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## **East West Encounter in Amitav Ghosh's Writings: With Special Reference to 'Countdown'**

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**Abstract:** "Countdown," a travelogue by Amitav Ghosh, delves into a diverse array of themes and experiences. The book chronicles the author's journey to various locations such as Pokhran, Pakistan, and Siachen, offering insights gathered from conversations with people across India. It extensively covers the emotional responses, grief, and sorrow experienced by individuals due to the aftermath of nuclear explosions. The narrative also examines the underlying compulsion behind the nuclearization of South Asia, shedding light on the geopolitical factors that have led to this development. It subtly satirizes the arrogance and dominance prevalent in political circles, often neglecting the peace and well-being of the people in favor of power struggles. One of the compelling aspects of the book is its simplicity of language and the soberness of thought. Despite its straightforward approach, the narrative is impactful and capable of delivering shocks and jolts to the average reader. The book opens with a vivid description of the apocalyptic vision resulting from the nuclear explosion tested at the Pokhran site on May 11, 1998. Ghosh's visit to the site three months later provides a firsthand account, offering insights into the aftermath of such a catastrophic event. A significant irony highlighted in the narrative is the dispersal of dust from the test site across the nation, symbolically attempting to involve the entire country in the aftermath of the blasts. This ironic gesture underscores the broader impact and ramifications of nuclear testing on society

and the nation as a whole. "Countdown" provides a focus on the importance of international peace. It draws attention to the consequences of nuclear activities and geopolitical tensions on a global scale, emphasizing the urgent need for diplomatic efforts and initiatives aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the international arena. Ghosh's travelogue serves as a poignant commentary on the complexities and risks associated with nuclearization, advocating for a collective pursuit of peace and prosperity among nations.

**Keywords:** encounter, narrative, society, influence etc.

Born on July 11, 1956, in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Ghosh had a diverse upbringing, spending his formative years in India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. His educational journey included studies in prestigious institutions such as Delhi, Oxford, and Alexandria, which likely influenced the broad range of themes and global perspectives evident in his writings. Amitav Ghosh has penned several notable works, showcasing his versatility and storytelling prowess. Some of his prominent books include: "The Circle of Reason", "The Shadow Lines" (which received accolades such as the Sahitya Academy Award and the Anandha Puraskar), "In An Antique Land", "Dancing in

Cambodia", "The Calcutta Chromosome", "The Glass Palace", "The Hungry Tide", "Sea of Poppies". His literary accomplishments have been acknowledged globally, with "The Circle of Reason" earning France's prestigious Prix Médicis in 1990 and "The Shadow Lines" winning multiple esteemed Indian awards in the same year.

Ghosh's works have been widely translated into more than twenty languages, attesting to their international appeal and impact. His insightful essays have found a platform in esteemed publications such as *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *The New York Times*, where he explores various themes and issues with depth and clarity. As an author and novelist, Amitav Ghosh's contributions span fiction, historical fiction, and non-fiction, allowing readers to delve into diverse narratives and thought-provoking storytelling across a wide spectrum of human experiences and historical landscapes. His literary achievements have cemented his status as a globally recognized figure in the realm of English literature. "Countdown," a travelogue by Amitav Ghosh, presents a wide-ranging exploration of significant events and experiences linked to nuclear testing in South Asia. The narrative encompasses Ghosh's visits to Pokhran, Pakistan, and Siachen, engaging in conversations with various individuals across India. It delves into the emotional landscape of the people, capturing their grief, sorrow, and the horrific aftermath of nuclear explosions. The travelogue delves into the compulsions driving the nuclearization of South Asia while subtly satirizing the political arrogance and dominance that often disregard the well-being and peace of the populace. The book's remarkable beauty lies in its simplicity of language and the profoundness of thought, capable of evoking

strong emotions and insights in the average reader. Ghosh opens the narrative by vividly describing the apocalyptic vision resulting from the nuclear explosion tested at the Pokhran site on May 11, 1998, which he personally visited three months later. A stark irony highlighted is the dissemination of dust from the test site across the country, symbolically inviting the entire nation to share in the supposed glow of the blasts. However, while some proponents championed the blasts and even contemplated constructing a sacred monument at the site for pilgrims to visit, the reality in the vicinity of the nuclear site was far from celebratory. Contrary to the envisioned glory, the people living around the test site weren't filled with joy and festivity; instead, they experienced a sense of sadness and gloominess. The specter of cancer, which was previously unheard of in the area, now haunted their fears. The looming threat of cancer emerged as a grim concern, especially for the inhabitants of Khetoloi, a village merely six kilometers from the test site. The more potent jolt experienced in 1998, particularly by the people of this village, amplified the anxieties and fears stemming from the potential health repercussions following the nuclear tests, reminiscent of the aftermath of the 1974 nuclear blast conducted on the same site.

Ghosh's vivid portrayal captures the stark contrast between the perceived grandeur of the nuclear tests and the grim realities faced by the local communities affected by the adverse consequences, notably the looming health hazards and the potential escalation of such risks. "Countdown" emerges not only as a travelogue but also as a splendid piece of artistic expression intricately woven into the fabric of aestheticism. It transcends mere lines and statements, offering fresh, vivid images, symbols, and phrases that enthrall the genuine

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reader's attention. The novel's beauty lies in its ability to artistically portray the horrendous and horrifying dismay caused by nuclear explosions. Within its narrative, "Countdown" vividly illustrates the fatal consequences of nuclearization, serving as a stark warning that unleashing such power would bring death and disaster, potentially undermining the very foundations of prosperity, power, and civilization. Through its storytelling, the book exposes various malpractices among political leaders in both India and Pakistan, advocating for their eradication to pave the way for swift and peaceful international integration.

Amidst the diverse religious beliefs, rituals, and practices, "Countdown" underscores a universal truth held by all religions—the supreme power in the form of love. It emphasizes that while religions may differ immensely on the surface, at their core, they advocate for the universal value of love. The narrative highlights the destructive nature of war and asserts that the monstrous cycle of warfare cannot be subdued through further violence. Instead, it posits that the path to vanquishing the monster of war lies in embracing love, harmony, and peace. By weaving together these multifaceted themes of nuclear devastation, political accountability, and the universal message of love and peace, "Countdown" offers profound insights into the complexities of human existence. It stands as a poignant reminder of the imperative need for global unity, empathy, and a collective pursuit of peace to overcome the looming threats posed by nuclear proliferation and conflicts.

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