writing occupies a liminal space between fact and fiction" lends support to the notion that Ghosh intentionally employs fictionality and orality as narrative devices in his works. From a postcolonial standpoint, these techniques become actions of regaining narrative agency and challenging Eurocentric travel writing conventions.
Ghosh's travel writing establishes itself as a form of self-representation rooted in Indian sensibilities by emphasizing voice, passion, and cultural uniqueness. The fictionality included in Ghosh's oral narrative technique is a way to reach the more complex and nuanced realities of postcolonial urban life rather than a diversion from reality.
Keywords: *Postcolonial Travel Writing, Fictionality, Orality, Cultural Uniqueness, Urban Memory*

INTRODUCTION

Travel writing, particularly in postcolonial literature, has developed into a very introspective and intimate art form that grapples with issues of memory, identity, and belonging. Indian authors are no longer limited to mapping distant countries or chronicling the exotic "other"; instead, they now frequently write about travels within their nation, encompassing its diverse geographies and emotional landscapes. In this regard, Tamarind City: Where Modern India Began and Longing, Belonging: An Outsider at Home in Calcutta by Bishwanath Ghosh is notable for their combination of fictionality and oral narrative traditions. These components enable him to explore his relationship with environment, geography, history, and identity while creating intricately layered pictures of two famous Indian cities, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) and Chennai.

Carl Thompson writes:
"If all travel involves an encounter between self and other that is brought about by movement through space, all travel writing is at some level a record or product of this encounter, and of the negotiation between similarity and difference that it entailed" (Thompson 10, p.).

This interaction between self and other is crucial to Ghosh's narrative approach. In both writings, he approaches the city as a participant, rather than a detached observer, often unfamiliar, curious, and willing to listen. His works exemplify a constant struggle between personal subjectivity and the cultural identity of the cities in which he lives.

In Tamarind City, Ghosh, originally from North India, moves to Chennai, a city frequently misrepresented and stereotyped in popular culture. He enters the city patiently and humbly, allowing its residents' voices to tell its story. His interactions with locals, including rickshaw drivers, artists, business people, and housewives, demonstrate his use of oral storytelling. His travelogue is around their

conversations, which enable Chennai to be heard through its citizens. Ghosh maintains the flavour of regional dialects and casual speech, replicating the oral storytelling traditions of the area, without significantly filtering or translating these stories into formal language. As a result, the language has a multifarious character, resembling an urban symphony with a variety of voices.

Even though the book is mostly grounded in journalistic detail, the text has a novelistic texture mainly due to the subtle introduction of fictionalised elements through dramatised situations, reconstructed dialogue, and narrative sequencing. In order to provide emotional depth beyond the facts, Ghosh occasionally conjures up what his interviewees could have thought or felt. His work is in accordance with postcolonial strategies that value subjective truth and experience over objective authority because of the way that reportage and creative license blur the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction.

A different kind of travel is taken by Ghosh in Longing, Belonging: An Outsider at Home in Calcutta. Despite having Bengali ancestry, he views Calcutta as a visitor with new perspectives rather than as a local. The emotional basis of the story is this conflict between familiarity and distance. Longing, Belonging, the term itself, alludes to the diasporic experience of feeling both at home and alienated. Once more, narratives are important. Ghosh allows common people, such as commuters, poets, regular café patrons, and scholars from College Street, to share their own stories. Through these voices, a Calcutta that is loaded with resistance, subtle transformation, and nostalgia is revealed.

This work's fictionality is even more obvious. Ghosh frequently combines observation with recollection, enabling the past and present to coexist. Scenes are recreated for emotional resonance rather than factual accuracy. Through imagery and narrative that verges on the literary, the city is portrayed as a living character, melancholic, poetic, and chaotic. Postcolonial issues of cultural continuity, historical displacement, and shattered identity are reflected in this imaginative reconstruction of Calcutta.

The conventional clichés of colonial travel writing, which presented the traveler as a civilising outsider staring at the exotic "other," are challenged in both pieces. Rather, this focus is inverted in Ghosh's work. He navigates cities that are part of his nation but not part of his cultural familiarity, becoming the outsider inside. Echoing Thompson's observation, his journey becomes a negotiation of difference inside similarities. He can close this distance by using both fictional and conversational tactics, which humanise his characters and put readers right in the middle of the metropolis.

Travel narratives by Bishwanath Ghosh are a postcolonial reinvention of the genre, based on storytelling, cultural translation, and empathy. He challenges strict ideas of geography and identity by fusing fictionality with oral tale traditions, establishing a space where voice, movement, and memory all come together. His writing demonstrates how travel writing, particularly in postcolonial India, is about more than just mapping out a city; it's also about discovering the place's essence and, in doing so, discovering oneself.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the context of postcolonial literary studies, travel writing has experienced a substantial reassessment. Postcolonial writers are progressively reclaiming what was formerly thought to be a genre dominated by Western viewpoints and colonial explorers. They utilise it as a means of cultural negotiation, self-exploration, and resistance to dominant narratives. The non-Western world has typically been portrayed in travel writing as passive, exotic, and consumable, according to academics like Mary Louise Pratt in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. However, in postcolonial settings, travel writing becomes a transcultural zone where local voices reframe identity and place according to their values.

Carl Thompson (2011) refers to Bishwanath Ghosh's travel writings as the "new travel writing" because they reflect not only geographical movement but also internal dislocation, emotional memory, and the blurred boundaries between self and place. Ghosh's travel writings, especially Tamarind City and Longing, Belonging, have not been thoroughly theorised. According to Thompson, "all travel writing is at some level a record or product of the encounter between self and other, and of the negotiation between

similarity and difference that it entailed" (Thompson 10). Ghosh's work repeats this assertion within this context.

Indian travel writing's use of orality relates to the subcontinent's longstanding storytelling traditions. Oral narratives are fluid, flexible, and communal, according to authors like Ruth Finnegan, author of Oral Literature in Africa, and A.K. Ramanujan. This oral narrative heritage is reflected in Ghosh's use of common voices, informal discussions, and street chats, which give his writing a more lived rather than observed quality. His travel writing thus transforms into a polyphonic narrative, a chorus of local voices that influence his perception of the city, rather than a monologue.

In the context of Indian English literature, Ghosh's writing similarly refers to authors such as Suketu Mehta's Maximum City, Pankaj Mishra's Butter Chicken in Ludhiana, and Ruchir Joshi's Poriborton, who use urban travel as a prism through which to examine fragmented postcolonial modernity and changing identities. But Ghosh's use of oral voices and subdued storytelling is notable for its dialogic and modest tone. He echoes the postcolonial idea of recovering marginalised or lost narratives by letting location speak for itself rather than imposing a single viewpoint.

All things considered, the literature on fictionality, orality, and travel writing provides a rich context for understanding Ghosh's works. His travelogues provide excellent examples of how these components might combine to create a profoundly introspective, culturally aware, and inventively told picture of postcolonial Indian towns. This theoretical and critical framework will be applied to careful readings of Tamarind City and Longing, Belonging in the sections that follow, demonstrating how Ghosh's narrative techniques shape the development of Indian travel literature.

A THEORETICAL APPROACH THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL LENS

This study examines how Bishwanath Ghosh regains narrative power through voice and memory in his travel writing using postcolonial theory. By emphasising local experiences and oral traditions, postcolonialism assists in analysing how his works resist colonial ways of representation. Ghosh's combination of subjective narrative and cultural perspective is consistent with Thompson's (2011) observation that "travel writing occupies a liminal space between fact and fiction" (p. 11). This theory shows how, in postcolonial Indian contexts, orality and fictionality serve as instruments of self-representation.

According to theorists like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Ashis Nandy, postcolonial theory offers a framework for analysing how formerly colonised cultures portray themselves once they gain their freedom. Ghosh's rejection of the exoticizing lens sometimes seen in colonial travel literature is framed by Said's critique of Orientalism. Ghosh provides an insider's perspective of Indian cities as dynamic, self-redefining places, in contrast to colonial narratives that portrayed them as archaic or stagnant. His literature serves as a counter-discourse, using its voices and principles to reshape India's urban image.

Ghosh has a specific place as a domestic migrant, neither native nor outsider, writing from inside but with reflective distance, making Homi Bhabha's idea of the "third space" especially relevant. A nuanced depiction of regional urban life is made possible by Ghosh's ability to negotiate many cultural viewpoints without imposing authority, owing to his hybrid positionality. Another of Bhabha's central concepts, cultural hybridity, aids in understanding how contemporary Indian cities combine indigenous customs with colonial legacies to create distinctively postcolonial urban identities.

Furthermore, an examination of Ghosh's focus on common voices and vernacular traditions is supported by Ashis Nandy's concept of "decolonising the mind". Instead of colonial landmarks or elite narratives, Ghosh reclaims urban space for the postcolonial subject by emphasising local people, culture, and memory. His works align with postcolonial efforts to re-center history, knowledge, and identity by shifting the urban perspective from imperial to indigenous.

Ghosh's travel writing might be seen using this paradigm as a literary intervention that reconfigures postcolonial urban identity in modern India, rather than just as personal observation.

NARRATIVE STYLE AND TECHNIQUES IN GHOSH'S TRAVELOGUES

Tamarind City and Longing, Belonging by Bishwanath Ghosh are prime examples of a unique narrative style that combines cultural reporting, literary journalism, and introspection. His narratives, which capture the daily rhythms of urban India without resorting to sentimentality or sensationalism, are distinguished by their simplicity, clarity, and keen observational expertise. Ghosh's writing is notable for striking a balance between subjectivity and objectivity by fusing journalistic discipline with emotional closeness.

Ghosh makes use of anecdotal storytelling as one of his primary narrative devices. Each chapter or segment typically focuses on a specific location, person, or event, presented in an informal, conversational style. Through these stories, Ghosh creates a micro-history of the city, whether it's a chance meeting with a barber, rickshaw puller, or former bureaucrat. His work is democratic and inclusive because of this strategy, which enables him to highlight the voices of regular people. As he notes,

"I walked on the Marina on the very day of my arrival in Chennai, and I could tell the distinct flavour that permeated its sands." He captures the energy and sensory richness of the space—the bustling crowds playing in the waves, vendors selling raw mango slices, hawkers with cotton candy, the aroma of fried bajjis and fish, and peripatetic astrologers offering to read one's future. (Tamarind City, Pg. 237)

This scene serves as a threshold moment since it is human activity and street-level detail, rather than monuments or landmarks, that frame Ghosh's initial experience of the city. His tone is personal and introspective, implying both awe and a sense of belonging, and the sentence structure has organic flow, which reflects the crowd's dynamic movement, strengthening the narrator's bond with the city. From a phenomenological perspective, this instance demonstrates that the location is not seen but also experienced, felt, and created by sensory engagement. By capturing the city's ambiance through lived experience, the term "the distinct flavour that permeated its sands" conveys more than just a literal taste. Knowledge emerges through direct bodily connection with space in what Merleau-Ponty, a French phenomenological philosopher, would refer to as the "lived world," which is evoked by the sounds of fried fish and bajjis, the movement of the throng, and the vivid images of hawkers and astrologers. Thus, Ghosh's story enacts a type of sensory mapping in which urban identity is understood through emotive, subjective participation with daily rhythms rather than abstraction. By doing this, he reinterprets travel writing as a very subjective, visual experience of culture and place.

The author's writing also has a strong feeling of location. He recreates the emotional and cultural ambiance of Chennai and Kolkata rather than just describing their physical characteristics. The reader is transported to the scene by his use of rich sensory details and evocative images, such as the sound of temple bells, the smell of filter coffee, or the muggy air of a Calcutta alley. In Tamarind City, he introduces readers to Chennai's various paradoxes, modern but traditional, peaceful yet bustling, and this strategy works especially well.

Ghosh's use of temporal layering is a crucial method. He frequently links the city's colonial heritage, cultural memory, and current transition by contrasting the past and present. By implying that urban identity is shaped throughout time rather than by a single historical moment, this narrative layering gives the story a feeling of continuity. For instance, in Longing, Belonging, Ghosh discusses the resilience and urban ruin of the present while simultaneously reflecting on Kolkata's history through allusions to Tagore and the Bengal Renaissance.

Additionally, Ghosh gently employs sarcasm and satire, which gives his writing a warm, human touch. He uses a tone of inquiry, humility, and affection rather than a lot of theorising or academic distance. He has an insider-outsider perspective because he is not a native of either city, which allows him to interact with people respectfully and sensitively while observing things that others might ignore.

THE INTERPLAY OF FICTIONALITY AND ORAL TRADITION

Travel writing is a literary genre that frequently blends cultural observation with personal experiences, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. Spoken tales, regional folklore, and firsthand accounts are all woven into the travel story, making fictionality in orality a prominent element within this narrative space. While fictionality provides narrative strategies that dramatise and modify reality, oral storytelling, which is founded in voice, memory, and performance, adds authenticity and immediacy to the story. Through

conversation, slander, and creative reconstruction, travel writers are able to provide several meanings for a location in addition to documenting it. It makes travel writing both creatively expressive and informative, challenging the rigid distinction of fact and invention.

Later, sipping the railway's tea, I had watched the countryside of Bengal glide past: the fields, the green ponds, the hyacinths, the communist slogans painted on brick walls, humans and animals moving about with an air of melancholy. Soon, the landscape tapered into a bed of rail tracks, signaling the arrival of Howrah station – the gateway to Calcutta. (Pg no. 21, Spring, Longing Belonging)
Bishwanath Ghosh skilfully combines oral narrative with fictional elements in this excerpt to create a memorable travel experience, turning a mundane train ride into a multi-layered story. Oral storytelling traditions, in which memory and voice affect the world being recounted, are echoed by the rhythmic listing of sensory imagery, such as "fields, the green ponds, the hyacinths."

Arun Mitra's "In Calcutta" poem encapsulates this sensory memory: "The crop-thick soil of Bengal seems to shiver / As I tread / Its roads, / I get back in its sky once more / The long-lost maze of dim trees... / My rural Bengal returns, forever returns / In Calcutta."
The emotional terrain in Ghosh's story, where memory animates both place and perception, is reflected in these poetic lines. Bishwanath Ghosh also invokes a landscape that comes to life through memory and sensory detail, much like Arun Mitra does in "My rural Bengal returns, forever returns / In Calcutta." Mitra's "maze of dim trees / The creepers and wild flowers" and his reference to "fields, the green ponds, the hyacinths" both allow nostalgia to turn the actual landscape into an emotionally charged scene. Similar to Mitra's "intoxicating odour, a distant voice," Ghosh's "sipping the railway tea" transforms from an act into a ritual that quietly brings the past into the present.

The act of "sipping the railway tea" not only grounds the narrative in a well-known Indian motif, but it also evokes the casual familiarity of a spoken story. A deeper emotional truth than mere factual observation is implied by the subjective tone and the gloomy aura projected onto the surroundings, which allows fictionality to pierce. From a postcolonial perspective, these narratives counter colonial travel writing styles that often objectified or exoticized Indian landscapes. The railway journey, a remnant of colonial infrastructure, is instead reclaimed by Ghosh as a site of intimate emotional connection and personal memory. His use of commonplace imagery, based on sensory experience and local culture, reflects a postcolonial attempt to give Indian narratives agency and voice again, endowing the ordinary with profound meaning.

In Tamarind City, Bishwanath Ghosh tells the story of Chennai's historical centrality again, this time using a mix of facts and reflective narration. The story of the Madras Railway Company's founding in 1845, before the first train ran between Bombay and Thane in 1853, is not just a historical fact; it is also a way to challenge the dominant colonial historiography. "Since the original structures of Bombay and Thane stations no longer exist, Royapuram station, declared open in 1856, is today the oldest railway station in the entire subcontinent". (Tamarind City Pg. 41). Ghosh says that Royapuram station, which opened in 1856, is the oldest railway station still standing in the subcontinent. This gives it a sense of permanence, even though the original Bombay and Thane stations no longer exist.

Bishwanath Ghosh challenges the historical and physical hierarchies imposed by colonial narratives in Tamarind City, a literary reclaiming of Chennai's underappreciated history, through a postcolonial lens. His reference to the establishment of the Madras Railway Company in 1845, which came before Bombay's well-known train trip in 1853, serves as both a historical corrective and a symbolic act of rebellion. By focusing on Chennai, a city that was frequently overlooked in the colonial discourse that gave Bombay and Calcutta priority as the primary centers of Indian modernity, Ghosh regains narrative agency. By fusing historical accuracy with an introspective, personal voice that evokes the oral traditions of memory and myth, his narrative blurs the boundaries between the past and present. Homi Bhabha refers to this combination of history and narrative, fact and fiction, as the "re-inscription of the postcolonial subject", a rewriting of the past that subverts colonial master-narratives.
A powerful metaphor in this counter-discursive approach is the image of Royapuram station. Ghosh portrays it as a cultural landmark that has withstood historical neglect and physical deterioration, rather

than just a useful piece of infrastructure. This opposition is strengthened by the subtle irony of pointing out that the original Bombay and Thane stations are no longer in operation, which delicately undermines the appearance of colonial permanency. From this perspective, Royapuram is a postcolonial site where repressed histories emerge, serving as a monument to continuity in the face of erasure. Ghosh's narrative serves as a decolonizing gesture by placing the South in the national consciousness through its fusion of irony and veneration, storytelling and truth.

A fictionalized orality that lends emotional depth to postcolonial space is reflected in this interaction between historical fact and oral storytelling. Ghosh reclaims rather than merely informs by describing Chennai's past with such affective realism. As memory, location, and identity come together to rewrite the narrative from the outskirts of his travel writing, it turns into an act of cultural resistance. This narrative approach is also provided in Ghosh's depiction of Calcutta, where environment and memory are composed in a similarly immersive and emotional context.

The storyteller captures a brief but powerful sensory moment that combines visual images and emotional resonance to bring out the magic of Calcutta. “Howrah Bridge comes into view, shining as if made of gold. To watch the iconic bridge bathed in powerful yellow lights, that too from the middle of the river where the pleasant river breeze is now kissing us”. Longing, Belonging, p. 107. By using first-person narration, "Sajal and I choose to stand..." gives the writing a personal, inviting tone that draws the reader into the scene. This sense of immediacy is a hallmark of travel writing, which ties experience to the objective and subjective.

The visual imagery is vivid and layered. Phrases like "Shobhabazar ghat recedes rapidly" and "the Howrah Bridge is shining as if made of gold" make one think of both movement and grandeur. The fading ghat represents leaving behind something familiar or historical, while the sudden appearance of the bridge, a colonial-era building, bathed in golden light, gives it a mythical quality. This personification and metaphor of the bridge, “shining as if made of gold”, changes the reader's perspective on how to think about colonial infrastructure, making it seem less like a symbol of oppression and more like a romanticised part of the modern city.

The phrase "pleasant river breeze...kissing us" uses tactile imagery and soft personification to make the moment more sensual and peaceful. This makes the mood thoughtful and meditative, turning the ferry ride into more than just a trip; it becomes a rite of passage and a way to experience the city. From a postcolonial interpretation, this nostalgic view of the Howrah Bridge is a symbol of British imperial engineering, bringing it back to life. The narrator doesn't directly criticize the colonial legacy, but by poetically describing the bridge, the passage shows how postcolonial spaces take in, reinterpret, and beautify things that are left over from colonialism. The narrator is not amazed because it came from a colonial past. Instead, they are amazed because it is now part of the cultural identity of a living, breathing Calcutta.

To end with, the phrase "this should be one of the most exhilarating moments of my stay in Calcutta" reflects the fictionality of orality; it resembles a diary entry or spoken thought, referencing the oral narrative tradition in travel writing, where subjective impressions are used to represent objective or historical facts. As Ghosh turns his attention to Chennai, where the cityscape itself becomes a living narrator of its postcolonial identity, this blending of cultural memory and personal voice continues.
In Tamarind City, “Every brick and street corner of George Town has been witnessing to several interesting incidents like shops on NSC Bose Road, Paris Cool Home, Dolphine Print Centre, the Bharathi Mart (P) Ltd, Bollywood Fashion Mela, and Broadway. P. 29-30. By personifying George Town's physical features—"every brick and street corner", as witnesses to a wide range of human experiences, the narrator in the passage gives the city life and turns it into a sentient repository of tales. This method is in line with a postcolonial literary framework, which reclaims urban Indian spaces, which are frequently overlooked or marginalised in colonial times, as dynamic hubs of historical continuity and cultural memory.
As R. Parthasarathy writes in the poem “Under another Sky,”

"It's a tired sea accosts the visitor / between Fort St. George and San Thome, / Here once ships bottled the harbour / with spices, cinnamon and cloves," representing the colonial and marine heritage that penetrates the city's culture. It Specific local landmarks like Broadway, NSC Bose Road, Paris Cool Home, Dolphine Print Centre, The Bharathi Mart (P) Ltd, Bollywood Fashion Mela, and Paris Cool Home are mentioned to ground the story in tangible, lived reality, but they also serve as narrative devices that blend the symbolic and the real. The hybrid, multicultural texture of postcolonial Indian cities, where customs, trade, and international influence naturally coexist, is reflected in these references.
The oral tradition invoking the generalisation, "You name any aspect of life, music, dance, politics, economics, warfare, religion, medicine, business, crime—George Town is a treasure-house of stories," P.30, resembles the sequence of spoken storytelling through the use of rhythm and repetition. In addition to highlighting the variety of experiences present in the area, this listing technique produces a cumulative effect that implies the city is home to all of human life. When the narrator combines factual geography with a heightened, performative tone that implies narrative shaping, fictionality emerges, reminding the reader that travel writing is always a mediated, imaginative act rather than just objective documentation.

By reclaiming the everyday urban landscape as a multi-layered palimpsest of memory, resistance, and identity, the passage thus serves as an example of how postcolonial travel writing uses orality and fictionality to transform space into story. This narrative technique is also used in Ghosh's portrayal of Bengal, where the layered textures of regional identity are explored through the weaving of cultural memory with sensory elements like food.
In Longing, Belonging, "Fish is as integral to a Bengali meal as Tagore is to Bengal" P.159 is a powerful simile that links Bengali cuisine and literary heritage while highlighting the fish's deep cultural significance. Irony is introduced, and the need to depend on outside sources for something considered inherently local is subtly criticised by the unexpected discovery that well-known fish like 'rui' and 'katla' originate in Andhra Pradesh rather than Bengal. In a postcolonial, globalised economy where cultural symbols endure despite changes in material origins, this contrast highlights the complexity of regional identity.
Bengali kitchen cannot function without the trucks coming from Andhra Pradesh.' Says Topu, a talkative fish-dealer at the wholesale fish market in Baithakkhana, one of the oldest fish markets in the city. 'Andhra Pradesh sends us sixteen items in all. Fish, eggs, cabbage, cauliflower, tomato, capsicum, beans, raw jackfruit, tamrind, raw mango, drumsticks, even rice. P. 159
R.K. Narayan's Malgudi Days frequently focuses on the daily lives of common South Indians, demonstrating the connections between rural and urban economies, social classes, and geographical areas. Narayan's characters, rickshaw pullers, grocers, and teachers, speak in straightforward, oral tones but possess a profound understanding of social realities, much like the fish dealer Topu in Bishwanath Ghosh's story. In the story "An Astrologer's Day," for instance, the title character establishes his livelihood in a marketplace, depending on both the migrant population of city dwellers and local superstition. This is a parallel to how the Bengali kitchen, which is a representation of deeply ingrained culture, paradoxically depends on the supply chains of Andhra Pradesh.

Both authors highlight the brittleness of local pride in an interdependent India by challenging regional self-sufficiency through economically based narratives. Similar to Ghosh's incorporation of Topu's speech, Narayan's use of Indian English influenced by vernacular rhythms demonstrates how orality and fictionality combine to accurately portray the voices of everyday people. The postcolonial myth of independent nationalism is also gently criticised by both writers, who instead highlight the cultural and economic currents that uphold local identities. Ghosh's evocative depiction of food, where culinary memory becomes a potent expression of place, tradition, and cultural pride, carries on this battle between lived experience and regional identity.

He describes the experience in the Rathna Café, "But all I want right now is four pieces of Ratna Café idlis, bathed in its inimitable sambar-that extra dash of coriander powder and asafoetida!" P.104. Ratna Cafe, a Triplicane eatery since 1948, has a unique tradition of serving generous mugs of sambar over idlis and refilling them when the plate becomes dry. This unique approach sets Ratna Cafe apart from other eateries where sambar and chutneys are served in small bowls. The restaurant's owner would be interested in interviewing him to learn more about his trademark sambar.

In travel writing, food acts as a sensory hallway to culture, providing deep insights into regional customs, identity, and daily life. The sentence perfectly expresses the sensory richness and emotional intimacy of food. Food becomes a symbol of comfort, place, and cultural belonging, as the narrator's desire for "four pieces of Ratna Café idlis" illustrates. Bathed in its inimitable sambar... extra dash of coriander powder and asafoetida" is a vivid description that employs gustatory imagery to evoke not only taste but also memory and identity. In postcolonial travel writing, where cultural exploration and personal desire converge, this instance illustrates how culinary experiences serve as narrative anchors, transforming the everyday act of eating into a profoundly expressive, nearly sacred ritual.

In addition to trying that cuisine, he intends to interview the Gupta, who is not from Tamil Nadu. Additionally, readers anticipate knowing this recipe so they can occasionally prepare it themselves. Readers are drawn into the culinary arts by the way he tells tales and thinks. It can be associated with longing, Belonging, the famous sweet called Rassagalla from Calcutta.
Calcutta, once upon a time the city of cities, nourishing minds that shaped the social contours of modern India, is today best known across the country for the rassogalla. Vivekananda, Tagore, Subhas Bose, Satyajit Ray: all these icons come much later for the lay non-Bengali, who identifies Calcutta most instantly with the celebrated sweet. P. 221.

Food appears in both passages as a powerful metaphor for cultural identity, collective memory, and regional pride, in addition to being a source of nourishment. Calcutta's description as "once upon a time the city of cities... is today best known across the country for the rassogalla" employs irony to highlight the reductive stereotypes and cultural amnesia that frequently characterise Indian cities in the eyes of the general public. Bengal's intellectual and political history is closely linked to historical figures like Vivekananda, Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Satyajit Ray; however, the narrator observes that these figures are only remembered in passing, overshadowed by the immediate, sugary symbol of the rassogalla. This demonstrates how, in the national imagination, cities can become intelligible caricatures due to culinary markers that can obscure intricate histories. A subtle sense of nostalgia, bordering on elegy, is also added by the phrase "once upon a time," which laments the transition from intellectual grandeur to symbolic simplicity.
In the second passage, a similar cultural condensation takes place as the narrator's desire for "four pieces of Ratna Café idlis, bathed in its inimitable sambar" transforms a simple meal into a ritual of rootedness and belonging. The particular reference to "that extra dash of coriander powder and asafoetida" illustrates how sensory details encode regional identity and how food can serve as a personal window into a place's culture. In addition to being delicious, the sambar is "inimitable," implying a cultural and emotional uniqueness that cannot be duplicated elsewhere. This is similar to how Bengal's self-image is closely linked to the rassogalla, despite it being available throughout India.

As a result, both sections show how food serves as a potent literary device in postcolonial Indian narratives, separating history, geography, and identity into a single, instantly recognisable symbol. In travel writing, food experiences serve as both sensory windows into a city's soul and a window into how consumption, both literal and symbolic, shapes, maintains, and occasionally weakens urban identities. Food becomes more than just a source of nourishment; it serves as a sensory archive, a narrative framework, and a kind of cultural memory.Local cuisine evokes strong connections with place and belonging, whether it is through Calcutta's renowned sweets or Chennai's famous sambar. Such culinary representations occupy a "Third Space," where overlapping histories, colonial legacies, and regional traditions are continuously negotiated, as suggested by Homi Bhabha in his theory of cultural hybridity. Similar to how food defines people, travel writing reflects the intellectual and cultural heritage of historical figures through architectural spaces and personal artefacts, each of which is a hybrid site of memory and identity construction.

In Longing, Belonging, Shantiniketan, a meditation retreat, was built by Tagore's father, Debendra, in 1862. In 1901, forty years old and author of twenty-one books, Tagore established an open-air school with five students, including his son Rathindranath. The school, Brahamacharya Ashram, later became Viswa Bharati University, and money came with the Nobel Prize. Hamlet became famous worldwide. He lived in five different houses with different architecture. "None of them is grand or reeks of opulence: they are

all minimalistic in design and décor, just as a poet's house should be, but at the same time bear the aura of a great mind". P.165. Tagore's black Humber, registered with WBA 8689, was displayed in a glass case between buildings.
The author combines biography and meditative reflection to create an intimate and emblematic portrait of Rabindranath Tagore, celebrating cultural rootedness and intellectual austerity.

Tagore has developed into a metaphor for intellectual and spiritual awakening. The name itself, which translates to "abode of peace," establishes a reflective tone, and the development from a retreat to a world-renowned university reflects the conversion of an idea into a long-lasting establishment. With Tagore serving as both a historical figure and a representation of postcolonial enlightenment, this development represents the bildungsroman of a country's cultural consciousness.

The narrative voice, which is composed and insightful, describes the homes that Tagore lived in using simple yet poetic language: "None of them is grand or reeks of opulence... just as a poet's house should be." By suggesting that extravagance offends the poetic sensibility, the verb "reeks" is used to subtly criticise pretention. Rather, these "minimalistic in design and décor" homes transform into literary spaces that are spartan, reflective, and infused with aura. The expression "bear the aura of a great mind" gives the building personality and transforms the material into the spiritual. Here, architecture becomes a manifestation of Tagore's philosophy, which is quiet, reflective, and internally luminous.

A brilliant example of literary symbolism is the allusion to Tagore's black Humber, which is kept in a glass case. The car is a relic caught between motion and stillness, a symbol of colonial luxury and modern mobility. It turns into a relic of movement and memory, a poetic contrast to the houses' unchanging simplicity. Although its registration number, "WBA 8689," gives the story a sense of specificity and documentary realism, its positioning "between buildings" alludes to liminality, between periods, between tradition and modernity

The tone of the passage, which draws attention to storytelling, folklore, and the creation of myths around national icons, is one of orality moulded by reverence. The flow of the sentences has a calm rhythm, a respectful silence that turns the prose into a literary tribute. Built into Shantiniketan's very walls and pathways, Tagore's legacy is whispered rather than shouted. Ghosh's writing thus occupies the boundaries of poetics and history, integrating postcolonial contemplation with a literary sensibility to make Tagore more than just a historical figure but a dynamic, living presence in Indian cultural imagination.

Similarly, in the Tamarind City, in olden times, Brahmin houses surrounded a temple, creating a garland around it, hence the name agraharam. "Low-hanging, tiled roof; wide front door flanked by niches to hold oil lamps; windows with vertical rods as grilles; and in the shade of the slanting roofs", P.113. A typical agraharam house features an open verandah where people sit in close circles, engaged in discussion or gossip.
Triplicane, once a village, now houses an ancient tradition in the heart of a city, with some equipped with broadband connections, unlike any other metropolis in the country. "Even today, if you were to remove all the cars and the cables and the motobikes ' lanes, Triplicane would easily resemble an early twentieth-century hamlet – the very air is so charmingly another age". (Tamarind City, Pg. 113)

Triplicane and its agraharams are reimagined in Tamarind City by Bishwanath Ghosh as storied sites of memory and cultural resiliency, rather than just as actual places, through the use of fictionality within oral narrative traditions. Invoking the sacred spatial design rooted in traditional Indian cosmology, he describes Brahmin houses "surrounding a temple, creating a garland around it." Architectural details like the "low-hanging, tiled roof" and the "niches to hold oil lamps" turn the building into a narrative that echoes oral storytelling, in which lived experience is preserved by memory and imagination.
This storytelling technique turns into a subtly effective form of resistance when viewed through a postcolonial lens. Native urban landscapes were frequently erased by colonial discourse, which reduced them to administrative or exotic zones. By giving voice to cultural memory, where the past is still ingrained in the present, Ghosh refutes this. Despite having "broadband connections," Triplicane still has "the very air of another age." Ashis Nandy refers to this coexistence of digital modernity and ancient tradition as the "recovery of the self", a decolonising act that affirms indigenous ways of seeing and being.

The first verse of Peyazhwar's on Thiruvallikeni is in harmony with this vision:
Where the white surf breaks, /Bringing in red corals and white pearls/which resemble twilight and the lamps lit therein/He who bears on his perfect chest/The lady of the Lotus, /Resides at Thiruvallikeni. Memory, devotion, and geography are all interwoven here as well. Peyazhwar, like Ghosh, turns space into a sacred story. Through affect, imagination, and spatial intimacy, fictionality in voices affirms cultural identity and restores erased histories, deepening reality rather than distorting it. Thus, Triplicane turns into a symbolic time capsule, a place where modernity and oral tradition meet in subdued opposition to colonial erasure. The revival of enlightening figures such as Tamil poet Subramania Bharati, whose legacy, like Triplicane itself, embodies the enduring power of resistance, imagination, and national identity, furthers this intersection of memory and place.
The recovery of cultural icons like Subramania Bharati, whose legacy reinforces resistance throughout time, is a potent echo of this interplay between space and memory.
Bharati's poetry was briefly revived in the Tamil film Kandukondain Kandukondain, inspiring the author to move south after watching it in the Delhi theatre. During the colonial period, a Tamil poet urged the people to be patriotic through his poems. In 1920, he returned to Swadesamitran, a newspaper where he had become a passionate journalist, earning a salary of 75 rupees, but the fire weakened.
His collection of works, “The books would sell faster than kerosene oil and matchboxes”. Despite his death, only fifteen people attended his funeral. “His songs were sung after his death, but he died unsung”. P. 115. Once a ferocious appeal for patriotism during the colonial era, Bharati poetry makes a brief reappearance in the Tamil film. Ghosh was triggered to visit through the mediated of cinema. Cinema serves as a representation of the timeless ability of art to speak to each generation in a new way and traverse its original context.
When Ghosh observes that Bharati's "books would sell faster than kerosene oil and matchboxes," the metaphor draws attention to both the socioeconomic background of colonial India and the poet's literary influence. Matchboxes and kerosene, which represent everyday necessities in a primitive time, highlight how equally important Bharati's poetry was regarded as a source of light, warmth, and sparks.

His life's tragedy, however, ends in obscurity: "His songs were sung after his death, but he died unsung", a moving reminder of how artists can be overlooked in life even as their creations become immortal. Roland Barthes' theory of The Death of the Author, which holds that a text no longer belongs to its author after it is created but rather to the readers who interpret and revitalise it within their contexts, is in line with this paradox. Thus, Bharati's poetry endures as a dynamic, changing discourse influenced by succeeding generations rather than as a mirror of his own life story.

Ghosh treats Bharati in Tamarind City as a cultural and textual presence that acquires meaning through reinterpretation rather than as a biographical subject. Ghosh's writings may also depart from the author's intention, allowing readers to journey not only through geography but also through the complex histories, identities, and memories ingrained in the landscape, much as Bharati's words spawned new forms long after his passing. As a result, while the author disappears, the text lives on, reborn with each reading.

Despite coming from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Rabindranath Tagore and Subramania Bharati both made significant contributions to India's nationalist spirit: Tagore through the National Anthem, and Bharati through passionate patriotic songs. Both icons are treated with equal respect in Ghosh's works, which reflects a term that Edward Said refers to as a "contrapuntal reading" (1993), in which a pluralistic literary tradition is celebrated and it diverse cultural voices are acknowledged without hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

According to the study, travel writing reflects people's emotional, cultural, and intellectual connection with a location rather than just documenting their movements through it. It is clear from reading Bishwanath Ghosh's Longing, Belonging: An Outsider at Home in Calcutta and Tamarind City: Where Modern India Began that Ghosh writes at the nexus of identity, memory, and imagination. The locations he investigates are more than simply urban settings; they are legendary locales influenced by individual

voices and shared pasts. As A.K. Ramanujan writes, “India is a land of stories. Every story has another story behind it, and every telling is a retelling.” The author's narrative's personal and oral nature is what makes his travel writing more than just a textual voyage; it becomes a type of lived experience.

Ghosh's stories combine elements of fiction and reality, creating what the researcher calls "Fictionality in orality." He mimics the format of oral storytelling with his use of dialogue, casual tone, selective recollection, and thoughtful criticism. For example, in Tamarind City, his mention of the Rathna Café Sambhar or Royapuram railway station is not shown as an objective truth but rather as a sentimental and nostalgic recollection. In the same way, he states in Longing, Belonging, "Kolkata did not grow on me overnight." His depiction of the city is shaped by experiential memory, as seen by the statement, "It took many evenings of quiet walks and overheard stories." Ghosh's subjective, personal, and flowing language enables him to reconstruct urban life through these oral and narrative choices.

Ghosh's travel writing serves as an example of how orality and fictionality may regain narrative authority when analysed from a postcolonial perspective. Ghosh creates counter-narratives that prioritise indigenous voices by combining lived experience, oral histories, and subjective realities, rejecting colonial notions of detached observation. His nuanced depictions of cities such as Chennai and Calcutta highlight sentimental and regional landscapes that are sometimes left out of colonial narratives. As Thompson (2011) points out, "the traveler's cultural background, personal history, and imaginative projections inevitably shape travel writing" (p. 9). Ghosh's method supports this idea by recovering space through fiction and memory. Similar to Tagore's Kabuliwala's narrator, Ghosh guides readers through personal cultural landscapes. His literary cartography resonates with Arundhathi Subramaniam's (2009) lyrical description from the poem “Madras” as "the flickering spice route of tamarind and onion" and "the vast opera of the Bay of Bengal," where ordinary city life is converted into rich cultural memory. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) asserted that “Orature… was not merely a celebration of words… but a carrier of culture, history, and identity” (p. 15), which is consistent with this approach to oral fictionality. Since Ghosh re-narrates the city, re-roots the self, and re-animates the past to speak on its terms, his travel writing transcends simple description and becomes an act of cultural resistance and narrative healing. The paper proclaims that Ghosh's writings serve as a means of regaining narrative intervention in a world once dominated by colonial discourse. The paper concludes that Ghosh's writings are acts of reclaiming narrative intervention in a world that was once dominated by colonial discourse, rather than merely literary accounts of place.

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