



## *In an Antique Land* a travelogue by Amitav Ghosh

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### Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh in his travelogue describes his journey to Egypt. The novel represents the trade relation between India and Egypt during the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It mainly focuses on the history of Egypt considering the relationship between Abraham Ben Yiju and his slave Bomma.

### Introduction:

Amitav Ghosh has written his fiction and non-fiction work based on history. One of his famous non-fiction historical works is *In an Antique Land*. Present research paper is based on it.

In *In An Antique Land*, everything revolves around Egypt's history in the eleventh century. It is a subversive history written in the style of a traveler's story. It came out in 1992. As an author of *In an Antique Land* Ghosh sees himself as an anthropological historian. With serious concerns, he emphasizes the history of the unarmed nature of Indian trade and commerce before Vasco-de-Gama came to India. He also tries to bring to light a forgotten time in history that shows how free and liberal India was during the Arab and Chinese world wars.

Ghosh's main concern is to restore a culture, social and economic map that stretched from Spain through the Middle East to India for many centuries until it was re-drawn by European military superiority. It is a wonderful picture of a now unknown world that has been lost, although probably sentimentalized, as Ghosh mentioned enough non-European conquerors, pirates and people held for ransom that life and trade seem to have been more insecure than he admits (King, 430).

The myths and images of ancient Egypt and India are similar in ways that can't be explained by either history or cultural exchange. Walafrid Strabo (c. 809–849) German scholar has said: "The lotus flower, sacred to Buddha and to Osiris, has five petals which symbolizes the four limbs and the head; the five senses; the five digits; and like the pyramid, the four parts of the compass and the zenith. Other esoteric meanings abound: for myths are seldom simple, and never irresponsible.

*In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh is about two Indians living in Egypt in 1130 A.D. One is Arabian Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisha who moved to India around 1130 A.D., lived there for 17 years, married a Nair woman, and bought an Indian slave named Bhoma, who went to Egypt with his master. Ben Yiju has been in Mangalore for a long time, so he lives comfortably with Ashu, a woman from Nair.

His association with Nair family helped in increasing the number of his relatives and well-wishers. Of many other spices and items, cardamom was one sent by Ben Yiju to Aden and in return silk and other items used to come in India. Bomma as an agent of Ben Yiju in Aden used to work there. But after 18 years, i.e., 1140 Ben Yiju decided to return to his place. He wrote a letter which fell into the hands of his brother Mubashishir who was in Sicily. He did not inform his brother Yusuf. But Yusuf's son wrote to inquire about his uncle Abraham known as Ben Yiju (Dwivedi, 102).

In *In an Antique Land* the book is split into six parts: the prologue, *Lataifa*, *Nashawy*, *Mangalore*, *Going Back*, and the epilogue. Ghosh does a great job of putting history together in a way that is both creative and logical. In fact, the first two parts of the book, called "*Lataifa*" and "*Nashawy*," are about the social and



cultural history of Egypt. The third part, "Manglore," is about Ben Yiju's seventeen-year stay in India. The last section, "Going Back," is a summary of the author's search for Ben Yiju's life and, through him, his search for cultural and political changes. So, the four parts of the novel, along with the Prologue and Epilogue, make up the whole of the novel. The Prologue is the first part of the book, and in it, the author explains how the whole book is put together. Amitav Ghosh writes:

I was a student, twenty-two years old, and I had recently won a scholarship awarded by a foundation established by a family of expatriate Indians. It was only a few months since I had left India and so I was perhaps a little a little more befuddled by my situation than students usually are. At that moment the only thing I knew about my future was that I was expected to do research leading towards decorate in Social Anthropology. I had never heard of the Cairo Geniza before that day, but within a few months I was in Tunisia, learning Arabic. At about the same time next year 1980, I was in Egypt, installed in a village called Lataifa, a couple of hours journey to the South East of Alexandria (Ghosh, 19).

Amitav Ghosh did a lot of hard work to find out about the religion, culture, society, and language of the East through the letters. The results are pictures of how people there live. The arrival of Europeans on both continents has destroyed much of the richness of Oriental culture. About 350 years after Ben Yiju's death, the Southern Coast. "Within a few years of that day the knell had been struck for the world that had brought Bomma, Ben Yiju and Ashu together" (286). For European historians, the idea of plurality is nothing but a fatal flaw because "the dignity of nuances of choices and preference" (287) is not granted to those who lose. In fact, the search for Ben Yiju and Bomma is impressive not only because of Ghosh's knowledge, but also because it builds a bridge between Egypt and India, which are two of the oldest cultures and civilizations in the world.

Conclusion:

*In An Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh, there are two stories: one about Bomma and the other about the author as a detective. It is a book about history and the author's (Ghosh's) trip to Egypt to learn about the history of an Indian slave named Bomma. Mr. Ghosh, who is an anthropologist, writes a novel about his search. People have said that Ghosh has a strong interest in history. In fact, *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh is both the story of Bomma and the story of the author as a detective. It is a historical novel about an Indian slave named Bomma and the author's trip to Egypt to find out more about his past. As an anthropologist, Mr. Ghosh turns his search into a book. People have said that Ghosh is very interested in history. the 12th century history of Indian's southern coast, Mangalore, the novel gives us a glimpse of pre-colonial period. But in brief, Ghosh also tells us how Portuguese and Dutch naval powers put an end to Muslim and Jew mercantile powers.

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