



A STUDY OF TREATMENT OF HISTORY IN INDIAN  
ENGLISH FICTION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH

THESES  
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
**Doctor of Philosophy**  
IN  
ENGLISH

BY

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T8138

*Dedicated*

*To My Kids*

*With So Much Love...*

## *Declaration*

I, Ms. Nazia Hasan hereby declare that the thesis entitled "*A Study of treatment of history in Indian English fiction with special reference to the select novels of Amitav Ghosh*", submitted to Aligarh Muslim University is an original and independent work done by myself. This is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* in English Literature.

The present research work, either in part or full, has not previously formed a basis for award of any degree/association/fellowship or other similar title.

  
(Nazia Hasan.)

Place: *Aligarh* .

Date: *05. 10. 2010*

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More silent than my shadow, I pass through the covetous multitude.  
...I walk slowly, like one who comes so far away he doesn't expect to arrive.

- Jorge Luis Borges

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## *Preface*

I still remember the pleasure of reading *The Shadow Lines* as an undergraduate student in 1999. It was read in sequel to Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* : for the assurance of the new found confidence I experienced towards Indian writings in English. These books evoked the feeling of 'oh yes, I am finally home!'

It also meant a lot to me that the Indian fiction had come of age and English as native language had evolved to its full! So, instead of slurping over the soups, pies, cakes and ale only; one could now also relish the life-taking whiff of '*macher jhol*' (fish curry), the sweet thud of *shondesh* on one's tongue and the aroma of the wonderfully sumptuous *Biryani*, beside the pungency of mustard and curry leaves in oil- through books and novels! Amitav Ghosh's novels became a constant companion to me with a unique window to relieve the pain and agony of life torn between a protected childhood and an uncertain future, rushing along the fast eluding pace of the present! I remember a very old advice regarding choosing of a favourite author as one chooses an ideal. Perhaps, Amitav Ghosh gradually did acquire that position; it's a real privilege to express my feelings for his wonderful oeuvre of works through this PhD thesis.

Most of us begin with the disadvantage of ignorance when studying something new which in turn becomes the very source of knowledge, pleasure and power. This work is valuable and precious to me for the same. It made me capable of reviewing so much of history, knowing so much of Anthropology, Sociology, Philosophy and sciences. Language, culture, art and fiction are now the most valuable aspects of life for me. They have gained a new meaning and fresher essence.

The present work consists of ten chapters beginning with *Introduction* and culminating in *Conclusion*. The second chapter is an overview; survey of the Indian fiction in English dealing with history as theme, background or technique. It is divided in two parts- A and B for convenience, with separate set of references. The survey does not promise to stick to the time of publication always. At times the thematic concern or style of the author has also guided the work to pick up the novels. The rest of the chapters, seven in number, take up novels of the author Amitav Ghosh, arranged in the usual chronological order. The references and endnotes are given chapter-wise towards the end.

The Bibliography is divided in three sections- the Primary works of the author consists of both fiction and non-fiction collections given chronologically. The secondary sources is made up of the numerous essays and articles penned by Amitav Ghosh, but excluding those already available in his Prose pieces' anthology. The last section is devoted to the *General Bibliography* of books, internet articles, journals and essays which profusely helped analyse, substantiate and assimilate my work.

The present compilation may at times read 'coloured', bent upon Europe and Britain-bashing. Perhaps this is in line with the postmodern trend of tossing away the 'objective point of view'. Or may be I could not resist the pressure of time or as it is – it was the demand of the revision job!

### ***Awards and Honours to the author Amitav Ghosh***

- *The Circle of Reason* won the Prix Médicis étranger, France.
- *The Shadow Lines* won the Sahitya Akademi Award & the Ananda Puraskar, India.
- *The Calcutta Chromosome* won the Arthur C. Clarke Award, 1997.
- *The Glass Palace* won the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards, 2001.
- *The Hungry Tide* won the Hutch Crossword Book Award, 2006.
- *The Grinzane Cavour Award* in Turin, Italy, 2007.
- *Sea of Poppies* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, 2008.
- *Sea of Poppies* was the co-winner of the Vodafone Crossword Book Award, 2009.
- Co-winner of the Dan David Prize, 2010.
- Elected a Fellow of the *Royal Society of Literature*, 2009.
- *Padma Shri Samman*, Government of India, 2007.

### ***Abbreviations used.***

<i>The Circle of Reason</i>	-	<i>COR</i>
<i>The Shadow Lines</i>	-	<i>TSL</i>
<i>In an Antique Land</i>	-	<i>IAAL</i>
<i>The Calcutta Chromosome</i>	-	<i>TCC</i>
<i>The Glass Palace</i>	-	<i>TGP</i>
<i>The Hungry Tide</i>	-	<i>THT</i>
<i>Sea of Poppies</i>	-	<i>SOP</i>



The charm of a story starting with the beginning still weaves a spell, capable of matching the thrill of the modern tales with sudden and unannounced junctures. That's how this work plans to proceed- with the initiation point. Though, the postmodernists will be bogged with the question in consternation, where do you find the 'start and end' landmarks? These are the most debatable assumptions. Oh yes, one has to assume many things... and that is what makes the crux of history: a nodal point of this research work. This idea in turn reinforces the new faith in 'incredulity' towards given facts.

So, when the Europeans finally hit upon the discovery of India, as they did on 'radium'<sup>1</sup> and a number of other precious things- they found India to be history-less. They also played the assumption game and propagated the generalized idea that the whole of the Eastern world hangs to a void without any recorded beginning, and roots! It had no 'skeletal chronology'<sup>2</sup> like the very inherent manner of depending on the linear time frame of the Europeans. Thus, came the most benevolent notion of giving India a history, a memory and a base, in the minds of these discoverers. Frantz Fanon has combated with this misinterpretation quite strongly in saying that the so called history-less-ness on the part of the colonized is a "colonial situation, maintained to further alienate the colonized from his past, traditional community and roots"<sup>3</sup>. Whereas Claude Levi de Strauss condemns traditional narrative historiography as "nothing, but the myth of Western and specially modern, bourgeois, industrial and imperialistic societies"<sup>4</sup>.

Both views hold convincing substance that on the one hand, history writing has been an arbitrary and subjective process in which one could promote or demote somebody as per the whims. On the other hand, one could accept or defy a given fact in a personal manner as the Westerners tried to do with people, societies and histories of other regions. If a sense of belonging to a place and its past renders a sense of identity and a confidence of psychological survival, the colonizers tried to tear that very strength through racialism and the policy of differentiation. Historicism was one major point upon which Colonialism drew its power for centuries.

Ngugi Wa Thiong explained this as an attempt “to turn us in to societies without heads...it is not an accident. It is an ideology of control through divide and rule, obscurantism, a weakening of resistance through a weakening of a sense of who we are...”<sup>5</sup>. It tried to make us hollow from inside and baseless where as they cared for their roots and pasts to the level of “counting the dust”<sup>6</sup> of time. That’s why people like Ashis Nandy argued history to be inseparable from its imperialist origins, which necessarily “imposes the imperialists’ understanding of people’s past over their own”<sup>7</sup>. The traditional historical narratives confined the zigzag of time in linear pathways, privileging state building over other forms of human connection. It told a story of progress that provincialized the East, inevitably leaving Asians or Africans on the periphery, which failed some crucial characteristics necessary to attain what is otherwise universal. Amitav Ghosh tries to defy this perfectly circulated notion by standing against the de-historicizing efforts of colonial and neo-colonial authorities. He attempts at narrative reintegration in all his novels which open a fulcrum of a variety of themes chosen from our forgotten past.

The authors taken in this present work show an awareness of the need to know one’s past. The particular focus on Amitav Ghosh’s novels reveals an India heavily burdened with its past, unlike the previous myths. But they also do an additional job of ‘provincializing Europe’<sup>8</sup> which almost jolts us to a new Europe. It is shorn clear of many extra roots, shining bare in the light of truth, (if it lingers anyhow) after the ‘borrowed and fostered’ history of its own is discarded. Amitav Ghosh’s *In An Antique Land* can be distinctly read in that light. This counter move has also been related with the new notion of reducing everything to fiction be it history, science or any reality. So if Indian history was a fiction or myth to the realistic Westerners, Ghosh and his contemporaries have harked back to the same platform. Now, their finger points to the opposite region in the blank.

While this tussle of proving oneself against the other goes on, one can sum up the present research endeavour in Louis Montrose’s terms that this is an effort to grasp simultaneously “the historicity of text and the textuality of history”<sup>9</sup>. This thesis is very much in sync with 1980s concept of reading texts more as material products of specific historical conditions and circumstances rather than just being pure and apolitical artifacts. Amitav Ghosh makes an important asset of this generation who

took to fiction as debutant in 1986, but turned out to be a serious and sincere contributor to re-evaluation of a forgotten legacy. He proves through his writings that we create history as much as history creates us.

This work looks at Amitav Ghosh's novels challenging the idea of literature as a sphere of autonomous aesthetic forms, discordant with other kinds of cultural practice. On the one hand, these novels trace out the textual/fictional elements out of various histories, picking up the discontinuities and gaps in their so far revered, sacred tomes. At the same time, they also assert the new historical idea that "there is no seamless, over arching unity in any history"<sup>10</sup>. One can claim that after reading Ghosh, one will never read history or record of any sort in the same way again!

We find history to be a narrative construction involving a dialectical relationship of past and present concerns, chosen arbitrarily. We are exposed to the shifting and contradictory nature of representations of histories being numerous. Amitav Ghosh's penchant for this aspect reaches a celebratory point, as he reads all the historical episodes taken in his fictions against the grain. He's that curious child who always wants to turn the coin, the frame, the table upside down to look on both sides. It leads him to shedding light upon many of unknown or even hidden journeys of time. He brings out the multiple and contradictory material practices embedding these historical events. Amitav Ghosh's creations as arte-facts do not go outside historical periphery, rather they reshape history anew- the one known, read, taught and exchanged everywhere. He comes out clean on the point that each of the literary, cultural products has the capacity to intervene in the process of history with sensible ramifications.

The first chapter of this work is a sort of over view, an aerial one of all those fictional compositions taking any aspect of history as theme or background. It particularly deals with the first part of the proposed topic – *treatment of history in Indian English fiction*. Though critics have expressed skepticism regarding the term "Indian" English literature for the reason Aijaz Ahmad elucidated in the following words:

"One of the arguments ... is that we can not posit a theoretical unity or coherence of an Indian literature by assembling its history in terms of adjacent but discrete histories of India's major language literatures. A national literature, in other words, has to be more than the sum of its regional constituent parts..."<sup>11</sup>.

But without going in to vagaries of such conflicting views, this thesis discusses writers, works and the movement of 1900s representing the theoretical stand point of the thesis. Thus, it might be leaving upon some of the towering figures while giving space to some of the not so well known authors, pursuing the historical point. The present work doesn't claim to trace down a thorough development of historical novels in Indian English Literature. But it tries to touch upon majority of known novels, for depicting history or raising some of the important questions regarding colonialism, nation and its progress with time. Some of them might seem only costumary or Byronic for holding the historical charm. But this furrowing process did come across some genuine pieces for treating past life in some innovative manner and grasping history more concretely than others. They treated history much more than just a "repertory of history"<sup>12</sup>. They used the past in their novels consciously, knowing the significance of telling truths and making readers aware of the lessons of history. They knew the value of the past - the movements, revolutions, interaction of social and economic development and the perennial class struggle. They are significant for the purpose of establishing the natural link between the past and the present instead of dumping it as a gone matter.

Art became historical in essence and instinct in places like the Indian subcontinent much earlier and radically than it reached more advanced countries of the West. For these nations experienced emotionally charged country wide upheavals and movements together by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – thanks to the European and British colonialism. Anti-colonial upsurge, anti-imperialism rebellions under people like Gandhi, Jinnah, Bose and Suu Kyi made history a mass experience for the first time. In the Western terms, all of a sudden the fervor of the French revolution caught these docile places living an assumingly silent life for centuries.

This changed form of literature shows history affecting the common life of the masses treated so far as 'natural occurrence'<sup>13</sup>. India underwent many more social and psychological upheavals during 1857 to 1947 than ever before, as the documented history tracks time. The political and social movements related to 1947 became a ground of regeneration and reaction which inevitably conveyed a sense and experience of history to the widely sprawled out masses. They experienced India as their own country. Literature and all art forms, Hindi and Urdu poetry and fiction

responded to these changes spontaneously. Rahi Masoom Reza's *Aadha Gaon*, Rajendra Singh Bedi's *Jhoota Sach*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, *Aag Ka Dariya* by Qurraitulain Hyder, *Basti* by Intizar Hussain, *Udaas Naslein* by Abdullah Hussain, *Epar Ganga- Opar Ganga* by Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Zindaginama* by Krishan Sobti – all make great examples of historical fiction.

These literary works show the national idea becoming a privilege of the broadest multitudes. It provided concrete possibilities for men and women to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned. They found the march of time to be entangling with their daily lives and immediate concerns, deeply affecting them in so many ways. If *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* show the strong sweep of British colonialism on common lives, how its growing power came upon them with the strength of a tornado to cause a 'Long March'<sup>14</sup>, the resultant and inevitable migrations caused by it also portray how the army battles no longer remained frozen in isolation. They rather invaded the family territories, making them to run out for life outside the precincts of their safe house boundaries.

The other cluster, *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tides* show the unique nature of Indian fate which unfurled the flag of Independence accompanied with a bloodbath on borders. History has been witness to this feature, the solution of one catastrophe giving birth to another conflict. Aijaz Ahmad's observation fits appropriately to the views presented by Ghosh in his novels –

"...Our nationalism... was a nationalism of mourning, a form of valediction for what we witnessed was not only the British policy of 'divide and rule', ... but our own willingness to break up our civilizational unity, to kill our neighbours, to forgo that civic ethos, that moral bond with each other, without which human community is impossible"<sup>15</sup>.

All three of these novels give us a feel of the nightmarish 'Coming and Going'<sup>16</sup> across the new blood-spangled nations. The borders "burst and... dissolved"<sup>17</sup> under the flood of willing migrants, forced out refugees, squatting outcasts. Altogether, they made an inescapably ugly part of the celebrated nationalistic idea, forming the crux of these novels. They all vibrate alive with the narratives of communal riots making a common feature of these countries divided on the basis of language and religion. There is a strange love-hate relationship among the three new nations, in which people get killed for riots and burning villages across the border. Amitav

Ghosh calls these lives to be in a 'mirror-image'<sup>18</sup> situation where Calcutta is closer to Khulna (Bangladesh) than to Delhi.

Very few of us will be knowing about the Sunderban islands' role during this period of 1947- 1971 or the way Partition led to creation of small and silent villages on these islands. Because these were stolen lives, spent in memory of past, hanging and sticking to the remnants of their cultures and places. Lalpukur in *Circle of Reason*, Lusibari in *The Hungry Tide* are such places which were always under the government's staring eyes for being the laps of 'illegitimate children' of torn-out nations. They chose to inhabit the no-man's land but even those turned out to be borrowed lives.

Thus, if histories give us well-etched and newly chiselled nations' maps and the successful tales of heroic fights, Amitav Ghosh's novels present something different. He brings out the "ghost stories... haunting"<sup>19</sup> the known tales. He goes for the alternative histories revealing an almost alternative world. The Lahore-Punjab and Sindh borders have been very much in limelight for the Partition tragedy, in all kinds of writings but the Bengal Partition which was as tremendously dislocating as the previous one, did not get much coverage. That's why Niaz Zamani bemoaned that before Ghosh, there was no significant novel writer in English taking 'the voices of Bengal'<sup>20</sup> to join the mainstream voices.

Amitav Ghosh's writings can be categorized both as postmodern and post-colonial as he believes in taking a path away from the beaten one. In doing so, the revelations present him 'unmasking authority' of every kind. His criticism doesn't play blame-game with the outsiders and Europeans only. He shows how *La mission civilisatrice* was a policy of racial difference. But he also finds out for us the way national government too tries to blind citizens, keeping them in dark about many of the significant facts or how it plays a dictatorship in the garb of democracy. Ghosh peeps into the omitted part of the national as well as Western history, he tries to reconstruct the distorted section of the historical jigsaw- once the formal selection of facts is decided to be portrayed for the public. He goes for something that his contemporary Shashi Tharoor also chose to regard reverentially - "For every story ... every perception... there are a hundred equally valid alternatives..."<sup>21</sup>.

Ghosh takes the challenging task of highlighting the selectivity, omissions and emphasis involved in historicization and its narrativization. Thus, he is a true post-modernist who has discarded the 19<sup>th</sup> Century credibility to adopt the humane practice of query and curiosity. His novels read like exposing one's past not only to a new set of readers, but also to an older one once again who seem to have forgotten half of what they knew. The magic of his writings lies not only in couching the facts imaginatively, but also in reminding us of those unfortunate, forgotten parts. His books imply a rejection of closed historiographies with the idea that historians alone are best able to produce 'real' history. He rather presents a fresh perspective of listening to different voices and histories from below against directive interpretation, fiction is given the topmost position for that!

Ghosh comes forward with a strong note of dissent towards the ideal policy of legitimation practiced by prototype authorities. He shows how it was a method of eradicating the greatest historical events from annals of an epoch. The Khulna incident in *The Shadow Lines*, the Morichjhanpi massacre in *The Hungry Tides*, the opium conspiracy of the British colonial-merchants in *Sea of Poppies* are some obvious evidences of ascertaining the essentially pseudo-historical nature of official history. Amitav Ghosh counters this mendacious empiricism with an extra-ordinary powerful influence, creating a ground for history to be rewritten afresh. Through his creative writings, Ghosh has ever been campaigning for restraining from the neutral attitude of quiescence and insensibility. In fact, he talks of avoiding the 'aesthetic of indifference' in one of his essays regarding open violence witnessed by old and young all in 1984. His novels betray this trend by reacting with the intention of resolving matters. He opines: "It is when we think of the world, the aesthetic of indifference might bring into being that we recognize the urgency of remembering the stories we have not written"<sup>22</sup>.

It is interesting to note while many authors withdrew into history as protest against the baseness and triviality, against the stupidity and depravity of the bourgeois class of their times, writers like Ghosh go back to the pasts not to escape from the imprisonment of the present periods. It is but to see history as a book of lessons which can be referred to see the experiments and the resultant experiences. Yet history repeats itself because it has been accepted to be a silent, imperceptible and stagnant

monument with no scope of alteration. Whereas truth demands to differ openly. Ghosh and his peers pay heed to this fastidious claim only. This initiates with the ever greater disbelief in the possibility to know social or any reality and hence also history completely. This particular genre of fiction establishes that history is very alive and humanity benefits by remembering it to nurture a healthier present.

It is quite note worthy that Amitav Ghosh doesn't re-narrate the history completely; he rather picks up the essence of those events. The author attempts to re-awaken those past realities poetically. He makes us re-experience the social, psychological and human motives which led the men and women of that time to think, feel and act just as they did. For this, he doesn't need to stick to the enormous edifices only. Rather his creativity is cultivated out of those apparently insignificant happenings, smaller relationships and circumstances which might have been marginal or just as footnotes of the grand history.

The inglorious Bomma of *In An Antique Land*, Dolly the Queen's maid in *The Glass Palace*, the child narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, the mediocre and prosaic Alu in *Circle of Reason*, the anonymous jetty driver Horen Da in *The Hungry Tides*, the outcaste Kalua with the impoverished widow Deeti in *Sea of Poppies*, the illiterate, handicapped half-witted Lakhan in *The Calcutta Chromosomes*- all come from the edges of the grand and ostentatious historical records. Ghosh's greatness lies in his capacity to give living human embodiment to such characters and causes. He makes them superbly tangible through presentation of both, the essential and superficial props to make the tale as genuine as it comes. Thus, we have an Elokeshi disclosing the hidden taste for sins of not only a high caste Haldar patriarch. She also reveals the next to holy, White European colonel who had memorable nights shared with this unsophisticated, low-born, black Indian nautch girl during the high imperialism days.

Jeevan Bhai Patel in *Circle of Reason*, Khalil the rickshaw puller in *The Shadow Lines*, the ignoramus rustic Mangla in *The Calcutta Chromosome* – all play such important roles in the making or hatching of evidential historical pieces. These minor characters, along with the other known figures provide a perfect frame for Ghosh's way of presenting the totality of certain transitional stages of history. They all hook our interest as human beings first and then as parts of the historical jigsaw. This is a



rare calibre that Ghosh uses as his magic wand to lend that essential human sensitivity to the readers- which transforms us into the concerned historical period.

Besides the human aspect, Amitav Ghosh also preens up the social, cultural and customary details of the period and juncture chosen in his fictions. Thus, the culture of *jatra* shows with Sonali Das' mother, the state of poets like Phulboni, the significance of the Ilish/Hilsa fish, a working girl in a middle class household of Bengal in *The Calcutta Chromosome*; the peregrinations of a Sari wearing style (like the celebrated Wolsey's hat<sup>23</sup>), an Indian's induction in the British army, the overwhelming effect of a tour to the Western world for a mourning and lonely widow Uma in *The Glass Palace*; the illegal human traffic across the Indian ocean in *Circle of Reason*; a fry pan or a wedding trousseau transported from Egypt to India in *In An Antique Land*; or even a solitary journey of an uninstructed fisherman in *The Hungry Tide* – these are all miniature histories but essentially crucial for the creation of the concerned ambiance and atmosphere of a particular time and place.

Thus, Amitav Ghosh takes care of not only the time but of the place also. which plays an equally important role in the formation and presentation of the whole historical scenario. They make part of that peculiar set of petty “pegs ... on which to hang a history”<sup>24</sup>. These details of the little objects and customs may provide us the fingerprints of our predecessors. They surround us covertly and casually. Raja Rao, another celebrated writer has hinted at in his remarkable novel *Kanthapura*. This novel evokes the Civil Disobedience movement preceding Indian Independence, the *Preface* begins with the following words, straight from the author's heart:

“There is no village in India, however...that has not a ...legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village – Rama might have rested under this *pipal* tree, Sita might have dried her clothes... or the Mahatma himself ...might have slept in this hut. In this way, the past mingles with the present... to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals...”<sup>25</sup>.

This impression of a close and warm familiarity with the life of people paves a precondition for real literary invention. This kind of reliance on imaginative and creative faculty has been dismissed by Doblin as rendering history to pure subjectivity, as he has said: “There's no difference between an ordinary and historical novel... (both) simultaneously botching and distorting the historical material”<sup>26</sup>.

But this is the reality of all histories. Literature has an edge for exhibiting the boldness of deviation through the licensed literary invention—a poet and novelist has the legitimate right to dispose freely of historical facts at will, maneuvering the character and situations deliberately to carve out the specific features, the particular characteristics of an historical epoch. So, if a historian makes use of history, by ‘botching’ and ‘distortion’, whereas a writer of fictions can’t do anything else but this. In fact, a literary writer should be appreciated more for the better garnishing- the “pulp” arrangement being so life like, and so real around “the skeleton of bare historical facts”; as interpreted Edward H. Carr<sup>27</sup>. Perhaps it won’t be an overestimation to say that such histories presented in fictions contend and exert in defense of human culture. They battle against the private and sanctified history, posing as a monument of pure facts. But that’s the next leg of Amitav Ghosh and his kin writers. The first achievement is this creation and manifestation of the chosen epoch with a successful characterization of people, their destinies and important social-human contents, their problems, concerns and movements.

With the ideal of presenting a close to life and reality history, Ghosh of course, indulges in the drama of class-difference and its repercussions. His works depict how human progress develops ever increasingly out of the inner conflict of social forces in history itself. Ghosh never declassifies his character in order to give a smooth picture of any place or society. He rather shows a fetish for entangling with the ruffled edges of such a group in which every man and woman stands his/her ground with all the accoutrements. It definitely leads to the tussle, the ‘us and them’ configuration- poor, rich and not so rich sects making the hierarchies of a given time. In the west, the French Revolution might have been a last decisive stage of this anathema. But with the additional part of caste – the Indian scenario has ever been a theatre of this struggle. Economy reigns as ruler of all human psyche and behavior. Ghosh is capable of giving each of his characters and events an individual complexion and identity with the help of his manner of treating them realistically. He plays a fine balance between originality and imagination while dealing with his historical tales.

Thus, the Boshaks of Bengal and common weavers of Lalpukur, or the idealistic science champion Balram Bose and empirically money-minded Bhudeb Roy could never see eye to eye in *Circle of Reason*. Alu’s socialistic-economic system could not

succeed for long in face of the sweeping power of the bourgeois class in Al Oued. While Ila remained an exotic in England of her dreams- living the life of a pauper with royal blood running inside in *The Shadow Lines*. Thamma with her middle class morals could never appreciate the high bred Ila's logic regarding her life style and choices. It was a class for which 'exams were more important than the life and death of a relative'<sup>28</sup>, or lack of good education always meandered towards the nightmare of working as ploughmen under the open sun, "being in close proximity to that blackness... the slugde..."<sup>29</sup>.

*The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, and *Sea of Poppies* are closely integrated with the class differences. They show human society to be based on the Marxian economic categories- as 'forms of existence and determinants of existence'<sup>30</sup>. The European scientist Farley in *The Calcutta Chromosome* could never conceive that illiterate, impoverished outcastes like Mangala or Lakhan could be of any help, rather a 'pointer'<sup>31</sup> for the research going on for malaria. Their minds and adaptability didn't match with their 'form of existence'.

Bomma's 'respectable'<sup>32</sup> presence at the margins of mainstream Arabic-Hindi historical connection stirs Amitav Ghosh, the upper middle class student to go on a scurry of research work, ending in *In An Antique Land*! While Dolly and Raj Kumar in *The Glass Palace*, Deeti, Kalua and Zakary in *Sea of Poppies*- all break the outrageous fetters off their class and caste, by embarking on the adventurous currents of life and history. They chose paths more independently in comparison to the exiled princesses, or the wife and kids of the Haldar zamindar, or the middle class Paulette with a hybrid genealogy.

Whereas *The Hungry Tide* is the most scathing critique of the class-war still continuing in ramparts of various Indian regions; in fact this war surpasses the national borders. It is a clash between the rich of the world desiring to preserve the exotic Sunderbans and its wild fauna in lieu of destroying the poor human inhabitants and encroachers of the same place. It's a fight between survival of the beastly beauty of the tigers against the poor immigrants living on the margins of the island and the history. There is no one to support them, every piece of land is being snatched from beneath their feet, hurling them helplessly in the mouth of death and anonymity.

This situation continues even today but these people get no mention anywhere even when media presents all those special reports about wild life preservation. They are just lost from the human history, about which Ghosh himself has observed that “history is notoriously not about the past...”<sup>33</sup>. It is not about the lost and gone matters, rather it persists in disguise even presently. Past is definitely the precondition to the present, and both are interlinked in more ways than we can conceive. But this kind of forgetting does recur in totalitarian times of governance. These societies are ‘busy in rewriting history themselves, regarding their palimpsest as acceptable only’<sup>34</sup> as analyzed by Christine Brooke Rose. Here Amitav Ghosh has done a better job than that of a historian who has defied the ‘state given grid to map history’<sup>35</sup>. He has once more proved that truths lie beyond the records, the breaking news items and the highlighted facts.

Amitav Ghosh continues his unique and extremely important critical observation of history and society in all his writings. At a time when literary composition tends to be an esoteric game, amidst the din of the vast problems now facing the world as a whole, he argues with great force for the essential changes of attitude required of honest intellectuals. He takes us closer to cultural and political whirlwinds of our present moment, whenever we are taken to the past of our nations and the world.

The most significant thing about Ghosh is that with these characteristics, he succeeds in re-awakening a period with all its human and emotional colours, radiating in their particular nuances and echoes. His portrayal of history depends very much on the felt relationship with the present which he is capable of evoking artfully by rising above mere allusions. This becomes possible by relearning of the past as a preceding time, in close relation with the present. It blossoms in his potential to give a poetic life to those social, historical and human farces which have shaped our present day as we experience it - in the course of a long process of evolution.

A living connection with the past is a necessary premise for such a treatment of history in which Ghosh excels. His manner regarding the factual aspect may lack the organic unity and a teleological rounding off. It is more so because of multiplicity and non-elitist conclusion being the new trade’s tricks in historiography. So, a canonized realism is an accepted illusion which novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Rushdie or Tharoor have radically rejected. The postcolonial writings in their particular manner

of treating history become one of the ways of subverting imperial myths. Slemon interprets it as foregrounding the fact that, “History is not a set of immovable past achievements, but a discourse - open... to reinterpretation”<sup>36</sup>.

Thus, historical literature as Ghosh indulges in, requires and exploits not only new territories of fact but also history itself as a verbal structure which Haydon white has analyzed to be ‘a narrative prose discourse’<sup>37</sup>. The fiction writer ‘uses’ these facts, arduously and technically discoursed, along with his imagination to make them comprehensive. This use of history thus topples down the standards of objectivity and impartiality pledged to, not only by the authors but also by the historians. This rather reinforces one of the truths regarding history that it is always approached arbitrarily. It can’t be a closed and linear inscription to be imposed on any society. In fact, Haydon White conveys that there are “many gaps, discontinuities, lacking casual connection between the events recorded in the texts”<sup>38</sup>. Novelists like Amitav Ghosh have testified it time and again, this irreducible and inexpugnable nature of historical interpretation through their novels. These historical fictions have shown a greater capacity to reveal the truths of a time which could not be known in any other way. Such creative works further verify the mythical notation regarding historiography as a true representation of past life in a linear relation between time and space. This was a perfectly circulated myth which was grasped and given roots everywhere throughout the world.

Works like *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* give this notion a show-down as to be imperfect, incomplete and less reliable than we have assumed. By the retention of incongruity, discordance, silences and contradictions, these narratives cast doubt on the very possibility of definitive historical construction. In some ways, novels of Ghosh fulfill another criterion of Postcolonial literature: they interrogate all the given and accepted discourses, be it the European or the very Indian ones. This kind of re-reading and re-writing of established historical and fictional record is a vital and inescapable task at the heart of the post-colonial intellectual enterprise. Ghosh’s writings no doubt, are very close to this aim of the latest movement.

Amitav Ghosh’s novels present the best exemplum of cross-fertilization across whatever lines scholars of History, Sociology, Science, and Anthropology use to mark their territory. This work doesn’t indulge in criticizing any of these fields as a whole

or even to pin down exactly what such field labels signify. But instead, it analyzes how literature amalgamates all by treating those blind spots which may help us in gaining new insights. In fact, fictions like *The Hungry Tide* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* extend a great influence in revival of interest in the colonial world, history and anthropology. Such wider intellectual currents have caused the most basic narratives and the most basic ways in which knowledge was configured to be questioned and analyzed anew. This new fermentation in literature has reinvigorated not only its own position but has caused whole social discourses into a whirlpool of changes to stand upright on stronger basis. These new challenges are meant for not only adding an Asian or African component to an atavistic Eurocentric curriculum. Rather they also revise the views of and about Europe, Asia and Africa and how they shaped each other over time. Amitav Ghosh's novels evoke the following idea expressed by Edward W. Said:

"The non-Western native was never supine or inert. There was always some form of active resistance and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out!"<sup>39</sup>.

This applies to the national situation of India also- as almost all the novels are ground in the regional and national discourses which go on to interconnect with the international ones. If the high class rulers and elites make authorities with certain sets of ideas, the poor and low class Indians are subjects with minds of their own!

The twenty first century is mostly showcased as one of a melting pot of races and languages; "as a cross road of peoples and ideas, one where all gods are tolerated"<sup>40</sup>. Critics like Umberto Eco, Jonathan Culler and others find the rights of the individual interpreters overstressed, in sight of ideas like 'texts as picnics' or readings as 'misreading'. But simultaneously, Amitav Ghosh finds the world in a "curious paradox... where the room for dissent has shrunk as the world has grown more free..."<sup>41</sup>. He finds this 'diminished space' alarming as every utterance begins to turn in on it. This anxiety stimulates people like him to value the 'need to recreate, expand and re-imagine the space' for an articulate, humane and creative dissent. So that the hideous vitality of all those forces which we have succeeded in knocking out from our past, does not re-emerge and flourish once again. The present should be a growth of and a progress from the past - that's the message of this work.

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*Part-A: Treatment of history in Indian English fiction: 1900-1970's*

The novel form in India was famously adopted from the West. But as it happens, in travelling East, it was highly enhanced by the Indian *Katha Saritsagar* and the Persio-Arabic traditions. It received a warm welcome and made a niche for itself quite speedily among the Indian elites, in its new and reinforced form. Bankim Chandra Chatterji reputedly made the first attempt to write an English novel, entitled *Rajmohun's Wife* in 1864. This novel didn't make waves for any account. Today it is regarded merely as 'a poor melodrama'<sup>1</sup>. But considering Chatterji's subsequent high stature in the Bengali literary world, Amitav Ghosh made a seemingly psychoanalytic study of this work. Ghosh found it 'clearly a rehearsal, a preparation for something else'<sup>2</sup> by the intellectual nationalist who once wrote:

"I cheerfully admit the intellectual superiority of Europe. I deny however... that intellectual superiority can enable the blind to see or the deaf to hear"<sup>3</sup>.

One thing that marks the advent of novel in India is its gift of realism to indigenous literature. We hardly ever had a share of so much life like rendering, as we got gradually from novels unfolding in various languages, besides English. If Europe alluded to the rise of the middle class a cause for the progress of the novel, the Indian social scenario beset with its struggle and fermentation of a consciousness in the making with the colonial delusion, reinforced the realistic strain of the novel. In this way, Indian English fiction adapted itself from the very beginning to a cause. Bakhtinian belief that 'culture is the site of social struggle'<sup>4</sup> fits aptly here, if the Indian fiction of the early twentieth century can be taken as an instance. The same sense of 'cause' makes *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao to be read as a postcolonial fiction though written very much in a colonial period, that is 1938.

The English fiction came as a means to fulfill the quest of an assertion of cultural integrity in India. This noble purpose tinted with adventure tempted the early writers like Rao, Narayan and Nirad C Chaudhury to excel in the language and the genre. Our

contemporary writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy claim to decolonize the language in order to regenerate a unique and exotic (not in the 'Said'ian sense) native culture of our own. As times change, challenges to man also alter – that is the crux of any history. The treatment of history in Indian English fiction also shows that differing, deferring and varying nature of life, and human attitude to it.

*The Journal of 48 hours of the year 1945* by Klyash Chander Dutt, published in 1835 could be taken as the earliest Indian attempt in English language fiction writing. This Journal consisted of some tales, revolving around the theme of freedom. A wish to defy the colonial oppression and the dream to be independent is quite strongly delineated in the tales. *The Journal of 1945* focuses on an imaginary revolt against the British rule a hundred years later. The revolt is unsuccessful, but the very theme of defiance and contention is significant, for the Bakhtinian 'resistance' is there. But if one takes note of the defeat on Indians' part, in the tales, the theory of discourse and ideology propounded by Michael Foucault would come to mind. Foucault takes the government or the state to be on a 'panoptic' surveillance<sup>5</sup>. The characteristic of a 'panoptic' state is that it maintains its supervision and authority not by physical force and intimidation but by its discursive practices. The state circulates its ideology throughout the body politic, which is more than just a way of speaking or writing. It is the whole 'mental set', the ideology which 'encloses the thinking of all members of a given society'<sup>6</sup>. This thought control, has been depicted very well in the novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* by George Orwell, in the tacit understanding encoded in the hushed call of 'Big Brother is watching you!'<sup>7</sup>. The same trick has played with Klyash C. Dutt in the *Journal*, which made him end his tale in defeat for the natives as against the all powerful Empire.

In another case, Shoshee Chander Dutt in *Republic of Orissa* (1845), dared to write about a democratic establishment by dethroning the British. But this fiction took the mould of fantasy and dream allegory used in English especially by Chaucer and Langland and by many Oriental poets commonly, as camouflage. The title *Republic of Orissa* also imparts significant information regarding the history of colonial India. India was divided in kingships; the feeling of one nation, one India came quite late. Though, as a subject, it was one whole India for the Colonizers. They also knew how

to exploit the divided loyalty of such regions and religions, which led to partitions in the long run.

The real challenge to the British hegemonic discourse in Indian fiction came full fledged only in the early decades of the twentieth century. Fiction was running parallel to the social and political developments in the country, with certain visionary sparks here and there. Meenakshi Mukherji has commented upon the splendid beginning of this century's renewed vigour in fiction. She says that even though the novel form of writing was taken by different languages at different times in India, almost "every where the first crop showed a preoccupation with historical romance"<sup>8</sup>. The national movement for political independence appears in all of the fiction and poetry composed at that time. It was not only Tagore who entreated for a country, "where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high..."<sup>9</sup>. It won't be an exaggeration to say that the long years of struggle and sacrifice have shaped and coloured every experience of modern India.

History proves that all the bad times have produced good art, hence it applies here too. Therefore, even after half a century of that 'tryst with destiny', the events, the feelings evoked, keep enchanting the present day writers. In *Midnight's Children* (1981), Saleem Sinai, the narrator gushes about the 1947 and succeeding events of "a nation which had never previously existed, was about to win its freedom..."<sup>10</sup>. No wonder, Rama Krishna must have reflected for long when saying, "Historicity is a part of human certainty- it makes man real..."<sup>11</sup>, in *The Serpent and the Rope* (1961) by Raja Rao.

The fiction produced in the 1920s onwards is essentially marked by a sense of search. It was a search for one's reality, origin, for one's historical roots and an identity. This introspective strain in the fiction of this time can be alluded to the Indian confrontation with the Eurocentric imperialism. It has been a common feature with all the colonized cultures and societies. One can trace the development of such fiction on the basis of their depiction of cultural confrontation too. Such fictions usually start at the level of history first when a clash of cultures takes place. The frictions lead to chaos and destruction of native ethnic societies.

*Kanthapura* (1938) in India and *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *One Man One Wife* (1959), *Arrow of God* (1964) in South Africa are instances of such novels. The native traditions dominate and dictate the literary form of such works- sounding full of anthropological details. Such novels concentrate more on situations than on characters. In the Indian critical scenario, Meenakshi Mukherji also elucidates the 1920's novels' bent towards history. She finds that the Indian novelists submerged in the colonial yoke "drew upon the past to explain the present"<sup>12</sup>. They used history to write 'narratives of resistance' to the experience of colonialism. *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao, in this context, comes as the best example. This novel is hailed as the seminal Indian English novel, which set out to subvert the colonizers' view of India. Rao confronted the Western notion that India lacked sense of history, when he said in his celebrated *Preface* of the novel itself:

"There's no village in India, however mean that has not a rich *Sthalapurana*, or legendary history, of its own... the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men... one such story... I have tried to tell"<sup>13</sup>.

Raja Rao, with *Kanthapura*, put the foundation stone of post modernism with a new historic twist. His exceptional technique of positing the past with the present has been highly appreciated and emulated ever since. Today Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong, Gunter Grass and Salman Rushdie are exploring and evolving what Rao had already capitalized on in his early writing career. Elucidating Hayden White, a new historicist, can clarify things further. She said, "...anyone who studies the past as an end in itself must appear to be either an antiquarian, fleeing from the problems of the present into a purely personal past, or a kind of cultural necrophile..."<sup>14</sup>. It won't be wrong to say that as past makes a better sense if read in the light of the present, the contemporary and the topical are also dependent on the bygone time to be explained properly.

Edward H. Carr didn't over estimate histories when his observation assigned it the dual function of enabling man to understand the society of the past and to increase his mastery over the society of the present<sup>15</sup>. Fiction heads the same onus with a romantic indulgence, as the traditional division of these two disciplines claim. New historicists have a different tale to tell. There's however, no one set way of using history in

fiction, but as many as the authors are. Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* has rendered history in his own preferred manner. The events of Quit India movement and the Non-Cooperation movement with Gandhi as the unseen but much heard of leader, set the novel in an historical chronology. But the writing of his version of 'history' is from the common people's point of view. It undermines the official and/or colonizers' version of India. He also subverts the conventionally used narratological processes to write literature and history in the West.

Viney Kirpal writes that Rao's aesthetics of opposition- also made explicit in the *Preface*, "erases the hegemony of Western narrative strategies..."<sup>16</sup>. Instead of a linear, smooth run of the narrative, Rao introduced the mythic and cyclical time perspective. This passionate indigenous treatment checks the novel from being a sheer history recounted or a mere traditional epic too. The novel portraying the colonial India in the metonymic *Kanthapura* with its variegated, essential aspects becomes the magnum opus of the early Indian fiction.

The modern Indian history can never be complete without enumerating the role of Gandhi. His entry in Indian politics was a historical moment. Gandhi became the inspirational force to galvanize the whole freedom movement with a motive. Even an iconoclast like Salman Rushdie has praised Gandhi, saying that 'he and he alone was responsible for the transformation of the demand for independence into a nationwide movement'<sup>17</sup>. He mobilized every class of society against the imperialists. Like history, literature of the time also can not disregard Gandhi.

V.S Naipaul called it one's peril 'to ignore history'<sup>18</sup>, and when it is literature in concern, it captures even the faintest of flutters of time. Gandhi, of course, elicited a varied range of reverberation. Today, we have an almost distinctly classified Gandhi literature. *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) by R.K. Narayan is one such pioneering fictional work. The narrative of the novel takes an individual's view unlike Rao's whole community in *Kanthapura*. The theme touches Gandhism but the treatment is quite ironic and humorous. The older generation of the times represented by Gandhi and the new one by zealots like Sriram, his reluctance and incredulity towards the nonviolence 'mantra' make a realistic framework. Sriram could never become a completely devoted nationalist. His chasing of beautiful Bharati rather than Gandhi, is

another facet of Narayan's postmodernist bent. He did not create any national martyr in any of his novels. Even the Mahatma does not retain his haloed personality here which was rare in his times.

K.R.S. Iyengar has summed up this Gandhian phenomenon quite aptly that other novelists have exploited the magic of Gandhi's name and presence, "but seldom is the Gandhian role subsumed in the fiction as a whole. Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part: on the other hand, he's sure to turn the novel into a biography if he's given a major or central part"<sup>19</sup>. Narayan could sense this. His disinterested treatment of Mahatma and the times in this novel stands to a postmodern belief that the hush of reverence is inappropriate for literature. It didn't earn him a good applause in his own days, that he could maintain such a perfunctory attitude in an age of passions. But Narayan definitely added a new dimension to a small town love story by the characters' common allegiance to the Mahatma, in the background. That he sustains this unique distance in his craft in spite of being a prolific writer testifies to his objective vision of life.

V.S. Naipaul observed in *A Wounded Civilization* that Narayan was never a 'political' writer, not even in the explosive 1930's<sup>20</sup>. Narayan is best known for his Malgudi Stories rather. There he reinvents India, especially the Indian middle class and village life. If Rao created a cogent picture of colonial India in the metaphor of *Kanthapura*; Malgudi is the placid, independent, village India - "It is not down on any map; true places never are"<sup>21</sup>, but is easily recognizable to every worthy reader.

William Walsh believes that with the emergence of the 'Big Three'- Rao, Narayan and Anand<sup>22</sup>, 1930s became prime time when the Indians contributed very substantially to the novel. It was a genre peculiarly suited to their talents. On account of the surging nationalistic feelings, the content of the novel underwent profound change. Unlike other narratives, now the centre stage was beset with the contemporary battles and agitations. The novelists heeded to the events and changes clamouring attention of those times. After all, artists and poets feel the nerve of time with great profundity and alacrity. Because they are more than just participants in the game of life, they are observers and "spectators"<sup>23</sup> too.

Mulk Raj Anand was one such novelist closely associated with the social issues of that era. He viewed the national movement for freedom to be inalienably tied up with social reform. His belief that political sovereignty binds us with a promise and commitment for societal progress is apparent in his novels. The marginalized and the subjugated people his novels like *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936). He raised his voice for the need of upliftment of the low caste, women and the poor. He boldly depicted how the world was divided only between two religions on the earth – the poor and the rich. And being the earliest of the subaltern writers, he chose the untrodden path of shedding light on the lives of the downtrodden. As the Dickens of the twentieth century, Anand unveiled the hypocritical society of India through commoners like Bakha, Munno and Gauri- people doubly suppressed by not only colonialism but also by the upper castes and class differences. He has finely delineated such historical facts in his novels, realizing that the Brahmins, members of the highest caste, historically had not been subject to any law. Such castes' prejudices died hard for other sects of society whom they despised as 'Malecchas' and apartheid.

Anand wrote in *Apology for Heroism* that the less privileged population had been deliberately kept at a level of sub-humanity in view of which all of one's presumptions about theory of knowledge and philosophical doubt seemed to become a mockery and a series of private jokes. He was the true follower of Gandhi in denouncing the prevalent notions of caste- differences as stigma on Hinduism and India. He showed his allegiance in the garb of an author. Gandhi's calling the Untouchables as 'Harijans- people of god', implicitly reflects the magnitude of the differences nourished in the society. Rao's *Kanthapura* also gives a vivid picture of this orthodox proclivity. Anand's works present the history of the colonial days very closely and clearly. Because he was not delimited by the political themes as such, but took the grand national movement at the grass root, from a particular point. He depicts how social life was a struggle for power. His concern for their plight made him write how a lowborn had to bear oppression like an animal and decent life was a mere dream for all of them.

Anand's novel, *Sword and the Sickle* presents the common man's protest against the landlord's oppression. The young men's incredulity towards Gandhian method of

fighting for rights, mark the beginning of this tale. The nonviolent *Satyagrahis*, the armchair revolutionaries and the Communists- all joined together in a common cause. But they were beset with deterring circumstances, overcoming these early hitches and conflicting ideologies provided a comparatively convincing picture of the First World War times in India. Thematically it reinforces a basic historical truth: that in the end the oppressed inevitably fight back, no matter how dim or foggy the future may be.

The same revolutionary zeal which has the potential of a coup d'état, makes the theme of another novel by Anand- *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953). The novel takes account of a particular aspect of Indian independence: fate of the princely states. Thematically Anand shows a giant leap from the messiah of the poor lot to the privileged class, in this work. As if he has changed sides. However delving deep in the work, we again confront the same socially conscious and humanitarian face of Anand. Though the narrator does succeed in arousing sympathy for the dethroned, patrician nobility but Anand's tilt is towards a change in the society. It tries to convey that the free-loading, parasitic aristocracy has to go and it's time for the periphery to march towards the centre.

The declaration of independence came as a tragic turn of fate for this uppermost class of Indian social fabric. The Crown had recognized 500 and odd states after the revolt of 1857, which were viewed as Britain's fifth column in India, by the Congress and nationalists. These states' princes played the last servant for the British. Pramila Garg believes that the princely puppets provided "an excellent instrument of 'divide and rule policy' of the English ... in addition to be a check on the nationalist movement gripping India"<sup>24</sup>. Lord Mountbatten's advice to the princes to accord to either of the new nations after Partition (1947) came as a shocking breach of solemn trust. The congress entrusted the job of princely states to Sardar Patel as it goes in the annals of the time.

Shashi Tharoor in *The Great Indian Novel* has sensationalized this whole episode to a titillating and bawdy account. Manohar Malgaonkar has also dealt with the same subject in *The Prince* (1963). But what is distinctive about Anand's *Prince* is that it aims at overthrowing of all suppressing powers, even the indigenous ones besides the foreign colonialism. Therefore, we witness a poor hunter like Buta retorting back and



protesting to the prince's rebukes. He had become courageous enough to shout the slogans of 'Prajā Mandal Ki Jai' on the prince's face<sup>25</sup>, shattering his fantasy and illusion of being the king. He feels relegated to the fallen angel's position, whose paradise was built by exploitation of the poor and powerless. No wonder, Maharajah of Begwad commits suicide, and Victor, the protagonist of the novel reaches an asylum. He is tricked by Sardar Patel to sign the instrument of accession, losing his gold over his sand castle.

Anand has not been tender in treating this enigmatic part of history as some Colonialist English novelists of the same time have been. The *Island of Chamba* by Philip Woodruff, *Bhowani Junction* and *Thunder at Sunset* by John Master portray this plight of the princes very sympathetically. One of them, Philip Woodruff wrote- "...we withdrew our support and rescinded treaties a century old with less notice than a considerate employer would give a gardener"<sup>26</sup>. The words and the memories could even today make a princely progeny cry for that fatal change. But every successful struggle has demanded lives to risk. It was for all the empires to write back and sending all oppression off to the shore. India was freed.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is another major novelist writing on India and its variegated history in most of his novels. *So Many Hungers* (1947) deals with the effect of the World Wars on India, especially on the progress of the Quit India movement of 1940's and its resultant Bengal famine. The author assumes that the famine was not generated by the angry gods of the seven skies as the superstitious Indian belief went (for example: in *Guide* by R.K. Narayan). But the greed and negligence of self-made gods in power caused this drought. Bhattacharya believes that it was a man-made tragedy, taking a toll of millions of poor, innocent people; while the bourgeoisie and the statecraft were busy in hoarding money. The novel presents a true, dismal picture of that cruel year, 1943. The title's refrain of 'hunger' goes beyond the wretched, impoverished crowds' hunger for food. It also relates to the hunger for freedom, for power, for wealth and carnal pleasures. The treatment of history, both at the level of theme and background, in this novel is true to life. It's realistic to the extent that even the fiction seems but a mirror of the times. The writer's tone is wryly sarcastic.

In *He Who Rides a Tiger* too, Bhattacharya attacks the profiteers, calling them 'giant sharks'. They cause disturbance and inhuman penury among the masses. He writes of this sad and baffling event in terms of a plague taking the land in its grip. No fiction ever sounded so factual, recording the plague of hunger engulfing more than half of Indian population. This manner of writing made Harish Raizada call him the "novelist of social ferment"<sup>27</sup>. Bhattacharya reflects that political freedom alone cannot save or solve the common people's problems. Freedom is not the panacea for the ailing society of India, he feared – and how true was his prediction!

*A Goddess Named God* (1960) also offers a timely warning. He wrote about freedom as the beginning of the road, swarming with robbers. He didn't mince words in condemning all the people in authority who with the Declaration of freedom, got engaged in seizing wealth and power, duping commoners with promises, and selling gods for vested interests. We find him hinting towards neo-colonialism in which the native bourgeoisie and gentry readily changed their masters without a change of mentality. Perhaps nowhere we confront a tone so sarcastic and scathing while taking in the concerns the disappointment and the anxiety of a post-independence Indian. This presentation is shorn of all the pride one took in that dream of being independent. He's afraid that "... free India will die a hundred deaths!"<sup>28</sup>.

Bhawani Bhattacharya's novel *Shadow from Laddakh* (1966) expresses the concern for the country's health and progress. The historical Indo-China war of 1962 makes the background of the novel. This war incited more than just the fear of insecurity of a new born, free nation. The novel deals with the post independent dilemma of choice between the industrial and defense mode of development for the national progress. It was a conflict of tradition and modernity but it was also a time for change. Satyajit, a character expresses the anxiety of this dissention that "the challenge is not just between Gandhi *gram* and steel town. It is between two contrary thoughts, two contrary ways of life, the spinning wheel set against the steel mill!"<sup>29</sup>. The novel ends with the marriage of two opposing ideologies which might mean the Indian belief in a balanced combination of the two ideals - Gandhi and Nehru, as an answer to the problems facing the nation today.

*Shadow from Laddakh* can be included in the Gandhi- Nehru category of literature. But very few writings are so vivid and detailed about the much talked about relationship of these two leaders, harbouring on both nexus and conflict. This novel is very far from the fictionalized histories we are surrounded with, today. The writer has tried to maintain a realistic vein consciously. The book sounds like a tribute paid to the two nationalists of very differing ideologies. However, in the present day context when we read novels like *Midnight's Children* and *The Glass palace* –history presented in Bhattacharya's novels does not sound objective, but a little coloured by sycophancy.

*Inquilab* (1956) by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *Twilight in Delhi* and *Ocean of the Night* (1964) by Ahmad Ali and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hossain are some other works treating history in its varied aspects. But one feature is common in all of these novels – they compare and contrast the Muslim splendour of the past with their sordid and confused state of existence in 1930s. This did not end even after the much awaited independence of India.

K.A. Abbas' novel *Inquilab* throbs with the political atmosphere of the country; as the chapter headings forecast- 'The Darkening sky', 'The Storm Approaches', 'Thunder and Lightning' and 'The Storm Bursts'. It's difficult to escape the boom of the times depicted in these episodes- all alluding to the national mission for self sovereignty. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre turns the insouciant protagonist of the novel to a Gandhian. He chooses the sacrificial path of an ascetic nationalist as he quits much acclaimed administrative service, much loved Salmah and over comes the trauma of being revealed a bastard. These incidents only make him fiercer towards participating in the Salt March and the Bhagat Singh squad. His despair for the exploitation of the underprivileged, the untouchables, weaker sex and for communalism makes him a real hero. History is almost biographically traced here if name-dropping is taken as a feature; the literary credibility of the novel gets suspicious at some juncture for such true to history presentation.

The other major theme of the novel is Partition and its effect on the Muslim community. The events of 1947 shattered this community's illusion of British sympathy and rent the sycophants' veil. The colonizers real face was visible only

when the 'Divide and rule' policy had spread the poison of animosity in the land. The Muslims were torn between the two parts of their home land- no party, no leader could erode their fear which had invaded their psyche. Larry Collins and Dominique Lapier express this insecurity in *Freedom at Midnight*:

"...unintentionally Gandhi's Congress Party movement began to take in a Hindu tone and colour that aroused the Moslem suspicions...though no man was ever more tolerant, more genuinely free of any taint of religious prejudice than Gandhi..."<sup>30</sup>.

Though, the postmodern writers like Rushdie and Tharoor do not buy this 'unintentional' change as they have a different picture to present. They believe in teasing out every fibre of the fabric. They do it by telling the tale cogently in a factual manner or bombasting it all out in nonsensical but still meaningful 'magic realism'. Abbas' narrative is tied up with numerous events, but is still marked with lapses and breaks. Because the narrator is a Muslim, a Secular Muslim Indian- it's like being on the razor's edge. Anwar, the protagonist dreams for a utopian India- a complete India. But dreams are hard to be fulfilled, Utopias aren't accomplished, something gets stuck in between. We end up finding history a mystery in this novel because things don't turn up the way we wish or plan. The fact that religion marked vehicles kept exchanging passengers to India and Pakistan even after 1955- makes a fiasco of this secularism. The protagonist's staying on in India, even when his family deserted him for the new nation, displays a Gandhian streak. *Inquilab* is significant for the competent communication of the experience of living during the turmoil of 1920s.

Another novel that deliberates upon the uncertainty and confusion of the Muslim community faction during the event of Partitioning is *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hossain. The novel covers a period of twenty tumultuous years in the life of a young woman and a nation eager to make tryst with destiny. The writer does not attend to the jubilation of the Declaration of Independence as much as to the commotion and disturbance which invaded a large part of North Western India. The story traces the dilemma and the shock of the Muslims about Partition which made them flee for their life, deserting a country which had been their home and hearth for so long. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) depicts the same turmoil from the Sikh community's perspective.

Hossain's catharsis over the loss and chaos caused by that one single dividing line is not complete with this one novel. She comes back to the same overwhelming and bewildering event in *Phoenix Fled* (1953). The Indian history of the 1940's and onwards makes the backbone of her writings. She takes the official history along with her private accounts, realistic enough to sound almost autobiographical. She names all those people who had the capacity to influence the masses and change the political winds' direction without flinching. She finds the differences between Congress and the League - a fight for power and vested interests. It could take a path other than the Partition. Laila's coming back to India to visit her ancestral home becomes a symbol of the possible synthesis and confluence between the disputed divisions. But it also refers to the other side of the picture that the past is a conglomeration of sad and happy memories; they loom large over our present, and are difficult to be evaded.

*The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh, *The Red Box* by Farhana Sheikh and Intizar Hussain's *An Unwritten Epic* have some resembling shades of the *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Hossain. With travelling characters, events and effects, this novel can be taken as one of the earliest of the diaspora literature. One thing that is distinctive about this novel is the writer's attempt to bring in focus a female minority's psyche to the light of the day. There aren't many works with this concept. The inclusion of Hossain and Sidhwa in the present work may confound some for the technical difference of their nationality. But authors are not "border guards...and good writing assumes a frontier-less nation..." as said Rushdie<sup>31</sup>.

Quraitulain Hyder and Mukul Kesavan's novels also take the Muslim plight in concern. Ahmad Ali is too nostalgic in his *Twilight*. History is both socially and politically relevant in Attia Hossain's novel, starting with the foremost domestic hub of life. However in the present Indian scenario, when value of the term 'minority' is widely used for the election campaigns, it would be interesting to define it and study in the novel's context.

Homi K. Bhabha raises this issue of identity based on its countable position rather than any other, in an article entitled- "Minority maneuvers and Unsettled Negotiations". Bhabha doesn't discuss the ontological or epistemological imperative of an identity here but places it in the political locations and its benefit in the same

arena. The study proves that no doubt the very existence of minorities is a state construct. But even this presence is jeopardized as the distinction between minorities and majorities becomes blurred. The emergence of a post nationalist “minority defined by internal thresholds and external borders allows us to articulate a different understanding of those shibboleths of ‘universality’- freedom, emancipation, solidarity...”<sup>32</sup>. These catch words have been the signature of minority writing. It is not what minority is, but what minority does, or what is done in its name, which is of political and cultural significance. The present day Indian politics gives as good a picture of this minority- trick being played as it was in the first election conducted for a prospective independent and democratic India. Things were never so hued with double-entendres. History after all, is said to repeat itself.

The elections of 1952 also make an appearance in the placid, liberal, Jane Austinian set of the *A Suitable Boy* written in 1992 by Vikram Seth. This particular event has a bearing upon the lives of all the characters, with its various aspects. The novel shows the Nehruvian age starting with a bang, full of bubbling optimism, robust vitality and great expectations. At the same time, we can go back to Nirad C. Chaudhury’s autobiography discussing this period. He dismissed the whole political affair as the natives’ exercising power only as a “futile pursuit of the political concepts of the preceding foreign rulers, inefficient manipulation of the political machinery left by them and above all, an egregious aping of their arrogance and airs”<sup>33</sup>. The words sound as a surprising exemplum of the longest and deepest colonial hangover. The ideological and political changes do not take place overnight, after all. But in fact, the picture is graver and bleaker today even when we’ve a totally indigenous governing machinery to rely upon.

*A Time To Be Happy* (1957) by Nayantara Sahgal also takes a close look at the Indian aristocracy during the colonial days. The novel is almost like a first hand depiction of the upper class’ Anglicized life style. Their borrowed mannerism, dilemma and confusion about their true identity is beautifully represented by Sanad, the protagonist. Sanad enters the scene, a victim of “mimicry of the Centre... by the marginal peripheral and the uncanonized”<sup>34</sup>. He is colonized with a desire to be accepted, adopted and absorbed by the colonizers. Edward W. Said has also explained

this situation of a colonized to have a “conscious affiliation proceeding under the guise of filiation”<sup>35</sup>. But Sanad undergoes the moment of enlightenment when he feels over burdened by a life of artificial, assumed authority, by being in the nobility of the colonialists. He was disillusioned and realized his position to be that of a colonial puppet in a sophisticated garb. But he doesn't quit the British firm impulsively or jump into the fire of freedom struggle. Rather he tries to put forward a resistance from inside the colonial structure. It could be a more cunning attack on the trusted body of power, something like the INA revolution led by Subhash C. Bose. Sanad acquires a sense of fulfillment and belonging by learning Hindi, knowing the Indian traditions and adopting a Gandhian lifestyle.

The August disturbance in 1942, the Bengal famine and the great year 1947 are predominant in the novel. Sanad remains an observer without participating in the events actively, but he succeeds in etching out some impressions of the times. History in this novel is not repetitive but revelatory, if the chronology of the book is taken in concern. It is one of the significant works produced in the first decade of post independent India, reminiscing about the colonial days objectively.

Nayantara Sahgal's other novels like *Mistaken Identity* (1988), and *Rich Like Us* (1985) also deserve to be mentioned. They continue the chain of her preoccupation with nationalism and Indian history. Both the novels are set in an independent India and shed light on its power-hungry, ailing, orthodox and male-chauvinist systems. *Rich Like Us* takes the Emergency period of our history and reasons out the capture of absolute power by the then prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The powerful 'widow's' high handedness in changing things in a 'foul is fair, fair is foul'<sup>36</sup> manner is of course condemned. Sahgal resists being scathing as Rushdie or pathetic as Khushwant Singh's *Delhi* (1992), regarding this theme. The role of bureaucracy in enfeebling the social, political structure of the country is well- illustrated through Sonali's account here.

*Mistaken Identity* by Nayantara Sahgal revolves around the fermenting year 1929 with an U.S returned Indian as protagonist. Gandhi and his coterie, the idealist Congress leaders and the militant trade Union- all appear in the novel, confronting the British Empire in their own ways. The political events overlap with the social, religious

bustle of life. Very few could escape the political humdrum's influence in their personal lives in towns and cities of the times. This is finely depicted by the experiences of the main character.

The same pressure of time on the lives of the common people is represented in *Some Inner Fury* (1957) by Kamala Markandaya. The novel is essentially a love story set in the historical year 1942. It depicts how time plays the fate, and at times has even fatal effects on some. It also presents a variegated picture of lives intertwined with emotions, passions and motives with almost a psychoanalytic depth. For instance, Markandaya observes that Govind's repressed love for Premala, bound by orthodox devotion, could be expressed only in the violence of the political wrestle. Mira and Richard, representing different races and classes, try to come together by defying the conventional norms of the society. But they are crushed under the chariot of cruel time. They fall victim to the mob fury of the Quit India movement. Markandaya's femininity comes to the fore in her characterization. The treatment meted out to Premala, 'the barren' is a painful reminder of the unchanged Indian society, especially towards women.

Kamala Markandaya in *Some Inner Fury* also tries to read the psyche of the aristocratic, Oxford educated, Anglicised Indians, through the portrayal of Kit. He stands for that particular faction of society which bore a hostility, a vile abhorrence towards the native culture and civilization. In fact this attitude is generated by a sense of inferiority, caused by a long history of Colonization.

Albert Memmi in *The Coloniser and The Colonised* (1965) has discussed this very myth of mediocrity of the colonized. He observes that the 'colonizers circulated a myth of the native diffidence through various procedures like education, acculturation and other means'<sup>37</sup>. This manipulated discourse was internalized by the victim with some jolting doses. It was given to him through 'ideological apparatus' if we go back to Michael Foucault's theory about Discourse and Ideology. The empire builders aimed at effacing and erasing the past of the colonized, made him view himself through the mirror of the colonizers. The natives were thrown out of the process of making and preserving history. Nothing worked better than this historical catalepsy of the colonized. It helped the settlers in propagating and perpetuating the myth of their



racial superiority. This racism had become an ideology and a defence mechanism for them.

Kit in *Some Inner Fury*, like Sanad of Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time To Be Happy* is a prey of the conscious affiliation to the British. It makes him hate not only the obscure, orthodox systems but also the rich, glorious culture of his own country. The inferiority complex doesn't let him rest in peace- he keeps oscillating between ideas and living modes. Thus, Markandaya presents the influence of history on individuals in a very intense manner. That the past bears an irremediable effect on the present, and our roots go deeper than we know.

K. Nagarjan takes another important facet of the national movement in *The Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961). We know that the movement's only endeavour was not to get political emancipation but it was directed to every minor-major aspect of the Indian society. It shows that before the twentieth century, many did not have any sense of nationalism, of unity and of a collaborated strength which came from only a particular kind of togetherness and brotherhood. Different territories were ruled by royal heads and were in warring relationship with each other. All the settlers took great benefit of this weakness. Area, domain, class, community, caste- all of such factors had contributed in devitalizing the amalgamating beauty of India. Caste difference among the Hindu majority of the country was a big barrier for a united nationalism.

Nagarjan in *The Chronicles of Kedaram* explores this very issue, which made Gandhi a messiah of the masses. The novel revolves around an orthodox young man of a small town. He upholds Brahminism in a very boastful manner, as a symbol of all the godly blessings and worldly powers. He can be taken as an alter ego of Ramakrishna, the philosophical historian of Raja Rao's *The Serpent And the Rope* (1961). Kedaram believes in what Ramakrishna muses about ironically, the Brahmin-tag, that "... a Brahmin is devoted to Truth... and Brahmin is he who knows Brahman..."<sup>38</sup>. Kedaram could never imagine the people of other castes whom he classified as 'Malechhas' being at par with himself. He believed the endeavours of all the Socialists and new humanitarian leaders, to bring all under the umbrella of equality, as blasphemous and disgracing.

This novel's perspective is almost a foil to *Untouchable* (1935) of M.R. Anand. But both the novels intend to show a historical fact of our society- that we've had enough of oppressive and suppressing treatment meted out to the poor on the basis of the family and forefathers he belonged to. Nothing could be more unjust than this for a human being. *Kanthapura* also devotes some space to this aspect of our society. But there is an important, implicit message of *The Chronicles*. That it was not only the outsiders, the British who exploited and maltreated the naïve commoners; and all those who are in position of authority do the same.

Frantz Fanon's comment in *Black Skin, White Mask* sounds true here, although he made this observation in the Western context where caste differences are based on the colour of the skin:

"... For the White man, the Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not self- that is, the unidentifiable, the inassimilable..."<sup>39</sup>

Fanon's article makes an adequate summary of the position adopted by the enforcers of apartheid rule in their ideology. *The Chronicles* by Nagarjan also reflects the Brahmin monologic ideology reigning in India of the old days. This ideology also believed in seizing the very identity of all non-Brahmins, especially the *untouchables*. The narrator of the novel is dismayed when the congress compels the Travancore temples to open doors for everybody without caste bar. He saw the old, golden India crumbling down under the blasphemous weight of the vision of a society based on parity and egalitarianism. It also reflects various rigid practices continuing in our society. The quota and reservation- laws passed today carry that enigmatic part of history.

This kind of rigidity can be explained through Michael Bakhtin's theory of Monologism - "...monologism at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and responsibilities, another 'I' with equal rights ..." <sup>40</sup>. It is finalized and deaf to others' response - which should not be encouraged at any level. The Nagarjan novel also refers to the clashes between modernity and traditionalism, the colonizer and the colonized, the bureaucracy and the commoners, the Congress and the justice Party, Muslims and Hindus, and even

narrowing down to the two sects of Iyengars. Gandhi is taken as a symbol of intervening, uniting force. It advocates a possibility and need for a dialogic society – with tolerance for all, and rights for all. If such differences were nipped in the bud itself, perhaps we would not have to witness so many heart-wrenching events in our subcontinent. Partition of 1947 heads the list of such fateful occurrences.

Whenever we ponder over this event, a particular novel comes to mind by Khuswant Singh. This pathetic trauma is best picturized in his *Train To Pakistan* (1956). The name of this novel has long been a metaphor for Partition, perhaps this is the most well known Partition literature in English available today. Its pitiless precision in projecting the uprooted masses of humanity, mauled and thrown across the border, chased like a ghostly whirlwind; is exceptional. Ralph J. Crane<sup>41</sup> comments that ‘the novel does not contain many specific historical sign posts’, as *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal does, but still it captures the feeling of its age like none. The title of Khushwant’s novel itself conveys the fierceness and intensity of the terror and violence unleashed in the name of making a new nation. Amitav Ghosh also refers to the use/misuse of trains in inciting riots in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) that “the harbinger of every serious riot was that the trains from Pakistan were arriving packed with corpses...”<sup>42</sup>.

*Train to Pakistan* by Singh sheds light inter alia with the cracking and segmenting of India, the destiny of the common man. It is about all those people who were caught between the avaricious self-seeking politicians, fanatic religious leaders and their cohorts. The unseemly haste with which the Labour government in Britain decided to transfer power and to divide the country added to their plight. As if all of a sudden the British Empire became morally conscious to Gandhi’s demand that “Leave India alone, if not, leave India to its anarchy!”<sup>43</sup>. The British seemed to hear this and pay heed towards the urgency of the ‘voice of the masses’ in Gandhi. As if they forgot what Karl Marx, another prejudiced Westerner said about India and other British colonies that “they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented”<sup>44</sup>.

Singh’s fictional *Mano Majra* can be taken as a representative of thousands of those small villages which ‘dotted along’ the newly created border between India and Pakistan. This novel like Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) gives instances of official callousness

and indifference, of the judicial body in which we are supposed to repose our trust and safety. The Magistrate, Hukum Chand fails to summon courage and sensitivity to check the enraged villagers from incendiary activities. Iqbal, the Comrade also shows lack of understanding for the people, whom he was supposed to rescue from the shrewd, exploitative government. Singh shows his maturity of observation as he is able to elicit the fear and suspicion of the peasants in the words of the Muslim attendant- "Freedom is for the educated people, we were slaves... now we will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis..."<sup>45</sup>. Such complacent responses also prove that the villages were in peace, untouched by the belligerent national movement. The city people failed to convey the proper message of freedom to them, and rumours only infuriated the gullible people.

Khushwant Singh's novel stands as the strongest voice decrying the ghastly, terrifying events, and the very outrageous concept of the Partition itself. What is distinctive about this novel is that the writer at times seems to give glimpses of a wry, black humour. But it is not implied as much deliberately by him as it comes out of the anecdotes itself. Singh doesn't mince words, while describing the stigmatic event of Division of the country of the so revered and glorious a history to preserve its sanctity. The novel has the vitality of a micro-narrative entity, a subaltern writing for the future progeny because whatever happened half a century ago was disgraceful and unforgettable. Even if all the history alters its direction, the novel can stand the test of time because it gives glimpses of one of the most heinous faces of Partition of India.

*I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale* (1959) by Khushwant Singh is another historical portrait of India. Set in 1940s, this novel is not about partition but it definitely gives a vision of the illusions, misconceptions and greedy motives that fomented that fatal eventuality. *I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale* is a representative novel about a particular slice of pre-independence India. A section of the middle class which was too well placed with the British empire to ever imagine of a different India. Buta Singh, in the novel, is one product of such a sycophant, avaricious lineage. When the Quit India movement was giving the zealous masses and devoted leaders sleepless nights, Buta Singh- the Magistrate was waiting and dreaming for the honour of Knighthood by the government. His son Sher Singh, without any political idealism

pretends to be a nationalist, only to gain a smart package of an authoritative post in an independent India. The author sarcastically refers to him as the future prime minister of India. We can note the sigh of despair in the tone of Pramila Garg, a critic when she comments about Sher Singh and his farcical intentions- “what a poor breed of leaders will independent India have to lead her into progress and prosperity”<sup>46</sup>. How prophetic the words seem to be, seeing the present political scenario!

Khushwant Singh doesn't believe in simplifying the multidimensional Indian rebellion against the British colonialists. The Indian independence had an abstract, philosophical aspect to it – which could not attract the very practical imperialistic people. Buta is one of that herd.

*Delhi* (1992) by Singh is another novel discussing history of India. The novel is an ambitious chronicle, covering more than eight hundred years in the life of a city, which has been the heart of India in more than one sense. The author's note declares;

“History provided me with the Skeleton and I covered it with flesh and injected blood and a lot of seminal fluid ... it took me twenty five years to do so”<sup>47</sup>.

It is a history measured and spanned through the eyes of a writer who cares about its effect on the people. He doesn't just narrate the chronicles, it is a saga, an epic panorama of Indian life. The book marches through time, from the Mughal kings and poets down to Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. The British rule, freedom struggle, Independence-euphoria blemished by incidents like Emergency (1975) and others: all are evoked and presented in a humane manner.

Perhaps, history never made such an engrossing reading as in *Delhi*, because at times we have almost history book chapters like 'Baburnama', Mughal Empire, Meer Taqui Meer, Nadir Shah, Taimur, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Sepoy Mutiny and Sikh Mercenary embellished with the wit of a story teller. Another innovative technique of Singh is the creation of Bhagmati, a bisexual whore as the objective correlative of the city, Delhi. M. K. Naik says “It is a brilliant stroke of imagination foregrounding the plight of a city dominated and despoiled by tyrants of all sorts over the centuries”<sup>48</sup>.

Furthermore, the book presents a Sikh point of view which makes an interesting and instructive reading; it can be effectively read as a literary account of a historical text.

Singh's themes find a resonance in the realistic masterpiece, *Tamas* (1988) by Bhisam Sahni too. Though it keeps in line with official history, it also tries hard to convince the readers of the authenticity of the world chosen to be presented, by showing itself to be deeply rooted in history. *Tamas* gains points in representing the human temper and sensibility, its reaction towards animal slaughter which causes in turn an unprecedented human massacre. In the communally charged atmosphere of 1940s, animals were lent with a reinforced value based symbols. In turn, they became legitimate targets of revenge and retaliation. The revival of this practice unleashed the most abhorring period of Indian Partition. The deadly shadows of blood thirsty enmity, selfishness and violence hovered over an old civilization based upon brotherhood and syncretism. Sahni presents these drastic changes from fractional angles but these separate pieces synthesize in to a unified picture of the most memorable year in an Indian's life.

Manohar Malgaonkar's *The Devil's Wind* (1972) can be taken as one of the first Indian novels which tried to dismantle the Eurocentric and colonized history. It demystifies the colonial heroes, by choosing to decolonize the first national struggle for freedom of 1857. Post colonial theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri P. Spivak and Frantz Fanon have illustrated the fact that history has been an easy prey of manipulation. And a decolonized past is an essential asset of a free mind and nation. Malgaonkar tries to find out a fragment of that real past which has been submerged under layers of misinterpretations especially when handled by non-native writers and historians.

*The Wretched of the Earth* (1969) by Frantz Fanon emphasizes this aspect of history writing when at the disposal of an authoritative body- be that a majority community, a colonial entity or even a governmental representative. He says that historiography has a considerable and lasting influence. It has been fraught with lies and cheating because in the colonial days, it has been used more as a tool of oppression than a scholarly exercise. It results in 'de-historicising' and 'de-culturation' of the colonized or the minority, in their respective cases. The novel *Devil's Wind* by Malgaonkar

observes the process of de-historicising India as attempted by the British. But it could not be a very successful experiment as proved by the novel itself. The novel retains the reality of our Indian past.

In the present context, it is noteworthy that Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* reads the settler histories as narratives of demonstration and of power. Such history writers regarded the native versions as little more than a vague, anthropological detour. He further elucidates that Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the natives' brain of all form and content. "By a perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, distorts, disfigures and destroys it"<sup>49</sup>. Because, authorship gives the writer an authority and therefore historiography provides an opportunity for immeasurable narrative and ideological presumptions.

The Indian history too had been subjected to that colonizing procedure. For example: the British had dismissed the first Indian revolt of 1857 as the Sepoy Mutiny or the 'devil's wind'. It made the theme of many English novels of the time. In each of the novels, the Indians were of course, condemned for this 'foolery'. Nana Saheb, the dethroned heir of Peshwa Baji Rao II was denounced as the principal villain. On the other hand, the British civil and military officers were glorified as real heroes, strengthening the myth of imperialism. Their presentation was intended to prove the British ethnic superiority with deliberate romanticizing and exalting of the British heroes. *The Great White Hand* (1895) by J.E. Muddock, *A Hero of Lucknow* (1905) by Captain F.S Brereton and others can be cited for evidence.

This is what excites and challenges an Indian writer like Malgaonkar to write *The Devil's Wind* (1972). He subverts the myth of White superiority. He projects Nana Saheb as the protagonist of the novel with all his real heroic, revolting, dare devil spirit. Nana Saheb was not a soldier of the British, but still he incited and participated in the Sepoy Mutiny for reasons evident to all of us. The imposition of the baleful Doctrine of Lapse could be the first and foremost one. This doctrine was projected as a benevolent measure to redeem the natives. But Alana like other royal heirs could guess its repercussions. It was in effect, a crude and tyrannical instrument of confiscation, to devour the whole Indian wealth by diplomacy and deception. The

novel portrays the British as felons and cruel tricksters, duping the Indians for their gold and rights. But it doesn't hesitate in giving a just presentation of people like Major General Sir Hugh Wheeler and Sir Charles Hillersdon who practised basic human values, unlike the usual proud British gentry. It doesn't mean that the Indians got undue attention by the novel. *The Devil's Wind* is a creative integration of art and history.

Malgaonkar also shows this predominant historical strain in his other novels like *Distant Drum* (1972) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964). Both of these novels take Partition of 1947 as theme. Meenakshi Mukherji finds *The Bend in the Ganges* a very ambitious, great Indian novel which is panoramic in scope and epic in aspiration. It is crowded with events, beginning with Civil Disobedience movement (1930's) and ending in the post-Partition riots of Punjab.

A number of artists tried these historical events to mould their creative writings. *Inquilab*, *Train To Pakistan* (1956), *Azadi* (1975) are some of the novels which come to mind. But Malgaonkar continues the legacy of presenting a different ideology and consciousness. He takes the same set of incidents in *A Bend in the Ganges* to explore in to the human contexts of violence, disintegration and communal disharmony, with the theme of revenge. He also observes the Gandhian Philosophy as a foil to his characters' response to life. The Ram-Rahim club and its allegiance to the Gandhian theory of non-violence and integration, is the major point of discussion. But the pledges made at the club by Debi Dayal, Shafi Urmani and Gian Talwar get weakened and disquieting with advancing time. Their belief in true nationalism gives way to terrorism. Their reverence for the philosophy of non-violence finds a sad demise as Singh hammers this down that Gandhi is the enemy of Indian nationalist aspirations and non-violence is the philosophy of sheep, a creed for the coward. But all these extremists fall victim to their self-employed trap. All of these characters get killed as the much-awaited Independence unleashes an unprecedented bloodshed and carnage. The religious unity and harmony nurtured for so long, was reduced to a joke, a farce by the implementation of Partition. On the same day we were declared independent.

The novel's depiction of rabid turbulence doesn't mean that it discredits nonviolence or demonstrates it as ineffective. Rather it has a positive note similar to Hemingway's



*A Farewell to Arms*. Malgaonkar delves deep in the philosophy of nonviolence and comes out with a conclusion in this novel. That non-violence is not only the mode of sages' lives but it is the tool of the intrepid and of the strongest. Malgaonkar's *Cactus Country* (1992) is again grounded upon the sub-continental history, the Bangladesh Liberation movement. It discusses the whole trajectory of events leading to the 1971 Indo-Pak war. It evokes the tragedy of a sub-continent tarnished more than once in less than three decades.

Malgaonkar gives signs of a curious mind which is objective and incisive while treating Indian history in all of his novels. Nobody dared to explore, critique or estimate the Indian tradition of 'nonviolence' preached by Buddha, Asoka, Gandhi and others so sensibly. But Malgaonkar tried to find out its relevance in the present day life, and in the novels discussed above seems to be advocating for the devil, at times. He doesn't scruple in expressing his doubts or going against the grain. He does not accept the received history as it comes to him but reads it putting it in various spheres of life. He is a post-modernist writer by spirit.

Zeenat Fatehally's *Zohra* (1951), D.F. Karata's *We Never Die* (1944), K.S Venkataramani's *Kandan the Patriot* (1932), Raj Gill's *The Rape* and B. Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1959) are some other novels, dealing with different periods and events of the Indian history. *The Dark Dancer* can be noted here for the context of the tradition of non-violence which is upheld in pride. The characters Krishnan and Kamala remain staunch in their belief and practice of this legacy, even at the cost of their lives. The gory aspect of Partition is well presented in the novel with a struggle not only between different communities but the struggle inside oneself whether to succumb or retort with inflicting of wounds on others. This novel can stand in league with *A Bend in the Ganges* for the same reason. Reading these novels reminds one of Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1971), Khushwant Singh's *Train To Pakistan* (1956), K.S Duggal's *Twice Born Twice Dead* and various other works veering round the theme.

Perhaps no other historical event set so many artists to work together, simultaneously in our subcontinent. The heat of the fire, the odour of the blood and echoes of the painful cries emanating from the Partition reached far and wide. Expression of that anguish and grief came in various forms – *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal is one of that.

This novel begins with the personal account of Kanshi Ram for whom Freedom declaration was more of a threat than something desirable or worth laying lives for. The Declaration simply meant only one thing for him – the desertion of his homeland Sialkot, to bear all the ravages associated with the search of a safe place in the divided land. But it was not just the division of the land but the very heart of the people and the long history which got torn asunder as the progress of the novel shows.

Kanshi Ram's confusion about the registration of his identity, his language, imposition of Hindi on Urdu speaking people and vice versa- make a moving incident. This phenomenon is also given cognizance in novels like *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody* by Anita Desai, *When Freedom Came* by Sharf Muqaddam etc. One is reminded of Thamma's bewilderment in *The Shadow Lines* also (1988 by Amitav Ghosh), about 'going or coming' to her homeland - Dhaka from Calcutta after decades of independence and dislocation caused by it.

Chaman Nahal's novel *Azadi* also sheds light on the powerful peoples' indifference towards the poor and the powerless, and a crucial indifference mounting to the level of cruelty. The official attitude is cold and exploitative towards the refugees who 'became just so many numbers' for them. The superintendent of Police, Inayatullah Khan's personal revenge upon the people of the other community is another instance of authoritative barbarity. Ralph J. Crane comments about *Azadi* that by juxtaposing the fictional story with the historical sign posts, Nahal shows the consequences those political decisions had on the lives of the common man<sup>50</sup>. No doubt, Nahal has been able to produce one of the very vivid images of Indian Partition, delineating some very minute but fundamental aspects of it. He has been successful in giving a very impersonal critique of the times, making one of the very crucial and indispensable part of our history.

Nahal's passion for Indian history doesn't dissipate with *Azadi* but is reinforced further to make him write a trilogy on the same topic, against the background of the exciting political developments of the period. This ambitious trilogy consists of *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981), *The Salt of Life* (1990) and *The Triumph of The Tricolour* (1993). His collection reads like an Indian response to Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet*. These three novels cover the span of almost thirty years from 1915 to 1947.

All the major events like the agitation against the infamous Rowlatt Act, resulting in the Jallianwala massacre, the Salt Satyagraha, the Bhagat Singh scam and martyrdom, Bose's escape and disappearance – all get a personalized account.

Though Nahal doesn't fictionalize the epoch-making progresses of the national movement the way the postmodern novelists like Tharoor and Rushdie do. He does bring in some Indian household stories stringing with the public and political world of the times. The essence of historical credulity is maintained throughout. The trilogy also hints at the rise of neo-colonialism. The independent India had been a dream for millions of Indians. But the euphoria didn't last for long. That sense of fulfillment was marred by the dirty game of politics and the struggle to rise above the others.

A cursory look at the early twentieth century Indian English novels gives this idea strongly that history was not always a consciously taken theme. It just happens to be there as an aspect of time, as a topical subject which now makes the fabric of our history. The Quit India movement, the Jallianwala massacre, the role of Gandhi and the memorable August events of 1947 appear in almost all the novels, as to be etched on the minds of everybody. They have an indelible mark on the very Indian psyche, so using these events as background comes naturally. But the treatment of history varies in nuances with all the writers and their creations as revealed in the above discussion.

In some of the novels like *Kanthapura*, *Inquilab*, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, we find the themes woven closely and intricately with the progress of the historical national movement. At times, some novels as chronotop- narratives have related references to the national scenario and concentrate on some social issues like Narayan's Malgudi tales, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Anand's *Untouchable*, *Private life of an Indian Prince* and others do. Such novels don't delve deep in the political progress but do study its effect on individual, out of the focus instances. History is delimited to the level of background only. Some of the novels give very intense pictures of the 1947 aftermath in contrasting shades. If Khushwant Singh finds the nation divided and drenched in the blood of the innocents in *Train To Pakistan*, Bhattacharya paints a prospering India in *Shadow From Ladakh* inspite of all difficulties.

However, as discussed, we can also trace a gradual change taking place in the tone of the novels towards some monumental parts of our history. Some characters do question the validity of the leading figures' role in the making of the nation. For example, the marginalized characters in both *Train To Pakistan* and *Inquilab* openly accuse Nehru, Patel and Jinnah for an unnecessary Partition. Gandhi is shot dead in *The Rape of Raj Gill* much before the event really took place. Malgaonkar at times seems almost advocating for the violent means in his novels. The stare of the questioning eyes on Gandhi's methodology, comes straight to the readers in his *A Bend in the Ganges*. No doubt, the way for iconoclast writers like Rushdie, Kesavan, Tharoor, Ghosh and the whole coming generation was being paved for their arrival scene with these stepping stones.

***Part-B: History's changed face in 1980s and onwards***

“A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history when we step out from old to the new; when an age ends and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance...”<sup>1</sup>

These words comprised the welcome speech for a nation called India, declared ‘Independent’, on a memorable day. The same sense and feeling of a cautious pride can also be applied to the renaissance in Indian English literature, especially the 1980s English fiction. Though that special ‘moment of utterance’ came after a long struggle—the Indian context has an edge upon others, for a non-violent sword and a violent pen! But here, being concerned with the literary storm of 1980s, the preceding fallow period’s lull had been quite disquieting. People like Uma Parmeswaram got a chance to set AD 2000 as ‘the dirge date’<sup>2</sup> for Indo-English literature. Anita Desai, a leading novelist herself expressed dissatisfaction about Indians’ creative writing in fiction that, “there’s so little of it ... there simply isn’t enough ... in the name of variety, value, interest or significance ...”<sup>3</sup>. Meenakshi Mukherji’s article “The Anxiety of Indianness” reminiscences over the same silence, saying that for a long time it had seemed that English writing in India was destined to remain a ‘one stringed instrument’<sup>4</sup>.

This literary void was conspicuous for the brilliance of the ‘Big Three’<sup>5</sup>: William Walsh’s term for Narayan, Rao and Anand, the 1930s novelists writing about myriad things. Though Naipaul, Nayantara Sahgal, Malgaonkar and others produced a number of good novels. Naipaul even bagged the Nobel Prize for his works written during this whole long period of 1950’s to the present day. But not all of these people writing were fortunate to reach an international audience like Naipaul. Something special was needed to make the world attentive to this Indian effort in English.

But change is the other name of Time. That wind of change did come, breathing a new life in the whole literary tradition itself with the success of one seminal novel—*Midnight's Children* (1981)! As one of these *Midnight's Children*, Shashi Tharoor said, the novel ‘liberated a generation and labeled a literature!’<sup>6</sup>.

*Midnight's Children* takes up where the *Raj Quartet* left: the departure of the British from India, as Peter Kemp observes<sup>7</sup>. Salman Rushdie, of course, doesn't grumble about this event but applauds it in his own way. If taken as a continuum to Paul Scott's magnum opus; this fact announces for itself a grand sweep of change in the writing. This novel goes off the mainstream track in more than certain ways. It renounces the established tradition of narrative, story telling at both the levels of theme and technique, in one instance. The novel keeps shifting and swerving to postmodern, modern and medieval style of writing. But the major alteration that comes out vivid to any reader in this novel is, the treatment of history. This is an innovative presentation of history, a volte face, rarely practised. *The Tin Drum* by Gunter Grass flickers as an example here. But *Midnight's Children* hammers down the jolting manipulation of history as not only a new but the only way of dealing with this big question. The novel in an unprecedented manner coalesces varied streams of culture, civilization, history of not only India but Asia and Europe as well. All this shows the writer's conscious effort to prove that 'history has become (or rather is) debatable'<sup>8</sup>.

Rushdie argues about the differences of fact and fiction, official and personal or remembered and hidden history. His effort to dismantle an established edifice of history is commendable in more than one sense. He does not take help of any pamphlet to undertake such a massive task but weaves it in the web of a fiction which gives the readers a wide choice, People not in favour of such avant-garde method, have derogatorily called it '*Chutnification*' of history and of English language.

*Midnight's Children* presents mainly memory's truth as far as the treatment of history is concerned. Rushdie justifies this mode of narration as he says, "History is ambiguous: facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings..."<sup>9</sup>. Amitav Ghosh also wonders about this ambiguity of the 'dropped' histories in *The Shadow Lines* and *In An Antique Land*. But Rushdie's handling of history is exceptional as he treats it with various nuances at all levels of theme, background as well as technique of the novel. So, we find Saleem Sinai, the narrator, resolving to confide in paper, by "pickling" history, to preserve truth in books like fruits in bottles, against the corruption of the clock! His birth is synchronized to the

midnight hour when India got freedom. He finds himself 'mysteriously handcuffed to history'<sup>10</sup> which adds an aura to the subject of the novel. A plethora of happenings and historical events constitute the theme - the Jallianwala Bagh massacre; the rise and fall of Abdullah in Kashmiri politics; Partition of India, assassination of Gandhi, reorganization of the states, the general elections of 1957 and 1963, and Indo-Pak war etc. The second Indo-Pak war which forces Saleem to migrate to Pakistan for some time, provides us a chance to get an exposure of the other side of the shadowy borderline as well. Birth of Bangladesh, Emergency rule by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and 1977 general elections conclude the novel.

*Midnight's Children* in its style is at once an autobiographical bildungsroman, a picaresque fiction, a political allegory, a topical satire, a comic extravaganza, a surrealist fantasy and a daring experiment..., as the noted critic M.K. Naik wonders<sup>11</sup>. Individual and public histories/stories collide together with stunning turns. Rushdie, in this way, subverts and invalidates the so long sacred history with the counter-culture of imagination. He reduces facts to fiction, truth to interpretations. He uses words in the Deconstructionist manner, letting them speak, drift and swell-swerve according to their basic nature. Such techniques enrich his themes and help create one of the finest examples of Neo-historicism in *Midnight's Children*.

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1988) is also based on the technique of historiographic metafiction. This novel not only questions the relationship between event and text but also erases the distinction between fact and fiction.

Tharoor's novel is grounded on history of India from two very different and distant periods. It makes the background as well as the theme of the novel. As Hastinapur, the mythical princely state of *Mahabharata*: the great Indian epic, is taken as the metaphor for the independent Indian. Allegory and myth run parallel with the colonial and postcolonial Indian history. Great historical figures like Nehru, Gandhi, Jinnah, Bose, Azad and others are allegorized and parodied in the garb of Dhrithrashtra, Karana, Bhishma/ Gangaji, and Pandu etc. The chapter headings are diverse and polysemic, hint at various epoch making events of Indian and British history. Some of the most creative titles are- *The Duel with the Crown*, *The Passage through India*, *The Mango March*, *The twice-born tale*, *The Rigged Veda* and many more. Undoubtedly,

such uncanny correspondences are suitably modified with an ironic twist. They aim at self-mockery and convey more than just one simple meaning. While M.K Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan compliment the novel as one of the best works of postmodern fiction; Niaz Zamani finds the narrator of this novel 'exuberantly unconventional in language, punning, playing with idiosyncracies of the English language...' <sup>12</sup> almost somersaulting!

Shashi Tharoor's treatment of history in the above mentioned novel is quite different from Rushdie's as far as the narrative is concerned. But the theme gives a mirror-image resemblance which is subversion and recreation of history. Both the writers use the post modernist and post colonial methodology, expressing their 'incredulity towards metanarratives' <sup>13</sup>, as Francois Lyotard defined Postmodernism. They believe that the recorded history, presented to the public has not been the whole truth like all the other histories of the world. In fact, New Historicism believes that their stories/novels can be taken as histories as well. These novels also point out the fact that the euphoria of Independence has come to an end. People realize now that for a true democracy many battles are yet to be fought and won. The satire implicit in the language of these novels reveals this disappointment. This hold over language also demonstrates a confidence unprecedented- Indian English language is close to decolonization, as the new writers seem to convey. The so called Caliban has come a long way, that *the empire is writing back*, is quite obvious throughout the novels of 1980s.

Technique wise *The Great Indian Novel* doesn't go very far from *Midnight's Children*. But Tharoor creates a distinction when he transposes history and myth together to a mere fiction. Rushdie shows shifts and breaks but Tharoor maintains continuity. He ends with a beginning, intertwining *Mahabharata* and Bharata on a common platform. The falsity of the conventional fact and fiction, myth and history is exposed again. Tharoor experiments with the very novelistic form itself, by liquefying it with an epic.

Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) is another novel using the fusion technique – mixing history and myth innovatively. Chandra lampoons Indian politics and advocates for the multiplicity of the nation India. One can find the novel



mooting for a space, an idea of India as endless narrative. Michael Bakhtin termed such experimental works as 'hybrid constructs'<sup>14</sup>. That is why a range of writers show an interest in such innovations. If Raja Rao weaves *Hindu Puranas* and Indian mythology into the very texture of his novels like *The Serpent And The Rope*, *Cat and Mr. Shakespeare*, *Chessmaster And His Moves* etc. Amitav Ghosh, coming much later does the same by wrapping science, anthropology, folk myths and environmental consciousness in his works like *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *In an antique Land*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and others.

*The Memory of Elephants* (1988) by Boman Desai is another memoir of Indian past, but from a Parsee perspective. History makes the theme of the novel while technically it is hybridized with scientific imagination. It reminds of *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh which is also enriched by some contemporary data- making computational procedures in the narrative. Thematically *Memory of Elephants* can be compared to any of the postcolonial, historical novels because here too, history- the so long 'objective' subject is fictionalized through magic realism. Indian chronicle in the minority discourse of the Parsees brings out an unattended aspect of history in this novel.

*The Memory of Elephants* traces a vast part of Parsee background from the Iranian phase to the pre-colonial and colonial India. Most of the characters witness the freedom struggle in progress and express the Parsis' confused alliance with India as well as the British colonialists simultaneously. It is quite well-depicted in the differing attitudes of the narrator's mother and grandmother, Bapaji. Their divided loyalty reminds one of the Thamma- Ila conflict in *The Shadow Lines* by Ghosh. While the older generation representatives, in both the novels, are nationalistic to the level of being chauvinists; the younger lot shows an anglophile leaning.

*The Crow Eaters* (1980) by Bapsi Sidhwa also comments upon this Eurocentric attitude of Parsees. Freddie says that Englishmen are the Parsees' 'sovereigns' and "next to the Nawabs, rajas and ...., we are the greatest toadies of the British Empire"<sup>15</sup>. He condemns Dadabhai Naoroji, a nationalist as a misguided Parsee from Bombay, a lunatic. But this Parsee indifference towards the freedom movement veers round to the same issue of insecurity, dislocation and of displacement experienced by

this particular group in India. The fear felt by them is converted into a kind of rigidity that made them remain a closed ethnic group. When asked about their choice for the partitioned India, their response is, “we will stay where we are... let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or whoever rule, what does it matter? The Sun will continue to rise – and ... to set- in their asses...!”<sup>16</sup> Bringing such attitudes and characters in the arena of fiction by the writers of the same community is another way of subverting their own history. They are aware of the mistakes committed and aren't hesitant to question and denounce their own forefathers and elders. This is what alienated them as ‘the other’ at two levels - in India as well as outside India.

This uncertainty about their real home is a painful issue, which is also delineated in another Parsee novel, Dina Mehta's *And Some Take a Lover* (1992). The decade of 1940s makes the historical background of this novel. The general feeling among the Parsees for the Independence movement was that it was not their battle. That if they joined it, it was fighting for others' cause, their neighbours' cause. They felt safe under the colonialists' generosity, with the special privilege and distinction bestowed on them. But they were afraid of the prospect of a decolonized India. They could sense their plight under the majority community of India, seething and boiling with revenge. Their fears came true but not just for themselves because they were not the only one to suffer. Loss and suffering was a synonym for Partition, it came as a baggage for all the Indians with differing degrees. A matter which is of equal concern is Parsee alienation in the post colonial India and their self imposed immigration to the West. This makes them double-exiles.

Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozshah Bagh* (1987) also takes in account the same dilemma of the Parsees. However, his novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991) gives a more updated picture of the Bombay Parsees. These Parsees are well-placed with the government of 1970s. They have gone beyond the identity-crisis, discussed in the earlier mentioned novels. They participate with fervor in the Indo-Pak war (1965) and help liberate Bangladesh (1971). The main incident is a take off on the Nagarwala Bank case (1975) which had rocked the Indira Gandhi regime. The Congress rule was accused of being ‘a rogue's gallery’, comprising of crooks. This denunciation came along with the reminiscences of Nehruvian India's defeat at the hands of the Chinese

in 1962. The novel depicts one of the phases of the long journey of the nation India and its history.

But while talking of Parsee stories and writers, the most important Parsee novelist who comes to mind is Bapsi Sidhwa. Her *Ice-Candy Man* (1988) is a very significant historical novel taking up the question of Partition. Partition as breaching the very idea of unity, of togetherness, of a bond for so many people, all of a sudden. As the child narrator of the novel, Lenny exclaims, "I am a Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that!"<sup>17</sup> One has to pause in order to understand and feel these words uttered by an innocent, ten years old girl.

Nilufer E. Bharucha's words about Partition as the 'political betrayal and symbolic rape of a helpless colony by a departing colonial power'<sup>18</sup>, sound true in the context of *Ice-candy Man*. This novel is significantly one of the few in Indian English literature, which gives a Pakistani perspective of Partition. It attempts to present a positive picture of Jinnah. Sidhwa doesn't just generalize the sad story but points out the British bias against Pakistan and the unjust distribution of lands and assets too. She writes, "Now that it's objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah...grant him Kashmir, Gurdaspur and Pathnkot..."<sup>19</sup>. Her novel reverberates with unhappiness over decisions of political leaders. It is one of the representative novels about Partition, expressing the pain and trauma fostered for religious and cultural differences. These were the differences which burnt down whole villages, butchered whole train loads of people fleeing in fright. Bapsi has taken this unfortunate event in *The Bride* also.

*Ice Candy Man*, renamed as *The Cracking India* is technically not very experimental or innovative. But the treatment of history has a shade of difference, for the narrative's point of view. This novel too lays a fact bare that truth or history, is just a matter of perspective. There's more than just one aspect or recital of it. History is just another fiction recapitulated by people differently, determined by their background and experiences.

*A Suitable Boy* (1993) was written at a time when an overshadowing change was taking place in the treatment of history in literature. Under the influence of

deconstructive theories, writers as well as historians were approaching the recorded annals of time with a questioning modulation. But Seth sticks to the conventional realism while presenting the first decade of Indian independence. He doesn't go 'against the grain' portrayal of the society through the fictitiously named Northern states. The characters' moves convey the larger political scenario, the rivalry between Mishra and Agarwal alludes to the Nehru and Tandon rift – conflict of traditionalism and modernity. Kripalani and Kidwai also constitute the representative characterization. Politics is reduced to a gamble – of power, for power and with power, as the story line assumes. The reverential tone for Gandhi, for history is still maintained in this novel, unlike other fictions of the same period by Rushdie, Tharoor and others. Seth maintains a reasonable reverence in his treatment of history. In theoretical terms- 'credulity' towards the presented, recorded annals is sustained here rather than investigated. The narrative canvas also portrays the middle class contribution to the making of history.

*A Suitable Boy* deals with some ground-breaking issues of a newly independent India – the first elections, the implementation of various new laws and the resultant changes on the social, economic and political visages of India.

At a time when Indian authors were trying all the possible complex and philosophical themes overriding extra-ordinary lives, Seth resorts to the simplest representation of the milling India. His neat description of various sects and sections of the native culture comes as a fresh breeze to the literary scenario. The caste-ridden and poverty-stricken common life of people like Kachheru, the apparently liberal ways of the middle class, the Zamindari Abolition Act's disturbing effect upon the bourgeoisie, the declining years of the golden era under Nehru – all get a spacious treatment. Seth also shows concern for the issue of religious intolerance in the form of hatred for Pakistan and the controversial Babri Masjid allegorized in the Alamgiri Mosque. Past is part of the living realities for some characters even after years, the word Pakistan has a "flinching and withering"<sup>20</sup> effect on Mrs. Tandon.

Seth also hints at the simmering and searing conflicts between the two main communities, the fast vanishing tribe of courtesans and its patrons – all get a sincere treatment by Seth. The failure of Lata and Kabir's budding relationship is a further

indication of things changing for the worse. But simultaneously, the beauty of their togetherness in happier times reflects the calm strength of the previous syncretism and connection of the two divided Indias. As Neelam Srivastava says, Seth's novel can be read "as a Nehruvian epic...of secularism founded on rationalist premises, emerging as the only viable approach to governance in the Indian polity..."<sup>21</sup>.

Vikram Seth's consciousness of time's political and historical dimensions is marked with a candidness based upon social realism. Jon Mee rightly finds it worth praising for the details and nuances of his treatment of a particular historical moment in a fictionalized North India<sup>22</sup>. At the heart of the novel, amidst differing trajectories, Seth reflects upon the relevance of traditions, power structures, human relationship and values from the ideological and historical perspectives. His success can be credited to his effort of presenting a vision of an India in one masterpiece, in spite of all fractions prevalent. It must have been a challenging task to tackle the ever-increasing multitude of the vibrant country that he presents.

Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* (1995) also takes the theme of Indian history. Mainly 1940s' vehement and passionate time of freedom struggle carves the background of this novel. If Boman Desai's *Memory of Elephants* took the same period from a Parsee perspective, *Looking Through Glass* witnesses the vicissitudes of the entire decade from a Muslim's point of view. The Partition holocaust bears a momentous effect on the characters of the novel. But the technique of magic-realism gives quite a manipulated picture of most of the Muslim Congressmen. While Jinnah gets a sympathetic conduct from Kesavan, other leaders are presented with mixed nuances- some appear bloated where as others look diminutive. Thanks perhaps to the postmodern liberty assigned to the writers! Kesavn almost plays with the characters of the novel and the nationalists at large. Satire and wit implicitly take a new-historic turn, because the reverence attached to such historical figures is missing. He fictionalizes the whole scenario in an exaggerated manner.

*Looking Through Glass* (1995) by Mukul Kesavan is a highly magic realist novel which is rooted in history. As an Indian Muslim of Lucknow, Kesavan is able to witness the vicissitudes of the entire decade, complete with the fiery events. The national movement and the Partition holocaust makes a major part of the novel. Many

of the Muslim leaders and spokesmen from different periods of Indian history have been presented through the magic-glass. But one thing is conspicuous, its Kesavan's effort to understand the minority psyche. It could be out of an attraction, an enchanted feeling which always entices us to the 'other'. Orient is still 'exotic' to the West. But something is exotic to us only when we're at a distance from that object or idea. Characters presented through the gauze, the web of magic-realism is another support for this idea. Either people like Kesavan aren't fully familiar with them or don't want to see them as they really were. But the most powerful reason seems to be the attempt to subvert the reality.

Muslim Congressmen disappearing from the scene all of a sudden, other characters turning translucent or just surviving as a 'mirror- image' – all emphasise on the disappearance of the real flesh and blood beings. Does it allude to a Utopian idea of a complete India, without the stigma of Partition or the dystopic idea of a monoglossia, a society without variety and diversity? Kesavan is not clear, he leaves it open-ended as a very much post-colonial narrative.

Mukul Kesavan's method reminds one of Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983) which takes a scathingly dark account of independent Pakistan. Though, Rushdie claims to be non-realistic in handling the Pakistani history, still one can decipher the personas lampooned and events attacked in the novel. Rushdie has used parody and black-humour, especially in the metaphor of a shameful and repressed society, personified by Sufia Zinobia. This becomes a method of bloating out the treatment of history to an exaggerated level. Such management of history, propped by techniques like magic-realism, pastiche and parody particularly aim at displacing the master narrative of history. It is reducing history to a secondary level of text, accessible through the negotiation of the primary fictional level.

*The Trotter Nama: A Chronicle* (1988) by I. Allan Sealy, chronicles the Anglo- Indian clan from its inception in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It provides us an intimate look into the life and experiences of this miniscule minority community which was founded by the French mercenary officers and traders near Lucknow. Unlike the other academic writings about this part of Indian culture and society, *The Trotternama* is a Rabelaisian extravaganza<sup>23</sup>. Though it begins as a family chronicle, it turns out to be

a blend of history, legend digressions, myth and magic, starting with the very title of the book.

*The Trotternama* runs parallel to the personal destinies of the Trotter family and the public history of an alienated minority. On the lines of postmodern narratives, it mixes facts and fiction, trying to bring out one of the many faces of history recorded. Humour, satire and parody are definite to be found here with shifts in the narrative as well. Sealy, like Rushdie and Tharoor has tried to subvert the conventional structure of the novel as well as that of history, society and culture. He seems to be a contender for heterogeneity in all aspects of life. He relishes the differences at cultural level which cease to live if tied to a homogenizing power stick. Sealy conveys the same kind of a message here what Ved Vyas wonders about in Tharoor's 'great' novel, saying:

"How much one may select, interpret and arrange the living past before truth is jeopardized by inaccuracy? ... No more certitudes. Accept doubt and diversity... Admit there's more than one Truth, more than one Right, more than one *Dharma*"<sup>24</sup>.

*Fire flies in the Mist* (1993) by Qurraitulain Hyder, like her magnum opus *River of Fire* (1998), is another fictional tribute to Indian history. The story spans a period of over thirty years from the outbreak of the Second World War, 1939 to the Bangladeshi diaspora's sprinkling to different parts of the globe after 1971. The novel is largely set in East Bengal, spilling over occasionally to Calcutta, Shantiniketan, Europe and the West Indies. It has characters from all the different and imaginable communities, mixing-matching, pushing-pulling, understanding-misunderstanding one another, as a metaphor of the Indian continent.

The novel doesn't speak at length about Partition, there is a deafening silence about the gory event. In *River of Fire*, the event could elicit just two words from Hyder's pen- "Hindustan-1947", conveying much more than all of the pamphlets or papers supporting or condemning the event put together. Perhaps Aijaz Ahmad tries to weave the same loose threads when he says about the post-Independence era -

"Our nationalism at this juncture was a nationalism of mourning, a form of valediction, for what we witnessed, was not just the British policy of divide and rule... but our own

willingness to break up our civilizational unity, to kill our neighbours... to forego the moral bond..."<sup>25</sup>.

Hyder's fictions reveal her to be one of those who refuse to forgive what we ourselves had done and are still doing to our own polity. One might feel the thunder, the reverberations of that silence, marking the wide sweep and profundity of *The River of Fire*, which speaks volumes, in these contexts. As Nawabs are reduced to penury, erstwhile Muslim Marxists and terrorists are seduced by the promises of the Muslim League. They turn capitalists and become pillars of the new establishment. Hyder indulges deep in social realism as she describes the Muslims' resentment for becoming politically impotent, their refusal to accept 'Western education' by one large section but a mindless aping of the very West by another group and many of such issues.

When the question of Bangladesh separation rocked the East Pakistan, Deepali's disappointment for the failure of Marxist aspirations seems to speak for the novelist herself. Her socialistic bent is quite obvious. She suggests that the idea of political betrayal, in the formation of Pakistan and Bangladesh by deforming India is, an emotional betrayal for many. Such disappointments usually result in seeking refuge in sceptic questioning in the existentialist tradition. Hyder voices certain fears when she writes – "Are the doors of history going to be closed on us?"<sup>26</sup>. As the new generation accuses, 'Hypocrisy was the hallmark of your times' and "The independence you achieved so bravely was such that it drove you out of your own country..."<sup>27</sup>. No doubt history, the glorious part of it is getting dust-laden day by day.

*The Conquerors* (1996) by Achala Moulik has been an attempt for an all-encompassing historical novel by choice of its theme. Her narrative spans from the revolutionary year 1857 to 1867, a significantly tumultuous period of time. It traces the unchallenged power of an ever expanding British Empire, through characters selected from a particular family headed by Ruthven.

Rukun Advani's *Beethoven among the Cows* (1994) is about the life of India under the fear of collapse and fragmentation, caused by a long defied demise of Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India. This period is depicted as burdened by



sorrow, signifying loss of innocence for the self and loss of integrity for the nation. The nation's progress is metaphorised in the central character's growing up, very much using the Saleem Sinai grid as an allegory. The same stage of Indian past is also taken by Shama Fatehally in *The Taralane*. The Nehruvian policies of nation building make part of the narrative, which makes it a politically conscious novel. Its realistic presentation sounds sincere towards the academic history of the nation.

The qualms and tremor of this kind is revitalized in the fiction of Shashi Deshpande, especially in *Small Remedies* (2000). It takes a very topical theme surrounding the Babri Masjid demolition of 1992. Though she does not jump into the whirlwind of the political game embodying the particular incident, she captures the effect of the resultant riots caused by it. Very much like *The Shadow Lines*, this novel shows how destruction and disturbance at one place could lead to riots and deaths in far away areas. Tridib was killed in Bangladesh for agitations in Calcutta and Kashmir, this time the star-crossed Madhu loses her young son to the incendiary acts of communalists in Bombay caused by the demolition. *Small Remedies* does not suggest any political resolution but indulges in healing the deranged and distressed souls in difficult times.

*The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy has been a much acclaimed novel, in the recent times. It does not claim to be based upon any history. But as it is common knowledge that whenever we have an account of the past, it does turn out to be one in some way. By sprinkling at least two names resembling the political figures active in the South of India makes *The God of Small Things* relevant for the present research work. She has coalesced various themes together, which had been dealt with separately so far. If Mulk Raj Anand had immortalized Bakha and Munno in his creative writings by presenting their stigma-ridden life of 'untouchables', Anita Desai and Deshpande have taken the female aspects of their fictional worlds, Upamanyu Chatterji has helped us peep in to the elite life style of government officers: Roy does all of these in her single work remarkably. She shows how the society of Independent young India is astrife with the conflicts of classes, castes, religions and sects; metaphorized in terms of *Laltain* and *Mombatti*, the big and small!

The novel also shows how a woman “turns” bad by practicing her volition and choice. Ammu is subjected to not only patriarchal rules, but also to caste rituals, class distinction, and the fatal legal rigours only for choosing to be with the low-caste Velutha. Roy depicts how ‘*Mombatties*’ are punished because of unacknowledged fears – “civilization’s fear of nature, men’s fear of women, power’s fear of powerlessness”<sup>28</sup>. Arundhati Roy shows the caliber of understanding Indian ethos and translating it in even better terms, her novel definitely speaks about India and the past eloquently.

By the above going survey, we confront various pictures of history presented by the galaxy of writers taken here. Certain features are found to be common. Though the treatment of history is different and individual in all of them, some aspects appear predominantly resembling. They all show that history is not just a record of a mortuary, of dead people and bygone eras. But it is very much alive and it breathes with us every moment. Instead, at times, it overshadows our present so powerfully as we can’t deny several riots breaking in several regions of India or anywhere. sparked by only a memory from the store house of the past. It’s sad that today we have grown so sadistic that we usually remember just the wounds inflicted, somewhere in our history. But fiction really comes as a healing factor because it speaks about all the aspects of life.

Juliet Gardiner is quite explicit when she writes in *What is History Today?* (1988) - that history is a big question, which can be answered in multiple ways: political, economic, social, religious, scientific, feministic, and of course with many more perspectives<sup>29</sup>. Fiction treats this ‘big question’ as nothing else does, perhaps, because its very survival depends on its amalgamating, coalescing characteristics. History is not a jigsaw which will one day be complete; rather it is a continuing process. It is a dialogue with the present and it is a narrative. It is a blend of observation, memory and imagination as the Neo-historicists have demolished the wall between text and history. Hence, the historical reality is a special case of fiction, as speech is of writing, and nature a special case of culture.

Salman Rushdie once said, ‘in fiction what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience believe’<sup>30</sup>. History writings have

been doing the same; they are produced according to the level of credibility of the age. We would not have stoned Christ, poisoned Socrates or hanged Galileo if we had understood them. They lost their lives because they spoke with a vision going beyond their age's truth. So, truth keeps changing as it is a matter of perspective, to the largest, possible extent. Fiction gives one the pedestal to present the other side of the established facts in history. If history preserves the so-called 'facts', stories are preservers of manners, customs and attitudes – religious, political, psychological and social, helping those facts to come alive to us. No recorded history can convey the fire and the romance of the bygone eras as fiction does. Post-modern theories liberate literature or text as a 'decentred universe'. No art is a single form, but an anthology of all the angles and aspects, being 'irreducible'<sup>31</sup> to a single point. The same condition applies to the writing of history which can not claim for 'given' facts or invincibility of truth but are in fact constituted by abstraction, with a point of view and a selective mind behind it.

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*“History is hope as well as despair.”*

*The Circle of Reason* is a significant seminal book in the prolific writing career of Amitav Ghosh. Reading this particular novel in the context of all his other works, *The Circle of Reason* mounts to the level of a generous fount- from where all the other stories, narratives, histories and observations flow out. It “opened up a rich seams of stories and themes that Ghosh would excavate elegantly in later works”<sup>1</sup>. It definitely established the strong root base from where the rest of his new works spring, shoot up and blossom to perfection. This point of observation will be explained in the course of analysis.

*The Circle of Reason* is also important in the sense of touching a new ground which Amitav Ghosh himself has discussed in one of his essays, “Petrofiction”. Ghosh muses about the differences and/or similarities of Petrol routes of the new age and the old days’ Spice trades binding the far off East and the West in one thread. Both have generated and splurged money in a bounteous manner but they differ in their contribution towards world literature. The spice trade claims a clear advantage in the quality of the literature that it nurtured. Ghosh comments that we have not yet seen any “great American Oil Novel”<sup>2</sup>. He expertly dabbles in counting reasons for this great want, centering on the harsh truth that the history of oil is unspeakably, almost ‘pornographically embarrassing’<sup>3</sup>. It is a tale of deceit and exploitation at its worst, between the West and the Arab countries – the most glaring example of colonialism in continuity! But what is interesting here is Amitav Ghosh’s attempt to answer the question raised by him, reasonably through this particular novel.

*The Circle of Reason* is a heavily issues-related work which Amitav Ghosh has creatively woven together within the immortalizing triangle of *Passion, Reason and Death*. Not to get wavered into the various alleys stretching across this labyrinthine novel- let’s begin with the most pertinent word in the title itself –*Satwa: Reason* (01). This very word is also significant for lending eloquence to the intent of Ghosh as an

Indian author who is set upon making some changes in the Eurocentric views regarding the East.

Reason has always been known as a symbolic term for Enlightenment, knowledge, superiority and, to put it bluntly, 'the West'. Their essentialist view regarding the rest of the world was dark, dull and ahistorical. Science and reason per se were considered to be innately absent on this part of the earth! Amitav Ghosh does the very contrary, writing against the grain- he takes his international readers to a brief and incredible sojourn of Eastern sciences, especially the Indian ones. He recalls Meghnad Saha, Satyen Bose, C V Raman and Jagdish Chandra Bose and their contributions towards the 'universal' sciences, to mention a few. While counting the important dates in the records of 'discovering Reason' (38), Balram remembers how Jagdish Chandra Bose demonstrated the so-called unfeeling plants and vegetables suffering agonies of fear and pain to a "stunned audience of scientists and poets and politicians... in a South London laboratory" (39). Ghosh also gives a passing reference to *Ayurveda* (182) - an Indian medical tradition which has recently been revived as herbal magic, causing no less than a *Green Imperialism* <sup>4</sup> in itself.

Balram Bose is a young teacher raising that passionate voice for the Eastern Reason- a deftly crafted character with a few quirky points, perhaps essential enough to represent the values Ghosh takes up in this project. He is shown as 'a soldier in his crusade against the force of myth and unreason' (109). To begin with, he was a rebel son (04), absorbed readily by Bhudeb Roy of Lalpukur village in his latest venture of opening a school for the poor villagers (19). This Roy was a mirror image of Balram himself, (an idea expanded magnificently in *The Shadow Lines*) made up of "Hopes, conscience and Ideality", according to his Phrenology expertise (20). This particular semi- scientific study of human head shapes is more than Balram's fancy which he pursues most seriously. Phrenology was his credo which he applied to everything, disturbingly. It is unfortunate that there were very few to appreciate his art or the science as he believed it to be. His wife, Toru Debi was ever ready to banish his calipers for the good, "One look at the claws and she knew exactly what was happening. She bounded up ...with a cry and snatched the instrument out of her husband's hands..." (5). Bhudeb Roy's enmity peaked up after Bose predicted Roy's

youngest son's criminal future, phrenologically (24). He also lost Gopal's trust for the same reason (13). But Bose had taken it as a science that he wished to practice before his attention shifted to the services of Pasteur, thankfully- at least, a pure science person (46). It sends him on a spree of sterilizing the whole village with carbolic acid (83).

If we trace Balram's past, we come across a young student who was nourished healthy on the wonderful Western science- advocated as a panacea for the ailing masses. It is significant that Balram's conservative father had decidedly accepted the boon of electricity quite early, when he 'festooned their house with bulbs' (40). This had a great impact on his growing mind. "That was the turning point ... he was bewitched ... couldn't find enough to read about electricity..." (40). Balram was 'Enlightened' symbolically, one can say for the progress, the extraordinary interest that he showed in science. Very much like Pasteur, the microbiologist who had a great influence on his young mind, he wanted to help humanity by thinking about them and working for their welfare. By seeing this trajectory, Balram along with some of his peers in Calcutta Presidency days, stands out as truly 'colonized' person. Their minds were superbly under the influence of the British and European progressive philosophies. The European scientific spirit had won their faith to have the capacity to deliver humankind from all terrestrial problems and superstitious attitudes.

Balram is basically a hybrid, an example of colonial mutation born of the process of 'appropriation and resistance: an aping and a rebelling's together; as Homi J. Bhabha defines the changed characterization of natives. He is very much a H. Hatterr (of G.V. Desani fame) as he belongs to nowhere completely. Balram in his Rationalists' Society speech is all eager to commemorate Satyen Bose and yet says something contradictory when voting for the new mantra of 'Hail Fermios' (46). He exhibits a confusion and excitement naturally associated with his youthful days but he can also be studied in the light of Ashish Nandy's observation regarding colonialism. Nandy believed that "the crudity and inanity of colonialism are principally expressed in the sphere of psychology"<sup>6</sup>. It begins and reigns in the minds of the ruled. Balram is an apt example of a blank slate-minded child which needed the colonial education to

mature and be an “adult”<sup>7</sup>. It was one of the justifications for colonialism by Europeans as Lloyd de Mause details.

Balram is a child like ‘primitive’- ignorant, corrigible and ready to learn. Westernization, modernization and sometimes Christianization came as the much needed education to lead them towards light. The objectivity that Balram, to some extent even Gopal and other youngsters at Presidency show towards their own religion is, exemplary of Nandy’s theory. They identified reason and rational argumentation as a modernist weapon against pre-modern superstition and irrationality.

Therefore we have Gopal condemning the traditional pundits’ incantation for every ritual and ceremony. Their supposed creation of innumerable gods instead of relying on ‘one Atomic *Brahma*’ (47) is also an example of a modernized, Christianized mind. Balram goes to the extreme of eccentric behavior when he tears apart the skull of venerated *Ma Sarawati* publicly in the Lalpukur school premises (30) – to the horror of all! He forgets his hard instilled reverence for the ‘goddess of knowledge’ so ironically, and is demonized by the Western Science of Phrenology. This rupture between the inherent belief and the adopted wisdom is reminiscent of Karl Marx’s observation regarding India. To him India appeared as a country of –

“...small semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities ... restricting the human minds... as unresisting tool of superstition”<sup>8</sup>.

Karl Marx condemned Indian communities for a brutalizing worship of nature like monkeys and cows which degraded man, the sovereign of nature. Balram seems to agree to the same when he says, ‘Reason rescues man from barbarity’ (46). He is so much a reflection of the Marx and the English *sahebs* when deploring the masses of Hindoostan for they don’t want to change ‘their lives and... see reason’ (50). They rather followed myths and took pride in pain, fortitude and hardships unreasonably in the name of *Dharma* and tradition. He is a representative of those native minds who came in contact with the West and thought of changing the traditional Hindu orientation away from the reigning irrational and retrogressive elements in the society.

The illustrious Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt who dabbled in English writing for a decade and then returned to his mother tongue is one such instance. He famously reversed the roles of Rama and Ravana in direct response to colonial upbringing in *Meghnadavadh Kavya* written in 1861<sup>9</sup>. Thus *Rama* was diminished as an effeminate pseudo-ascetic who did not agree to technological development and secular politics. Whereas *Ravana* was the new 'adult': modern, learned and scientific in temperament. This is reflective of the Western winds ruffling the Indian shores strongly. In another meeting with Gopal, Balram condemns Calcutta for what it was and what it ought to be: "Nothing can change people here. Not science, or history or reason. Nothing ...." (50).

It is the desperation of an excited mind in throes of a strong influence from without. He sounds like passing through the first phase of *internalizing* the phenomenon of colonialism, theorized by Frantz Fanon as the '*mimetic assimilation*'<sup>10</sup>. It is a stage when the native absorbs the culture of the occupying power but in an unqualified manner, the mimic way. Where he is all dazzled and not experienced enough to sift through the whole situation. Gopal, Balram's lawyer friend aptly calls his mind to be "a dumping ground for the West" (53). Because Balram trusted everything related to science blindly. He is a true credulous native who could be moulded in the way the rulers wanted - ready to be disfigured, to be cleansed of all nativity considering it to be primitive and erroneous.

In contrast, Shombhu Debnath, the weaver or Toru Devi or even one time his alter ego Bhudeb Roy and Gopal were unable to adjust to his frenzy of rational spirit. Because they were not off their feet by the new education of imperialism which they got in different stages of their life. They could retain their minds 'uncolonized', as post-colonialists put it. Shombhu gives the final opinion about Balram:

"You are the best *Sadhu* I have ever known, Balram Babu , but no mortal man can cope with the fierceness of your gods"(142).

Balram was outrightly against Indian traditions and life style which he viewed like a colonizer as dark, savage and diseased! It needed the Western scientific medicine to heal it. When Lalpukur became a shelter to all victims and fleeing refugees from East

Pakistan, Balram found their ramshackle shanties dirty and infected. He set upon his 'White man's mission' of cleansing the place with carbolic acid. "He was appalled when he saw people surrounded by shit; roofs black with flies, no drain and no clean water" (60). Balram could think of only one solution, 'carbolic acid' use - amidst this commotion stagnant with germs and pregnant with every known disease. He imagined himself to be in the lineage of Pasteur and his disciple Lister (61), as saviours of humanity.

Balram's obsession for Carbolic acid is something that he acquired as a lesson in Western hygiene, a novel way of looking at things in the Indian context, beyond spiritual purity and impurity. It had few takers at that time. It makes an interesting comparison when we see Anne Mc Clintock analysing the similar effects of 'soap' which was promoted as the icon of non-fetishistic rationality<sup>11</sup>. When in the mid nineteenth century, the manufacture of soap burgeoned into an imperial commerce, Victorian cleaning rituals were presented globally as the god given sign of Britain's evolutionary superiority. Perhaps there were many Balrams to take this marketing strategy to far off corners of India and the world at large.

Balram's journey from Clean Clout Campaign (105) to the march of Reason School (115), dashed with his Carbolic acid obsession, shows Balram as a person given to extremism- rational, open and yet confused. He could not win friendships or perpetuate them for long (35). He couldn't kindle many souls towards his mission- he had to fight till the end. That's why his sole friend Gopal, a relationship always on rocks, once introspected with terror that there was no longer anything he could do to save Balram from himself!(51). Gopal's prediction regarding his friend's self-destruction proved true. Bose remained an obscure person, in alienation.

The fact, that Toru Debi burns down the whole pile of books accumulated so lovingly by this strange teacher; is reflective of the way his wife views him. He was an unfit among them, because he was the only one who had taken the modern education to his heart and practised it blindly. But of course, this affected the whole family. Alu could pick out *Life of Pasteur*, the most influential book from the angry pyre (34). This is also a symbolic incident. Any education or training once acquired does not go

altogether – one cannot unlearn something completely. So colonialism could not be effaced from this group's life completely. This ideology creeps in mind and perhaps ends at the same place- but not so easily. Balram decomposes but reincarnates in Alu, after some time, first phrenologically perhaps in boils, “the size of duck's eggs” all over his body (155). Gopal embraced Alu that night and laughed “Let them be, they have nothing to do with you. It's only Balram trying to come back to the world” (155).

When Alu gets trapped inside the crumpled down Al Najm multistoried building in al Ghazira, he comes back alive and surcharged with the ‘Infinitiesmally small’ (49 and 235) idea of cleanliness and socialism. This incident in its symbolism may be a device of magic realism. But Alu's experiment is much mature, though it fails after some time. He has progressed in Fanon's chart of colonialism. His story ends with hope unlike Balram's sad demise in anonymity, under wraps of misinformation.

Amitav Ghosh thus presents Balram as one who thinks against the tide worshipping “Reason” and the Western Science. Balram chose Calcutta rather than Dhaka for his studies which was no less than a ‘scientific pilgrimage’ (41) for him. He started with full zest to get a real feel of his ideals in earthly gods like C.V Raman and Jagdish Chandra Bose. He had no interest in visiting this grand city's pride possessions like the Museum or the High Court but Prof. C.V Raman(43) only, showing all eagerness of a *shishya* (disciple) to touch the feet of his *guru* (the Great teacher). And he was no short of other students who pulled his leg for this oddity, like Dantu and Middle Parting, the teasing names associated with physical appearances – products of his Phrenology fetish again.

In another instance, Amitav Ghosh writes about the twinkle eyed Balram as how Marie Curie was a fantasy for him, “a legend come alive, a part of the secret world of his boyhood, an embodiment of the living tradition of science” (15). It was a distant love affair since the age of thirteen and how Balram had celebrated Curie's second Nobel with fireworks (15). He was thus a man built up of all the right materials- likes, dislikes, wishes and aspirations befitting a ‘nice’ and capable native under the White masters.

By presenting such a character, Ghosh is pointing towards the mythical dichotomy of West for science and East for Tradition – an idea held up and propounded since Renaissance all over the world. But Ghosh does not construe to this notional classification. He rather proceeds to question this division – which has been fruitfully used as a secret weapon of cultural Imperialism. Here peeping into Alan J. Bishop’s analysis regarding “Western Mathematics” could be useful. Bishop shows how mathematics has been considered to be ‘culture free’, culture-neutral and so context-free and universal<sup>12</sup>. Though it was basically a subject imposed on indigenous pupils in the colonial schools, like Science and others. Today it is obvious to everybody that an especially designed variety of education, aimed at creating servile Indians, was a carrier of Western power like trade and administration. Gauri Vishwanathan has noted “that British Parliamentary documents have provided compelling evidence for...the disciplines of ethical thinking – essential to the process of sociopolitical control”<sup>13</sup>. This power imposition came heavily upon the illiterate Easterners’ in the form of science and rationality along with Language and Literatures of the particular dominant colonial power in the country. The idea of all sciences given by the West to the world has also been propounded from the beginning. But this was one of the blinding myths too which Ghosh takes up fully fledged in *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

Yet Ghosh has another trick in his magical wand- he makes the same person Balram the tool to resist the European power strategy. We should not forget that Balram meets Lambroso, comes to know about Phrenology, the day he was publicly humiliated by Marie Curie on her visit to Calcutta, as the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* correspondent (15). His heart full of reverence and admiration for the godly scientist was hurt to the core. It marks his veering from pure science to pseudo science like Phrenology, which he considered no lesser subject to pursue for knowledge and practice. It is ironic how his shifted love proves fatal, causes the whole Roy household hatred and animosity as well as the fire cremation that his own extended family meets (49).

Balram’s convergence towards the semi-scientific Phrenology secured a sudden consciousness about another level of science, which has never been explored much. He values Astrology as a reality and he considers it not to be ‘a chance or an accident’



(39), although he had Edison, Benjamin Franklin as his role models since childhood. He was rational enough to call the Numerologists and Palmists as ‘hocus-pocus Stone Age magicians’ (87). So we find him a man of contradiction- he practises Pasteurism as well as loves Phrenology; a pseudo-scientific discipline. Thus Balram as Ghosh’s postcolonial representative resisted the European cultural hegemony by mixing the two opposites together. He defied a normal and complete conformity to Western science. Claire Chambers finds Balram outstanding for this reason that by adopting the ‘juster approach’, he “makes no distinction between the arch-representative of mainstream science, Pasteur, and those scientists, who are now widely considered to be discredited...”<sup>14</sup>.

Let’s remember Balram’s savoury experiments of the skull measuring discourses as an amateur phrenologist. Amitav Ghosh notes in the chapter “*Heads*”, how it was little less than a torment to him to watch that extra ordinary skull of Alu at a tantalizing distance, just beyond examining range: “It was like sitting down to a wedding feast after years of stewed rice” (9).

It was confusingly exciting, a wealth of new stimulating material enough for a lifetime’s study. Balram couldn’t wait to pounce upon Alu’s majestic head! But nobody in the whole of Lalpukur or even the metropolitan Calcutta, not even friend Gopal, took him seriously. Definitely, Ghosh wants to establish this long forgotten fact that sciences of these different levels have been deliberately put apart with malevolence, though their roots might be same. Such deviant sciences could be clustered together as “subjugated knowledge”, an idea propounded by Michael Foucault. These are the “dusty alternatives which have been disqualified as naïve...”<sup>15</sup>. These are the hierarchically inferior knowledges, below the level of erudition or scientificity; local knowledges declared non-common sensical.

Ghosh looks into this oppressed part of history – where many of the things coming from not the West but some other quarters of the world, are kept under covers. Or they are simply wrapped to oblivion in order to perpetuate one’s own ideology. This is one big trick of fooling the subjects under rule. It is evident that the Western pride over all the sciences is myopic in the face of the cross-currents in between the two

which might have nourished each other. This is a stand which makes European supremacy lopsided, something constructed shrewdly putting all other systems aside to take the centre stage.

One can't forget that Ptolemy and Galileo's findings were accepted only after their own lives' sacrifice, for their deviance to some pseudo-science of that time! As Chambers notes that the borders between mainstream science and pseudo science are more porous than is usually supposed. Dan Brown has convincingly shown grand masters of various sciences like Isaac Newton, Botticelli and Hugo as members of the secret society practising something as weird as 'sorcery'<sup>16</sup>. Newton the epitomic scientist has also been known widely believing in Astrology and Alchemy. The very name of 'Alchemy' conjures up so many instances of reasonable researches undertaken for this unreasonable idea of man. Literature mirrors society, it has borne evidence to Ben Jonson and Paulo Coelho also for their efforts to unearth the hidden wealths!

Edward Said's *Orientalism* has uncovered many veils from that all powerful White persona. Amitav Ghosh also exposes some of the racial and imperialistic subtexts in this debut novel intelligently. Balram is, therefore an agent of New Historicism who attempts to de-subjugate Phrenology, a discipline in itself. He defies the coercion involved in the unitary, formal and scientific theoretical discourse.

Thus, we see how Amitav Ghosh historicizes the Indian mind – the so called 'primitive' Indian undergoing changes. But shearing off one's own nativity completely is not the right thing- out rightly forgetting the past is injurious for a healthy future. Shombhu Debnath also tried to flee away from his old, traditional life style by stealing Tangail's '*Jaamdani*' art but he got no use of that. His new science like Balram's could not secure any benefit. That's why the author thinks that Shombhu too had his burnt books (68).

But Ghosh has another very important matter to unravel here through Balram. It is the critique of Enlightenment, an important event of European history that he undertakes to look into. This chapter of records marking a new dawn tried to homogenize, normalize, classify and centralize knowledge. It was welcomed as a

struggle of knowledge against ignorance, of reason against chimeras, of experience against prejudices. But it was also aimed at elevating science to the status of single champion. This was done only at the cost of other sciences; by means of excluding, of taming the folk amateur studies like Balram's beloved Phrenology, Criminology or Craniometry, old Anthropology and many more. A historian like Roy Porter aptly warns us against this 'saints and sinners' categorization. Taking sides is not just: losers need study and research as much as winners. "One should not neglect Descartes merely because it was the Newtonian laws of mechanics that ultimately triumphed. For Descartes was a key figure in his own day and immensely influential"<sup>17</sup>. Who knows if Balram's secret gods Gall and Spurzheim (09) will come alive once again in future discoveries!

After all, as Christopher Norris says, science is itself just one more discourse, "subservient to the interests of established hegemonic power"<sup>18</sup>. Today the age old Indian Yoga is back with a bang not only in fashionable diet regimes but also in Physiotherapy! Balram Bose also serves the purpose of bridging the gap between hi-tech science and practical life as well as between Science and Arts in this narrative of science.

In this context of colonizing knowledge, we can't ignore the use of violence with which power strategies were enacted. This is a reference to the hidden barbarity which has been a faithful companion of modernity. If Balram could terrorize using his rational practice of disinfecting with Carbolic Acid, it would not be an exaggeration to trace its base in the very colonization process. Bhudeb Roy was so scared of Balram's activities that he filed a case against him, for working under a 'foreign trained agent' (126), 'receiving guns from across the border' (131). In another complaint, Roy dictates he was 'attacked with all their foreign weapons and everything, ...tried to kill me and they disrupted the whole meeting, wrecked the law and order situation...' (129). This presentation, though fabricated in the story, bears resemblance to the way the Colonizers used scientific powers to dazzle and enchant the uneducated masses of the colonies. They used it as a tool for the empire as shows Daniel Headricks in his writings. The British technological development in all forms of its use "assisted them in gaining political power"; be it transportation, medicines, communication or the

modern arms race. Thus, instead of staking a technological claim as a "cause" of imperialism, Dr. Headrick has demonstrated technologies' primary role as an enabler. He notes:

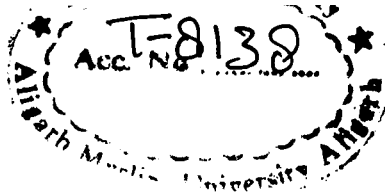
"What the breechloader, the machine gun, the steamboat and steamship, and quinine and other innovations did was to lower the cost, in both financial and human terms, of penetrating, conquering, and exploiting new territories"<sup>19</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh himself shows this in his later works like *The Glass Palace* and *In an Antique Land* – how British fleets could control the milling population of Burma or Southern India all at once from the shores. *The Circle of Reason* is thus an initiative by Ghosh to point towards the successful European 'gunboat diplomacy', which induced so many nations and cultures to allow their countries' wealth to be mined by them. *The Calcutta Chromosome* also explores the deep connection between progress in medical science and the resultant network of imperialistic power throughout the world. It turned science laboratories into virtual battle fields – Hiroshima and Nagasaki are live examples even today. Industrial revolution came as bliss for many but swallowed up many other facets of normal life as the weaving story in this same novel shows.

*The Circle of Reason* is also a history of the art/science of weaving - how this particular craft has ruled over the world in spite of all its fragility. Ghosh, the anthropologist breaks his cocoon to revel in his creative writing when he speaks highly of this weaving technique:

"It has created not separate worlds but one, for it has never permitted the division of the world. The loom recognizes no continents and no countries. It has tied the world together with its bloody ironies from the beginning of human time..." (55)

But contradictorily the same cloth weaving became a cause of exploitation for some. Ghosh writes, "What does it say for human beings that they let themselves be ruled so completely by so simple a thing as cloth?" (57). It simply refers to the power of this knowledge which drove man 'mad...and human!' (58). Its potential can also be measured by the way it became a means of dividing the world in strong and weak. The author notes that when the world broke, "cotton and cloth were behind it" (57).



Machine-haunted people are sure to fall prey to self destruction, at least in Lalpukur. Ghosh tries to trace the history of machine which came as a salvation for the masses but it also fell upon them as the biggest curse.

Balram takes the loom as a machine and weaving as a science. He boasts that it has never permitted the 'division of reason' (55). Here too, he is going beyond the Indian mysticism, as the ancient Yogic tradition believes "the Creator to use human body parts as warp and weft in weaving the mortal robe. Each man and woman wears the robe, soiling it or keeping it pure"<sup>20</sup>.

Priyamvada Gopal finds the cloth story as one of the most beautiful parts in *The Circle of Reason* which exemplifies Ghosh's trademark writing style. She examines the process of weaving with its exquisite details, he "teasingly puts a myriad embedded stories, much like the weaver's loom"<sup>21</sup>. Amitav Ghosh has enlivened even this prosaic job of weaving as a wonderful integration of reason and emotion. According to Suraiya Hassan, very much like Bose - weaving is science: "... a mathematics with all the vivid graphs that go into defining the warps and wefts required for each individual fabric"<sup>22</sup>.

Weaving reveals itself as a complex craft which involves innumerable parts on the loom, and has to be named and defined in order to work. Ghosh believes the loom is also 'a dictionary glossary thesaurus' (74). It has trespassed on the poets' territory by giving language more words, more metaphors, more idioms than all the world's armies of pen wielders. Anand provides some interesting idioms cut out of fabrics like 'a velvet revolution', 'a velvet divorce'. Or this French proverb, "A throne is only a bench covered with red velvet" also replicates the cloth's comparative value. The Persian poet Jalaluddin Mohammad Rumi romantically described- "...jarful spills and makes the earth more shining as though covered in Satin"<sup>23</sup>. The English Romantics have long ravished the pleasures of satin, muslin and chiffon. But that is another part of history. The other reason is its equal value and importance everywhere throughout the world. Perhaps making clothes and cooking food were the earliest of the technology discovered by human society- something closest to human practice and aesthetics.

Amitav Ghosh digs out the much ignored records of our Indian/Asian textiles which are no less than jewels among our heritage with a visible presence in India's fight for freedom. Remember the Swadeshi movement led by Gandhi, through the *Khadi* fabric. The fact that some of these textiles have endured through the ages, is of paramount importance. They underline the efforts of the weavers to sustain in the face of the monstrous splurging of machine made clothes. The weaves like the Ajanta influenced Aurangabadi *Paithani*, *patola* of Orissa, *Pochampalli ikkats* of Andhra, *Kota dorias* of Rajasthan, *Maheshwari* Sari of Madhya Pradesh, the intricate *Kani Pashmina* of Jammu & Kashmir, Bengali *Kantha*, Moghul Court's pride in *Ari work* - are some of the wonderful weaves which have no match in the whole world. Can we forget *Benarsi* silk? It has been "the stuff of dreams, of dowries, of rituals and sacred traditions"<sup>24</sup> as Sugata Madhok reminisces while questioning the silence of looms in Banaras in the present high tech era.

*The Circle of Reason* binds the readers in this particular part, *Satwa: Reason* with the threads of its central motif - the art of weaving. It is a timeless symbol of man's artistry as well as intelligence. man's dexterity and perfection in carving out useful things out of God's grand and lavish nature. Karl Marx also appreciated 'tailoring and weaving' as qualitatively different productive activities, both being "productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves and hands..."<sup>25</sup>. Amitav Ghosh adds to it: "Man at the loom is the finest example of Mechanical man; a creature who makes his own world as no other can, with his mind..." (55).

This is also a symbol of transition from the past into the present and moving on to the future. The author also trails the journey of several of our textiles over continents and centuries. He writes- "Indian cloth was found in the graves of the Pharaos. Indian soil is strewn with cloth from China..." (56). Through this sojourn, Amitav Ghosh constructs a chorus of voices, now individual, now subsumed by a community, its historical and geographical location. He shows how the whole of the ancient world hummed with the cloth trade (56). It has been the source of civilizations, their rise to the zenith and sometimes their fall to the abyss.

The weaving history is a magic tale, a drama of reincarnation in forms, colours and motifs. Alu weaves *bootis* of war, politics, love for Maya and bombs, everything that his young mind could think of, as all can find a place here. Weaving transpires as all encompassing like a mother! That's why Ghosh thinks that, "It has tied the world together ..." (55). Thus, he refers to the story of the illustrious silk-route from China, running through central Asia and Persia to the ports of the Mediterranean and from there to the markets of Africa and Europe. It has kept continents bound together for more centuries than we can count.

Ghosh expertly provides us a quick glance at the long intertwining world of weaving, its dominating force how it "spawned empires and epics, cities and romances" (56). But this is also a Subaltern history in itself – about the nameless, unsung traders armed with nothing more than clothes' bundles who tread past high waters and wide gulfs. They got no mentioning anywhere near Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta or Vasco da Gama and Columbus. They were the real adventurers, and explorers who went out armless to join hands and hearts. Ghosh elaborates this significant idea in *In an Antique Land* beautifully through Ibrahim Ben Yiju and Bomma and others. We get a glimpse of all those centuries in which cloth with its richness and variety, "bound the Mediterranean to Asia, India to Africa, the Arab world to Europe, in equal bountiful trade!"(56). James Clifford refers to this *bonhomie* only, when he says that in light of such a history "the notion of separate, discrete cultures evaporates; ...all cultures have long histories of border crossings, diasporas and migrations"<sup>26</sup>.

But the picture on the other side of the coin is much more intriguing. So far we have known the conquests of cloth but there are people and regions which had to pay for it very dearly. Cotton is one such story which wreaked destruction over places like Egypt. Her soil was extremely fertile for cotton along with its Nile's wealth which excited the avarice of the West too strongly. It caused thousands of Egyptian fellahin to be tied "in bondage to the demands of the cotton mills of Lancashire" (57), very much like the Indian farmers forced to cultivate poppy, as Ghosh shows in his latest novel. Lancashire became a cotton demon which devoured all the near and far-flung lands, be it English or Dutch, danes of Culcutta, Chandan Nagar or Madras, Bombay or anywhere. Every continent was flooded with its clothes, 'strangling the very

weavers and techniques they had crossed oceans to discover' (57). Cotton caused a new series of enslavement throughout Africa and America. Man became subservient to machine. A noose hanged around him when new technologies were developed and exchanged between China, Italy and Europe giving birth to the mechanical man in the eighteenth century. Amitav Ghosh gives a brief but comprehensive narration of this gory history fed with greed and destruction. He finds it true that 'every scrap of cloth is stained by a bloody past' (58).

This is allegorically presented as we confront the despairing weaver Shombhu as Alu's teacher in Lalpukur. John C. Hawley reads "a metaphysical meaning in the way Alu eventually learns to weave the world in complex patterns"<sup>27</sup>. He also remembers Shombhu's cynical destruction of Alu's most ambitious philosophical weave- the Politics *Booti*, with the demand of *guru dakshina* for the way the world has lost its aesthetic sense. He says, "...I'll get you a knife. You can cut your thumbs off and give them to me." (81) This character of Ghosh laments for the way the joy of beauty intact in *Jamdani* has vanished with the death of its owners. Beauty no longer exists which *Jamdani* art created 'like forts are built, or words are woven together to compose poetry' (81). Through this incident Amitav Ghosh tries to remind us how *Jamdani* was a unique part of the country's diverse textile heritage. Through its varied motifs and the ethereal feel, this art unfolded fascinating tales of the Boshak community, their aesthetics and life style living in Tangail, within the undivided Bengal State. But it is in crisis today as the magnificent textile composition has been slowly fading away in the post independence era, keeping pace with rapidly changing technology and politically affected community along the border lines. The reason is not only the secrecy maintained by this group but also migration, loosening of tradition, dearth of crafts-persons, changing lifestyle and the very relevance of such expensive materials itself. That's why Shombhu mourns; it has 'become a toy among the officers' wives' (81) who can never appreciate its real merit and dignity. In the same context one can refer to Gyanendra Pandey's study of *Julahas*, a north Indian Muslim weavers' community. This group faced "increasing displacement from their craft as a consequence of colonial economic policies in the early twentieth century"<sup>28</sup>.



In this way, Ghosh refers to the present day problems besetting the weaving industry in the modern squalor. It fetches the weaving community a pittance and misery only. A fatal combination of mechanization, computerization and globalization is ruining the handloom work. Adoption of more and more power looms, ballooning imports of cheap Chinese yarns, low import duties are causing this country's loss. The experts believe that in pursuance of globalization, Indian government's agreement with the WTO has been harmful. The effects show that this pact is literally inked in the weavers and farmers' blood, resulting in a depressed artisan group. Lack of patronage from any side is wiping away the present generation of handloom weavers. Death and cremation of Toru Debi's sewing machine can be read as a metaphor of the same (147). This situation causes a déjà vu feeling of those days when under the guise of Free Trade, Western machines were devouring up the traditional handicrafts around the turn of the twentieth century. As this homely machine fails, Toru Debi sighs exasperatedly, mourning- "it's of no use... it's the end" (147).

Amitav Ghosh reminds the readers of the riches of material culture in traditional communities and the wealth of accumulated knowledge which is generally ignored. This also points to the way cultures cross expanses barring borders, or how they are carried over to other parts of the world. It diffuses all kinds of barriers etched out in the name of nations, completing the '*circle of humanity*'. Through this novel, Ghosh also bets that diaspora and migration are not modern developments only. Rather these have been the sources of spreading out human society and the way trends trespass highly-guarded nations. The third important aspect of *The Circle of Reason* is about this old phenomenon which has re-emerged as a new subject for contemporary Anthropology.

The Bengal division and the exodus of people across the borders is one such incident, providing roots to a diaspora which is an impending and permanent reality today. Apparently the phenomenon of this Bengal region does not support the idea of borderless world in the process of globalization. Rather contrarily, this border land was increasingly being policed, patrolled, fenced and land-mined. And yet throughout its existence it has been a scene of large, transnational flows of migrants and labourers, of trade in many goods and exchange of rituals and notions. Lalpukur is

that epitomic border town (21) which is literally made up of the East Pakistan refugees. Amitav Ghosh records:

“Most of the people of Lalpukur belonged originally to the remote district of Noakhali... They had immigrated to India in a slow steady trickle in the years after East Bengal became East Pakistan. Most of them had left everything behind...” (27).

This is a reminder of the treacherous end of colonization, where declaration of independence came with joyful celebration at par with tormenting mourns and mayhem.

This issue is significantly taken by Amitav Ghosh in *The Circle of Reason* to present the history ‘from below’, of a very peripheral border land, the Bangla- India one. In the official records, it has been a victim of State simplification, represented with only a particular slice of social reality that served the official observers. It is usual of a tendency inherent in statecraft. The Bengal Partition has been treated as a very marginal incident compared to the other one on India’s Northwestern part – the Lahore and Punjab one. Ghosh himself has taken one such inter linked incident in *The Shadow Line*. As a college student Ghosh tried to read about the Khulna violence. But to his shock, he finds very little information regarding this incident in one of the biggest libraries of the Indian Capital. After all kinds of search, Amitav Ghosh could conclude to the official ‘politics of forgetting’ the incident only. Tathagata Roy bluntly puts it as an elaborate attempt to obliterate the contested origins and nature of the borders in his book entitled *A Suppressed Chapter in history*.

Tathagata Roy believes that the Bengal partition is a major case of violation of human rights that has so far escaped the attention of the world. He claims to unearth the “persecution, mostly state sponsored”<sup>29</sup>, causing exodus of Hindus from a land mass once known as Eastern Bengal. He proposes to record the resultant willful, deliberate and malafide concealment of this part of history from the world. The little bit of provided history tells the tales of high class people like *zamindars*, their employers, mercantile groups, professionals, teachers, businessmen from Dacca, Chittagong, Mymensingh and Raj Shahi. These people kept finding a pretext of leaving the gifted country to them, getting their properties exchanged till 1950, for fear of persecution.

Perhaps it would please Roy that Gosh has taken the unnoticed and subaltern part of this forbidden history- the bulk of rural folk, small traders, weavers, artisans, fishermen, cultivators who had no lands of their own to weep for. He shows how even for them becoming homeless was a traumatic experience. Amitav Ghosh takes this particular 'flood of refugees' (61) into Lalpukur, with which it 'swelled' (60) first and then burst open its boundaries, out of which people just 'poured in' (60). A bit later Ghosh again notes, "With the beginning of war, the stream pouring over the border became a deluge..." (83). Amitav Ghosh uses the metaphor of a river which receives every stream coming from afar and embraced it as one's own. Lalpukur and thus India had to be that open- hearted after the war broke out in East Pakistan. It kept people 'busy' (59), fleeing away from genocide and all kinds of atrocities.

Senator Edward Kennedy reports that around 10,645 refugees used to cross over to India from the new Bangladesh every day, totaling the number of around 09.54 million<sup>30</sup>. It consisted mostly of Hindus (80% Hindus, 15% Muslims and 5% Christians). Such a huge exodus simply marks the extent of horror which could have been the reason of this brave fight to fear. 'left with blood trickling their way and no choice but to join the flow or mop it up' (59). Partition came upon this unsuspecting population brusquely like an earthquake- unpredictably, devastating and overpowering! Unlike many borders created by the colonial rule, the border between East Pakistan and India owed little to modern concepts of spatial rationality.

Willen Van Schendel observes that the draughtsman of Bengal Boundary Commission, Sir Cyril Radcliff showed no reason or respect for anything. The new border... "snaked through the country side in a whacky zigzag pattern"<sup>31</sup>, cutting up families, lanes and blood relations blindly. Ghosh puts it that the relatives on the other side of Lalpukur never let them forget as the war brewed across- "...often they were drummed to bed by the rattle of distant gunfire" (59). These half open borders with the patchy normalization had a strange effect on the Lalpukur residents. They were 'melancholic', and had 'no anger left' (59), unlike what Taslima Nasreen, the famous poetess of Bangladesh expresses in her poem "*Denial*" composed in 1994-

“...I want to erase the word 47 with rubber/I want to wash away the ink stain of 47/...47- the word pricks like a thorn in my throat/I do not want to swallow it/ ...I want to regain the undivided soil of my forefathers”<sup>32</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh sketches Lalpukur as a shadowy town with no feeling of revenge or outburst against any institution for the past injustice and trauma. It was quite a passive place, living under the dictates of Bhudeb Roy. The only thing alive and simmering was the memories of their past, their pain and pining woven in the throbbing ‘songs of love and longing’ (67). These Bangladeshi refugees were trying to “invent a nation”<sup>33</sup> in this border area by relying on the common remembrance of a glorious past and by a common will to live together and maintain that memory. As Earnest Renan expounds in the following words:

“To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more- these are the essential conditions for being a people. One loves in proportion to the sacrifices to which one has consented, and in proportion to the ills that one has suffered. One loves the house that one has built and that one has handed down...”<sup>34</sup>.

Ghosh also voices their longing for their past very poetically as a “land where the green was greener, the rice whiter and the fish bigger than the boats ... bearing the wealth of a continent” (59). Gayatri C. Spivak beautifully evokes the same feeling in highlighting the “love of one’s mother tongue, the love of the little corner of ground”<sup>35</sup> in explaining the formation of collectivities. Lalpukur is also a homeland constructed out of “collective imagination...through remembrance”<sup>36</sup>. Its residents are living on their last life’s fragrance, daydreams lingering in their ‘*Shonar Bangla*’, resting in the lull after the most unforgettable storm had befallen on them.

Lalpukur picture seems to match with C. Vijayasree’s understanding of ‘Nation and Nationalism’, which is usually enmeshed in “bewildering contradictions”<sup>37</sup>. He believes that nation is ‘cohesive’ in bringing together people of one land unit to live in a bond of solidarity. Money, caste and creed do not matter here. This group cherished their commonality in elements of the historic territory, language, customs and myths. That’s why Ghosh comments that they had left behind everything except their

'dialect' (27). But at the same time, this new found nationalism is 'divisive'. It thrives by sustaining differences from and antagonism against the other. The uniformity of pain suffered by these driven out step-children of the previous motherland brought them closer. As Ghosh recalls the way Lalpukur was constructed out of close kins coming together: "First it was brothers with burnt backs and balls cut off...then it was cousins and cousins of cousins ... then it did not matter..." (60).

The pain and despair of this suffering brings them closer like relatives. So Alu could be a disciple of the low-caste Shombhu (70), he could also think of marrying his daughter Maya (112). Parboti Debi's much desired daughter could be fathered by Debnath and many more new tales are taking rounds of this acquired village. So many barriers have dissolved amongst them that the one marking them in and out of 'borders' has also become a fluid entity. This new unifying solidarity came as a resistance to imperialist domination as well as the unbelievable cruelty caused by the birth of the new nation. This same benevolence can also be the ideology of a fictive unity. This is a semblance in which the exploiter and the exploited, irreconcilable in practice, can be made to appear as equal members of a polity and society. It thus, forms the imagined community of horizontal comradeship.

This new found camaraderie is nowhere better shown than in the relationship of Bhudeb Rao and Balram Bose as well as that of Shombhu and Bolai da. The first two important characters could immediately bind in a bonhomie as twigs set on fire by their common background of Sylhet and colonial training for 'Enlightening' the uneducated lot! But they parted ways even faster for their contrasting ideas! The weaver was made a teacher where as Bolai da became a representative of the people. Bhudeb Roy emerged as the new imperial power, 'not a bird chirruped in Lalpukur but with Roy's permission...' (97). Nabogunj got changed to a busy market in spite of the war across (83). This is more than the 'quilted' normalcy- a good sign amidst all the pandemonium of land division. This motley group's hold upon their newly adopted town became even stronger. This is a good progress from a 'dumping ground' (59) of tyrants' refuse, and more than a consolation to the traumatized beings.

Although Ghosh in this novel does not indulge in the live border activities deep, in a pure Partition genre, but he gives us timely information regarding developments. He just means to recall a past under haze of forgetfulness. He sticks to his new historicist endeavour to make the readers aware of this aspect of official records. He conveys it clear that if the 1947 partition is a mainstream history, the 1971 incident also amounts to the same stature with its losses, agony and historicity. He efficiently takes up this matter in his later novels, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide*.

*The Circle of Reason* nowadays is increasingly read as a bold example of postcolonial writing which is very much connected to history today. The Indian locale with all of its' richness and lush beauty is at once getting lost from beneath the feet of central character *Nachiketa* alias *Alu*, running away from the chasing Indian police. Very much like romantic adventure tales, or as Urvashi Butalia terms it a bildungsroman narrative<sup>38</sup>, *Alu* receives hospitality from the sea, when running short of land, in flight for refuge. Amitav Ghosh traces his fast vanishing steps from Kolkota to Kerala, to Mahe in the following words as a quick glance at India's historically influenced geographical treasures:

“He passed down a chain of ...*Chalia* kinsmen, scattered over every factory along the South Eastern Railway, paying out to ...down, down, steadily southwards, ...in the mills of Madurai and Coimbatore. Then it was time ...to slip into the forests of Nilgiris, ...along elephant trails and deer tracks through, clouds in Blue mountains, then over the watershed... in to a magical prawn *malai curry*, redolent of cardamom and cinnamon, sharp with cloves, sweet with the milk of coconuts enough to float the world!” (157)

A briefer and quicker description of the Southern Indian region capturing its beauty, fragrance and melody can't be found anywhere else. Ghosh elaborates this idea in his Bomma trail to *the Antique Land*. He also recalls the French occupation of the country for some time, referring to the multiple colonialisms suffered by the Indian continent over a period of a few centuries. Mahe has one such remnant history, still alive with the slate steeple Church, “a tiny island of Gallic domination in a sea of British occupied territory” (150). Lastly the sea offers a home, a friendly environment, which doesn't change with the treacherous winds of opinions made by the Calcutta police headquarters. Like always this change of footing takes *Alu* from troubles to peace and

maturity after a host of varied experiences. This is a shift from apprenticeship (to a weaver) to a leading and thinking man in evolution. Zindi comes as a mother figure, very much like a hen with spread out wings to take Alu within her guidance. Her very form and look represent her habit and intention. He's made a man in her company. There are certain other interesting characters too populating the boat *Mariamamma*, very much reflective of Amitav Ghosh's future project in a *Sea of Poppies* (2009). As its flap cover summarises-

"They are a motley array of sailors and stowaways, coolies and convicts...thrown together...to build new lives for themselves... the beginning of an unlikely dynasty"<sup>39</sup>.

These people are on to a new world, perhaps the second or third generation toiling on the *Poppy* lands, assembled from various corners of the Indian subcontinent in search of hope - money, dignity, change or even safety! They are all abandoning their homes in search of another house which will fulfill all of their other wishes and dreams. Perhaps, here Mike Davis' research regarding the British rule's effect on Indian economy proves true. He believes the whole history of this period can be condensed into a stage fact- 'there was no increase in India's per capita income from 1757-1947'<sup>40</sup>. Indeed in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, income probably declined by more than 50%. Davis goes on exploring the British rule paradoxes, having an enormous relevance even today. He asks about the fruits of modernization brought by British rule, of the thousands of miles of railroad track and canal, the profits of the great export booms that transformed the subcontinent's agriculture in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> Century <sup>41</sup>.

All such studies show an ephemeral prosperity and insignificant increase in local agriculture productivity and profitability. Rather India on the whole became 'under-capitalized', barring a few landlords, urban merchants and a few indigenous industrialists who did benefit by the new trade ways. *Sea of Poppies* depicts that era with all of these aspects. The villagers in *The Circle of Reason* seemed to get pauperized by the modernization and accompanying commercialization, as the epitomic presence of Indian population appears on the creaking boat *Mariamamma*. Even the Lalpukur society shows this division, how people like Bhudeb could earn profit

even by a calamity. When refugees turned towards Lalpukur in fright from Bangladeshi genocide, Bhudeb earned good by giving shacks on rent to them (60). Bhudeb had insurance of the school building, so he owned the whole of the plane wreckage and sold its parts (93). Whereas general public lost in all games of fate and commerce, the plane scraps were taken back by police (97) which the poor villagers had purchased from Bhudeb with money or debt.

These determined migrants give all evidence of being victims of the systemic poverty and human misery. They have all gone through that period of disenchantment where being expectant from the government and authorities was considered natural. *Mariamamma* is the host to all- be it Professor Samuel of Tellicherry Science College (172) or a poor farmer of Kerala like Karthamma's. "They seem quite as happy to be going as any" of us, Rakesh opined (173).

If the barbed land between India and East Pakistan heaved under the stampede of refugees changing residences across (83), the Malabar Coast has a resembling scene down the map and time! Ghosh gives evidence as he writes:

"Hajji Musa listened carefully to the stories people told up and down the coast of boats setting off for al Ghazira with twenty, forty and even a hundred eager emigrants..."(169).

But the difference here is that of choice and willingness. For this present group, home is always provisional; they have little qualms about going out of the familiar territory. There is exhilaration in breaking out of the borders, barriers enclosing the nation for safety which are often defended beyond reason or necessity. There's a kind of freedom in thought and experience of an exile even if it is at the cost of estrangement from soil, roots, unity and destiny! Zindi's roosting chickens do not express any euphoria but their forbearance, the fortitude and patience are muted expressions on the same lines. It is visibly allegorized in their acceptance of the 'stopping machine of the boat', in their 'long wait' (171). But the sea lapping gently at *Mariamamma's* sides (170), the grinning bottle-nosed dolphins splashing around her (184 – a signboard of *The Hungry Tide?*), birth of Boss (187)- all underline hope, an expectation for change and another world. Finally Alu's painful boils also start oozing away and dry up (181).



Mahe, a stepping port on Alu's path, splurges in money and 'Indian Made Foreign liquor' where "gold is coming in, from all over the world- Kenya, Tanzania, Iran, the Gulf" (158). Inspector Dubey himself informs Das about the incredible level of smuggle going in this remote village, but they don't smuggle objects like coconuts or spices. They sell and send "people" from surrounding regions (159), employing needy people to indenture contracts. It immediately reminds one of Rajkumar from Burma, Ramsaran, Burnham and Deeti from the *Ibis* in Ghosh's other works. Alu, the unheroic protagonist, linking the three different parts of the whole novel, is one of these excavating groups of people (163). Though he has little in common with the rest, but this departure is an embracing of safety for him. His case is very much like Forid Mian who worked for a ship but had to go under Jeevanbhai's protection for a crime committed in a bout of poverty and greed. Alu is an alleged criminal too, hunted by Calcutta police throughout his unplanned and unending journey.

Al Ghazira is an old civilization carrier but has been built anew and young by the continuous British, American principles guiding it. Ghosh aptly calls it "a merchants' paradise, right in the centre of the world, nourished by the flow of centuries of trade..." (221). This town beckons people like Jeevan Bhai and Rakesh to get the best offer possible outside their own hopeless nation. Thus, Zindi-at-Tiffaha of al Ghazira fame, a madam; is thronged heavily around by women of all age and colour when she reaches Kerala as contractor/entrepreneur. The women shriek, cry, fight and demonstrate to be taken in as Zindi's workers. She boasts that, "... these women find me out and come running. Take me Zindi! no , me! Zindi do not take her, she's got lice..." (181).

Then the madam chooses her 'good and reliable' girls herself by a self designed screening process. Thus, this combo of diffused boundaries and free markets has opened doors for such ignorant and uneducated women fold too. Kulfi exclaims analytically:

"What I can't understand is how she got these ideas? She's so uneducated... you can tell as soon as you see her that she does eight *anna* jobs in rice fields and things like that... but she still wants to sign forms"(177).

These village folks know things are not easy yet they are ready to take the challenge. Zindi repudiates Alu on his casual attitude, “Don’t think you will find people pissing money over there. There are hundreds and thousands of *chhokren* like you, begging; begging for jobs” (180).

But the most surprising thing is that only the poverty driven persons do not dream of getting away to these distant golden lands. Dubey’s eye-opening account of criminal investigations meandering towards Middle East ‘terrorist groups or something’ (165) shows how even the best placed bureaucrats are also allured by the same. Amitav Ghosh notes Dubey drawing a deep breath on IPS Jyoti’s chance to go upstream “So, Das! Congratulations! Lucky bastard...” (165). It is not just al Ghazira, but the lure is with any foreign land in the wake of this borderless world in the name of globalization. It is the new face of Enlightenment spreading common values for the benefit of humanity, proclaiming the sacred word of “promoting the well being of billions of people like a godly panacea”<sup>42</sup>. The feel-good promises are propped up with consciousness of individual rights, spread of democratic pattern and market oriented policies.

Thus, *Circle of Reason* in many ways is basically about migrants to distant lands in search of all those things denied to them by their history and country- home, hearth, a place in the community. Ghosh has also called *Circle of Reason* a “novel of exodus and diaspora”: story of ‘an irrevocable sundering of the dual bonds that tie members of a community to each other and to other like communities’<sup>43</sup>. It makes the novel very topical. Although this is ironical that these migratory birds leave home behind to look for the same out of their legal peripheries and nation states, applying devious means. Most of Alu’s co-travellers are illegal, without required papers. Some of them might have tour visas but they stayed back lured by the Mammon’s generosity.

Zindi puts it quite emphatically that “It’s not a business; it’s my family, my *aila*, my own house... no one’s unhappy and they all love me”(181). They are expatriates, refugees, guest workers making “a domain of shared and discrepant meanings”<sup>44</sup> as

James Clifford defines 'Diaspora'. They are exiles in many ways but they try to make the best of a bad situation, by choice.

In many ways, diaspora and globalization can be found interdependent. Helen Tiffin, Bill Ashcroft et al explain diaspora as "dispersion, diffusion and heterogeneity undertaken through migration, movement and scattering"<sup>45</sup> of monolithic notions of culture and identity. Thus, diaspora problematizes the concept of a settled, unified nation giving one experience, one identity to all. But again in the light of Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, we must acknowledge the inevitable presence of diaspora from time immemorial for that is how at least the multitudinous India was constructed over the centuries, as an example. The difference between earlier exiles and our time's is that of 'scale' only. Ours is indeed "the age of the refugee", the displaced person and mass immigration as recounts Edward W. Said<sup>46</sup>.

This diaspora in its positivity shows a big heart which allows different cultures to mix and mingle flamboyantly. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century will go in history as a period of easy flow of people peaking high with demographic shifts on an unprecedented scale, impelled by many different forces. Elleke Boehmer records it as "anti-imperialist conflicts, the claims of rival nationalism, economic hardship, famine state, repression, search for new opportunities"<sup>47</sup>. No wonder, some 100 million people in the world today qualify as migrants - living in minorities, in a state of un-belonging. It has resulted in a cultural and religious expatriation.

Zindi's nest is a living picture of this phenomenon housing persons from Gujarat, Calcutta, Kerala, Jamshedpur and Egyptian villages with an equal love. This multitudinous group gives *The Circle of Reason* an essentially plural characteristic which the postcolonial writers find noisy, street muddied and that's why so authentic! It is a multi-voiced piece, very much created by one who is an extra-territorial, cultural traveller rather than a nationalist. Ghosh, like Rushdie, Kincaid, Ben Okri, Kamila Shamsie and so many others, ramifies across widely separate geographical, historical and cultural spaces. Thus, the *Ras souq* (market) scene is a real melting pot with:

“Iranian *Kebab* shops, Malayali *dosa* stalls, long narrow Lebanese restaurants, fruit juice stalls run by Egyptians, Yemeni cafes... as though half the world’s haunts had been painted in miniature along the side of a single street” (344).

Ghosh is clairvoyant in pointing out these facts. The present history has to take note of the changes creeping in everywhere. Any sincere record cannot connive at this post-modern trade culture which has merged so many borders together that the world has progressed to a grand new market instead of the old ‘Vasudev kutumbhkam’ idea – a house for all.

The al Ghazira ‘*Sand*’ provides space to all, for it was home to anybody who thought it so (261). Thus, Zindi’s Allah and Kulfi’s Bhagwan Sri Krishna adjust happily together to save them from any unseen danger in Algerian Sahara. Both the gods further show their kindness in consenting to take the *avatar* of an orange *sari* clad Dr Uma Verma in El Oued town (353) of all the places. It instantly gives them a flicker of hope and happiness to be rescued in that wilderness. Amitav Ghosh graphically presents this effect of *sari* on the minds of both the Indian women - kulfi and Dr Verma-

“...She caught a glimpse of an unaccustomed shade of yellow.... Something unexpected, something vaguely familiar about the drape of the cloth .... drew her to a puzzled halt...”(358).

The happy surprise on both sides drops signs of a good prospect. Perhaps this is what Salman Rushdie experienced when he described coming across an old family photo frame of Bombay in the famous essay “*Imaginary Homelands*”. It reminded him that the present is foreign and that “the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time”<sup>48</sup>. Dr. Uma Verma was away from her hometown Calcutta, where as Zindi’s sunken battalion was lost in running away from clutches of law! These transcontinental journeys connote not only global operations but also opening of temporary escape routes from the present into history or the supposedly unknown parts of the East. Here is the postcolonial Amitav Ghosh joining the movement of cultural opposition to empire itself, because he interrogates the Conradian imperial power’s autocracy. He is showing the interconnection of all the ‘dark’ alleys of non-

European world, joining them and getting strengthened in the very process. This cultural inter-twining empowers the 'once colonized', brought together by the same thread, as shows *The Circle of Reason*.

The connections between India - Bangladesh borders, the Persian Gulf city of al Ghazira and the Algerian Sahara come in mitosis. They become one, though belonging to old and legend haunted civilizations as well as modern new worlds. Amitav Ghosh employs a restless crossing of borders, of naturalism and fantasy and in return breaks the realist unities of time and space. This lends him the gift of double perspective which he intensively exploits, dwelling the in-between position. Ghosh moots for the fact that there's no gulf separating societies, rather the interactions energetically dramatize the collision of histories and cultures to create the pluralistic and hybrid beauty. Because the world is heterogeneous and ultimately the only one! Perhaps these trans-societal flows and border less global state are the definitive condition of the twenty first century. The author of the novel is outlining the future by tracing the past, very much keeping with the wisdom of the world.

The promises of migration/excavation to most of these characters of the motley group are denied in different ways. Though they are successful in achieving a place away from home but life doesn't seem to be completely secure. Injustice and exploitation continue as part of their life. They all feel to be 'running away from something' all the time (362). Everybody has a tale, a history of their own. Mast Ram's unusual arrival to Zindi - the Apple House sheds light upon the suffering of these diasporic labourers to be in 'bonded' contracts- referring to the global flow of labour. He was the first person to raise a voice against the injustice that labourers like him got a third part of the promised pay. When he rebelled against it because he was 'young enough to burn at the injustice of it' (202), he was beaten up black and blue. Zindi recalls how Mast Ram had come "a wounded rat, with blood pouring from his head - his skull split half open, without a job, without a place to stay..." (202). It's ironic that he had abjured the north Indian hills to pour his sweat over the Ghazira Saharan sands, in turn the reward was pain and humiliation only!

In the same way Prof. Samuel and Kulfi are made to feel insecure by being thrown out of occupation on grounds of being Indian - strange, alien and uncultured. It reflects upon the fact that the diaspora are mostly cultural minorities in social power if not always in number. They have to struggle hard continuously for establishing their sense of identity and cultural affiliation against the background of a majoritarian rule. As Kulfi's experience in working as a cook in an al Ghaziri household ends with this declaration by a bigot guest:

"...I am not going to eat food cooked by an Indian. Don't you remember how your uncle told us that these Indian women spit into the food because they like the flavor?"(204).

This refers to the way diaspora, mostly poor ones remain subjugated to racism. In the same way Samuel's one incident of misunderstanding the foreign language turned him to an alien, incapable of working in Hurreyya (210). It warned them not to hire an Indian again (209).

These experiences of discrimination and exclusion remind them of being exiles, the negative aspect of diaspora which Edward W. Said defines as the 'un-healable rift forced between a human being and a native place'<sup>49</sup>. The crippling sorrow of this estrangement is hardly overcome by the heroic and romantic episodes of this life in displacement. It is caused by the racialized barriers like socio-economic constraints. Even Kiran Desai hints at this incredible race consciousness in Biju's words in *The Inheritance of Loss*: "what happened to Indians abroad, nobody knew but other Indians abroad only. It was a dirty, little rodent secret"<sup>50</sup>.

Like Kulfi, Biju too learns what the world thought of Indians, while straddling in kitchens of different restaurants and cafes of democratic US – everybody wanted to get rid of Indians. The class, colour, race and religious differences have not been effaced even if globalization claims to join all together- "as a metaphor for humanity"<sup>51</sup>. Perhaps that's why Samuel P. Huntington observed that the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics, "the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future"<sup>52</sup>. This kind of consciousness reinvigorates animosity and differences. The burden of the past, and colonialism still hangs heavy on people like Biju, it seems there is no escape. This is also a reminder of Maya, treated as an

'exotic' Indian in spite of all modernity and Westernization adopted on her part in *The Shadow Lines*.

James Clifford also refers to "the regime of flexible accumulation marked with a non-union, low wage sector offering very limited opportunity for advancement in the multi-nationalized world"<sup>53</sup>. He notes how 'casualization of labour' and revival of outwork production have increased the proportion of women in the work force. On low wage, these women are employed in all sectors including the industrial one. But unfortunately they also make the biggest chunk of exploited labour masses around the world. *The Circle of Reason* also points towards these facts which are not usually talked about. Zindi chooses women for her business but people like Samuel and Rakesh find an oblivious haze around this claim. They simply call Zindi a 'madam' who herds poor women across the sea, 'to sell them into slavery' or worse (173). After all, doubt and suspicion is a constant companion of all distant lands and trades.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty observes that the operation of the Capitalist global economy depends significantly on women. It is particularly the poor, third and two thirds world women, working class and immigrant women. They are preferred workers in these global, 'flexible', temporary job markets. That's why "the documented increase in the migration of these females in search of labour across national borders has led to a rise in the international maid trade"<sup>54</sup>. It also leads to a growth in the international sex trafficking and tourism. People are aware of the pitfalls, yet this group is ready to try their luck with a determination that accepts loss and hope as a defining tension of their new life style.

Karthamma's case is especially illustrative here. As Kulfi says, 'she is not from Bangalore or some big city' (177), neither is she educated. Yet still, Karthamma showed an extreme urge for moving out in Zindi's sponsorship, "She had heard of me from someone. I did not have to tell her anything. She had already heard more stories... She begged me; she even offered me money, to take her away from your India" (78). She had a firm belief that abjuring the native land will take away all pains and deprivations of class, gender, caste and region. This kind of expectation,

John Gray reads as “an unrealizable fantasy”<sup>55</sup> which has victimized a big slice of every poor society.

*The Circle of Reason* as postcolonial novel explores not only the travelling and straddling process, like leave takings and departures. But it also shows regeneration of communities and serves out of the heterogeneous experiences in a new country. After all a travelling culture or community is destined to change, develop and transform itself according to the various influences it encounters in different places. Bill Ashcroft and co-authors conclude, while ‘diaspora change their countries of arrival, so are their cultures changed in turn’<sup>56</sup>.

This changing system is best amplified in the last part of *The Circle of Reason*, in ‘Curtain’ under “*Tamas*”(403). Mrs. Uma Verma, a microbiologist by profession, living as an immigrant in El Oued presents the best example of hybridity in giving Kulfi a respectable cremation in spite of all difficulties and oppositions, by Dr. Mishra most emphatically. She is presented as a socialist, both by birth (being daughter of a hardcore Hem Narain Mathur, organizer of *Kisan Sabha* in Bihar) as well as by her beliefs and actions. She tries to purge Dr. Mishra of the various prejudices by finally saying: “There’s nothing wrong ... all you have to do to cure yourself is try to be a better human being” (413).

In spite of being a rationalist, Mrs. Uma Verma understands the positive role of religion, particularly in respect of common human ethics. When Dr Mishra declares that the unidentified Kulfi doesn’t deserve a proper cremation according to *Manu Smritis* (408) and *Baudhayana Dharmasutra* (407), and rather advises the dead body to be left on a sand dune, to give Mr Das’ vultures ‘a nice meal’(408). Uma is flabbergasted by the demonstration of inhumanity by one who pleads religion in everything. Her response is heated but reasonable: “All you ever talk about is rules. That’s how you and your kind have destroyed everything – science, religion, socialism... That’s the difference between us: you worry about rules and I worry about being human” (409). Here Ghosh is of course referring to the sad fact of religious fundamentalism which has spread wide along with diaspora culture. But he tries to bring out humanity as the winner. Hans Kung advocates the same kind of



belief in saying that the world is undergoing so many changes simultaneously that “ethics and self restraint are essential for saving humankind from reverting to jungle!”<sup>57</sup>. So, accepting changes with a concern for human rights and values is an important facet of the global times where,

“Nothing is whole anymore. If we wait for everything to be right again, we’ll have to wait forever while the world falls apart. The only hope is, to make do with what we’ve got” (417).

Pursuing this idea, Mrs Uma cleans the pyre place with carbolic acid (reminding us of Balram Bose, marking his final triumph as well!) in lack of *Ganga Jal* for the body to be laid down; chops down old furniture for the pyre (415) and pours butter in lack of ghee (416) - to do the best out of the worst. She has transformed herself according to time and place because being human is much better than being always correct! This is what unites the world and it is far greater ‘than what divides them in any manner’.

While narrating so many tales of such variety, Amitav Ghosh doesn’t forget his real duty. Like all the other novels, *The Circle of Reason* being the first in line, also tries to restore history to the lost and forgotten al Ghazira. People today know this place only as a rich source of oil and money, which is Westernized and sophisticated like any other Middle East country. Amitav Gosh goes to the roots and tells the history of this cosmopolitan place in the most compassionate as well as hilarious manner. After all what’s the use of weeping over a lost chance and lost time? Thus, the characters like Jabal, Sanneya, Nury Damanhourri and Jeevan Bhai along with the old Malik, the *Goat’s Arse*, the *thin Lips* are some of the most comic and yet tragic creations of Ghosh. This is of course related to the colonization of the Middle East, and Mediterranean areas which invited the European greedy eyes for its gold, oil or even water (River Nile, Red Sea)!

History and its originality relate to the most debatable disciplines of post-modern and post-colonial studies. Oswald Spengler puts it that there was a time when the European nationalism, represented by three or four world cities had “absorbed into themselves the whole of world history”<sup>58</sup>. The present novel attempts to show that Europe rode upon fabrication for long, suppressing of “Other” histories was a

deliberate move too. Colonialism began with the exhibitory motive of developing 'the dark areas', meaning the non-European and consequently non-historical places.

It is no surprise that history as a discipline emerged in European thought as coterminous with the rise of modern colonialism. They had realized it well to have a significant controlling power for the subject peoples. Thus, we got our imperial history which washed away all little and big facts of continents, "making it a palimpsest on which Europe wrote its dominance through the agency" of (their) history<sup>59</sup>. Thus, with this kind of background which is no secret to the Easterners now-a-days, Amitav Ghosh joins the post-colonial bandwagon which believes in challenging the forbidden entry in the Mainstream discipline of history through the literary writings. Ghosh stands up to Wilson Harris' idea that the buried facts can be achieved out by the use of "arts of imagination"<sup>60</sup>. Art and fiction provide as many relevant ways of interpreting the world as the privileged discourse of science and reason have been considered to do. Ghosh's "weaving" is undoubtedly a metaphor for the fiction craft, beset with his penchant for sprinkling local proverbs, myths, anecdotes and legends in the babel of so many and so far-fetched characters. Claire Chambers reads it as an effort of Ghosh "to convey a commitment to the view that fiction is as valid a way of explaining events as the more prestigious authority of scientific reason"<sup>61</sup>.

Ghosh does not make this restoration work a very serious, all sweat and pain story. He rather takes the comic strain to make it emphatic. One can see the tongue-in-cheek observation of Ghosh regarding the not all- fair means of colonialists to grab the ignorant lands of Al Ghazira, by the British officials named- The Goat's Arse and the Thin Lips. It's time we write back to the immortalized picture of 'dark, ugly Caliban with a red tongue wagging out'. This is almost a healthy humorous fight in which the author engages, in chapter "*From an Egg Seller's end*". Amitav Ghosh literally turns the tables down by giving authoritarian power of history-recording job to a marginal character like Nury Damonhourri:

"No one knew anything about him. He didn't even have a name for a long time... a quiet man, always willing to laugh, and never any trouble..."(246).

Thus, our historian is none of those White, scholarly and ‘tight lipped’ Europeans, who gave ‘myths’ of a value-free, scientific view of past with the beauty of *order*. In fact we do not rely on any one person’s tale, we’ve as many parts of history as the witnesses and narrators in *The Circle of Reason*. Because our new history does not “reduce the space to a stage that pays attention to events unfolding in time alone”<sup>62</sup>. We do not put in our historian the illusion of “an all seeing spectator” because that is not natural, human and possible! There is Hajj Fahmy countering Abu Fahl’s arguments in words like:

“... I know the real story, the true story.”

“If it’s true, how’s it a story?”

“All right, then, it’s a story” (245).

This instance points very much to the contemporary belief that history is after all one story ‘legitimized’. The fictitiousness of facts itself is a significant thing. As Paul Carter critiques Imperial history, saying “its primary object is not to understand or to interpret: it is to legitimate”<sup>63</sup>. But once the haze of colonial opium goes out, we know that history can’t be always the fixed and detachable facts. At times, ‘truth lies in silences’ (263) too as Ghosh exposes through this novel.

Ghosh experiments with this reigning reality through the story teller of the novel – Zindi. Her narrations and anecdotes, ‘litany of stories’ (213) could cause an uncontrollable, spilling crowd in the courtyard as Ghosh presents it, saying: “That was Zindi’s power: she could bring together empty air and give it a body just by talking of it. They could never tire of listening...” (213). The author also adds how -

“They had lived through everything Zindi spoke of...It was only in her telling that (they) took shape; changed from mere incidents to a palpable thing...” (212).

By such incidents, Ghosh amplifies the point that reality, facts or truths have a very subjective nature. Their presence depends a lot “in the telling itself” (212), in the language used for delivering them. We experience the world through language, and thus the history as well. This could be related to the very crux of *The Calcutta*

*Chromosome* mystery of “silence”, that the things change in the very telling of it. Thus Claire Chambers debates that “even the ostensibly unbiased discourses such as science inevitably change the thing they seek to describe at the moment they attempt to articulate it...translations slant their findings”<sup>64</sup>. In the other ‘novel of discovery’, Ghosh explicates it again in the following words:

“Knowledge is self-contradictory ... to know something is to change it. Therefore in knowing something, you’ve already changed what you think you know. So you don’t really know it at all: you only know its history”<sup>65</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh shows Nury building his trade on the tales brought by the immobile and dumb eggs, “For him every egg was an epic, a thousand paged song of love, death and betrayal”(247). As an Arabian proverb goes, ‘an eye in a courtyard is worth a hundred guns’ (248). Nury, the cross-eyed had the benefit of going to all houses, and knowing their life’s action and speed. He was riding on the power of knowledge, reminiscent of Fanon’s code. Joining him is Jeevan Bhai Patel, a Gujarati expatriate who churned money by his shrewdness and value for opportunities. After all, a history is incomplete if it provincializes the whole East - truth lies in depths which can’t be fathomed out by any one person or one side ever.

These factors also tell us about the significance of oral history which at times preserves much more than what gets into the written annals. Unlike the respected records, orality has a democratic essence: it does not belong to the high class or caste only. It invites people with knowledge of the past from every strata and region of a society. Zindi, Hajj Fahmy and Musa are important figures in this sense.

Thus, Ghosh is introducing all the forbidden cases in this recording of history. A drunken Patel (262), who is not even a native of Al Ghazira, plays an authoritarian role in this very construction! Then another exceptional presence is that of Sanneya (255), a woman living inside her home, veiled and secluded who became an important link for unraveling some knots. Ghosh makes this woman speak and act even if her whole past has been an alley of silence only, which nobody hears. She is an extended exemplum of ‘subaltern – a person without lines of social mobility’<sup>66</sup>. After all to believe Derek Walcott, much depends on whether we write this fiction (of history)

through “the memory of hero or of victim”<sup>67</sup>. *The Circle of Reason* runs on these lines basically – conjuring up memories and oral history through the un-winning participants whom Amitav Ghosh crowns with power and audibility. He writes:

“Though nobody knew for certain, there was not a man in al Ghazira who didn’t, at heart believe ... No one ever stopped to ask... Once it began to be whispered, people believed it absolutely, indisputably” (246).

Besides criticizing fraudulent historiography methods and totalitarian mannerism, Amitav Ghosh also hints at the other side of the coin. It is true that historians for a long, long time have measured up events in one way only- be it the White way or the Right way, assuming that the rest is darkness. In *The Glass palace* also, Ghosh shows Rajkumar, the minor, foreigner working in Burma splitting with news and knowledge, but anyone hardly heeds to him. All of these people are subalterns, without a platform and audience! But at times even Nury Damanhour, the foreigner in Al Ghazira had no difficulty in sustaining his credibility amidst people. He always had the first hand information about the two Forts’ new developments. So Nury was a celebrated man, in a matter of days; “the café he went to had to build an extension over the road, the mosque he prayed at was always full to bursting...Nury’s name became a byword, for he was always truthful and always right”(255). But, there also came a time when news was rejected and unrecieved, for they seemed ‘meaningless to people and untrue’ (255). Suddenly Nury found himself alone in his café again.

Amitav Ghosh is very much destabilizing the one unifying, all-seeing voice representing people’s history. Here it also refers to the facts being stranger than fiction at times which go unregistered and unreciprocated. That’s why Ghosh concludes “meanings are never apparent” (225). Perhaps an event can be interpreted in myriad ways, sometimes people can’t reach to the kernel of truth. Some things are always clouded by guesses, they lie buried for decades until some historian or an artist like Amitav Ghosh tries to uncover them to light! Therefore he doesn’t give a smooth account of the old Malik’s end at the onset of British imperialism in Al Ghazira. He keeps it disjuncted and fragmented with comments like “that was the plan, some say

but nobody knows for sure...” Or “what happened there nobody knows... what is sure is that...” (258).

Jeevan Bhai Patel is then given the prophetic presence among that chaos, who did not care much for acts. What he cared for was “warnings, meanings, those delicate shades which remove an act from mere adventure and place it in history, which are important”(259). It is like showing incredulity towards ‘metanarratives’ as puts Jean Francois Lyotard<sup>68</sup>. Perhaps that’s why we can always learn a lesson or two from history, as they say. Even Zindi at Tiffaha, an enchantress in narration herself believed in that. She used to say:

“It’s only when you learn to accept that what’s happened has happened. That, you can use your knowledge of the past to cheat the future” (224).

Thus, it is time that we do turn to the real story of al Ghazira, how it changed to an oil town from that of a home to all travelling souls in distress. Amitav Ghosh shows his uncanny anthropological study in giving details about this small country which seems to consist of the native Mawalis shrunken in a particular area (225), surrounded by foreigners of all colours and creeds. Today Al Ghazira can’t be called a national city in the strict sense any longer. It is a city of the world, a modern day Rome with mixed classes, “a paradise...!” (221).

The royal Malik family had been ruling over the people before the British spread their power. The young Malik had got his education in India in one of the ‘princely’ schools (248) which was already a highly colonized planet. It was a time when India was already upheld as a model for emulation by the British world around. The Malik was not only well informed by the English education which was used for ‘colonist subjectification’, rather he had received it more wisely than Macaulay had conceived of it in his design. The Indian experience made him wary of the British invasion. He could not be transformed to a gentleman from that of the wild and barbarous Easterner as he hardly conformed to the English ‘universality theory’ (371). He became an exception to the British teaching, unsmothered by “the vast intellectual wealth of English education which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded

in the course of ninety generations”<sup>69</sup>. He rather returned an angry young man with terrifying, bad temper.

“People already knew that here was a man very different from the senile and foolish old Malik, his father... This new Malik was a storm of energy” (248).

But unfortunately this was also a time which collided with the British expansionist phase. It was the peak hour when ‘the maps were open and connectable’ to be explored as a right for them, to spread awareness in turn for gaining wealth and power. They were quick in knowing that ‘al Ghazira was a speck of sand floating on a sea of oil’ (248). Ghosh has passionately described such a place in *The Glass Palace* too, which added its ‘oily’ wealth to the Asian continent, causing a heightened rush amongst the tech-savvy Europeans towards such ‘bushy’ areas by the end of the nineteenth century. He writes with the spark of his Anthropological observation:

“...to the South of the great volcanic hump of Mount Popa, ... on the eastern banks of river Irrawady, there appeared a range of low, foul smelling mounds...of thick ooze, ... seep(ing) from the rocks like sweat...”<sup>70</sup>.

The second part of *The Glass Palace* shows the *twin-za* community hanging onto these wells for livelihood as more and more foreigners, White men started gathering around Yenangyaung. They came “armed with instruments and surveyors’ tripods... from England, France and America...offering money and buying up their pools and wells...”<sup>71</sup>. They kept ‘hammering on the earth’ for its riches lustily and ceaselessly, through the mechanical ‘beaks’ of their wooden obelisks.

In *Circle of Reason* also, the British are shown sending a ‘resident’ to al Ghazira immediately, to make the Malik “sign a treaty which would let the British dig for oil” (249). But Malik was not to agree so easily, for he detested going through the wretchedness of ‘Indian princes’ (249). He had witnessed them changing to slaves in royal robes, chained by the English rules. This was simply an invitation to the *Goat’s Arse* battleship invading the sandy fort of Malik. He resisted hard, organized the *Ant - frying ceremony* (250) but that also failed. The English had arrived with the sturdy Indian regiment on the ramparts under the *Thin Lips’* command. When all efforts

failed in placating the ruler, the British had another plan. It was slow but steady and perfect! They ensnared the stepbrother Amir in the British education (253) which had worked as a massive canon in the artillery of the Empire.

Gramsci has observed this method of instilling servility through education to be much more powerful than any of the military or territorial aggression. It effected 'domination by consent'. This training was "a conquest of another kind of territory"<sup>72</sup> - the mind and the imagination are enslaved! And finally everything fell in its place for the British regiment in al Ghazira. They gradually won over all the 'complaining' (254) people, the 'still quietness' of the place awoken at once 'agog'! (254). The 'oil town prospered and grew' under the British tutelage, and they wanted even "more space" (252). The real Malik was more or less a prisoner in the old fort (252), as he had signed the treaty for the peace of al Ghazira (252).

For further extension, they chose the old Sheikh Musa's tomb area- a very 'special piece of land' (253). The Mawali went for prayers, the Souq-keepers held 'fairs' there and the Malik loved it for the best 'falconry' he enjoyed there. But these factors hardly dented the strong determination of Thin Lips. The other reason for their obstinacy regarding this sacred land of al Ghazira is the imperialist view regarding the colonized cultures. Nicholas B. Dirks (58) felt that British assumed the indigenous cultures like that of India "assimilated to the landscape itself- fixed in nature and freed from history"<sup>73</sup>. For them, the culture and nature of the colonized were one and the same, for a long time. They did not find it necessary to understand the reason for the great hue and cry over annexation of this special piece of the town. "It was a marshy, sandy bit of land... To them it looked unused...." (253). The colonialists always assumed and boasted that they only could utilize the lands and potentials lying unused in the new territories. They made experimentation a way of their life. But the natives always resisted such usurpation and tried to combat it. Ghosh progresses in detail:

"So , when the oilmen went blithely up to the fort to buy that piece of land, the blood almost burst from the Malik's face..."(253).



He knew that if that bit of land were sold, the business class would all shut down the Souq and immigrate to Zanzibar. But the real loss was greater than this, the Malik knew it.

At last when Jeevanbhai Patel took reins of the *battle of Date Palms* (263) along with the natives, the shopkeepers and the Malik, to “try again to win once at least!” (318). But as the world history shows, who could have defied the Empire at that time of her steep rise to invincible power? At least the old Malik, the ‘prisoner king’ (262) did not have the luck as neither did Bahadur Shah Zafar in India in 1857, nor king Thebaw of Burma in 1824. They were all battles fought in vain. They all stepped down wounded, imprisoned and exiled, living in drudgery over English pension! (262). Thus, the old Fort became a place of banishment for the old Malik who lived like a mad man in his own ‘attic’!

Amitav Ghosh has taken all of these three different histories in his other novels which prove that colonization seeded across widely in separate and vastly different territories simultaneously with a remarkable synonymy. This period is very much like a place decorated with a series of reflecting mirrors where the winner has only one face. But this shinning face has its depth in the darkness. Amitav gives penetrating insights into the less than honourable mechanisms of empire-building. These ‘downfall’ tales show the unlawful practices, oppressive and fraudulent activities undertaken by these non-wild, non-barbarous and civilized White men as Flory observes in *Burmese Days* by George Orwell:

“My dear doctor, how can you make out that we are in this country for any reason but to steal? It's so simple. The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets. Do you suppose my firm, for instance, could get its timber contracts if the country weren't in the hands of the British?... The British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to the English”<sup>74</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh has also shed light upon this cruel aspect of the colonials in exploiting the timbre, oil and jewels’ mines and ‘skinning the unfortunate peasant’ in this novel. By this, he is trying to repair a shattered history. Both the writers’ works are commendable for the sheer courage exhibited to tell the truth in the eye of the storm!

The kind of historical retrieval Ghosh undertakes here, depends largely upon reclamation of oral memory through which historically damaged selves could be remedied. He is cancelling the colonial stereotypes, defying the pre-conquest period as a blank, unmarked one. He depicts how it was neither a 'terra nullius' nor it lacked traces of history. What Ghosh proves is that the East and its history is not a blank area, rather the foot prints of history are very much present all over the place. The moving sand dunes can't remove and erase the facts which have been coercively buried down. He has literally brought the past alive and kicking.

What is most wonderful about *The Circle of Reason* is the way Amitav Ghosh weaves together so many events, their varied narrations and thoughts, all concluded in such a marvelous way. The Al Ghazira history could be unfolded through one of the chance incidents, that is, the fall of Al Najm and Alu's getting trapped in its debris. As these chance happenings provide windows to the vast wealth of knowledge about places, cultures and pasts that Amitav Ghosh exudes so beautifully in his well knit narration. They are all tied up in a pattern in which nothing is out of place or time, like a perfect 'Buti design' conceived by the Bengali artisans. The 'fall of the Star' is a metaphor for the indigenous resistance to the rise of neo-colonialism. The first wave of colonisation had already streaked the sea shores red around Al Ghazira. Amitav Ghosh hints when Alu and Zindi are on the last leg of their long journey, anybody could feel the spectral presence of their gory past, "there were more wars than villages along those shores"(371). The British had no sand 'unturned' for the hidden wealth wherever they could smell it so. Their barbarity is writ large over almost half of the world, leaving 'stumps' like the Japanese Miracle named character everywhere (371) – cutting off the very 'tongue' with which natives could resist or raise their voice against.

Jabal, the eunuch who used to be a faithful employee of the old fort became an agent of new imperialism for the oil town. He announced his shifting loyalty in his absentia- "Already smiling in triumph, Jeevanbhai (Malik's ally) reached out for ...Jabal beside him, but his hands clutched empty air. Jabal was gone"(259). It is very much like the *minister's silence and dishonest assurances to Queen Supayalat when the British regiment was literally entering Mandalay with all guns and boats in The Glass Palace.*

Buying the old dogs and using the 'divide and rule' policy made one of the most cunning tricks of the Western power. So, the same Jabal became the 'king of the Eunuchs' (263), and one of the closest advisers for Amir and the colonists. It won him more than a dozen of most lucrative British and American agencies "...with enough money to buy a continent..."(263). He invested the money to build Al Najm, The Star, a market 'greater than any in the continent' (263). Though this was kept a secret under wraps of various foreign companies' names, some people did know the fact.

Thus the building of the New town for Amir and his compatriots is symbolic of new Imperialism 'rising'. It reached its climax in the construction of the Star. It is a monumental proof of the continuing economic control by the West of the once colonized world in spite of their political independence. It is in fact the arrival of another insidious form called New Imperialism though in a less overt way. It represents a new world order under guise of multiple multinational companies working together- to further expand the capitalist modernity. We call our age 'Postcolonial', because of the new homogeneity among nations in terms of democracy. But the way many "destructive even genocidal histories of modern empires are being white-washed in order to rehabilitate the ideal of Western domination as an appropriate ideological cover for Anglo- American adventurism across the globe"<sup>75</sup>, can't be ignored. We are witnessing the various power absorbing models of imperial might from the past in the name of liberalization, modernization and development. What happened in Iraq, Afghanistan and is still continuing in places like Palestine makes it absurd to call ourselves postcolonial or beyond colonialism!

If we remember the Star background, we will find how native trade and culture was destroyed by the settling down of the British power in al Ghazira. Amitav Ghosh recounts- "The Amir found out the shop keepers ... their shops were seized..."(263). Soon after this, the fairs on the empty site were stopped as well. The Western modernization thus came as a destructive blow to the local business going on in the souq. It also seized human rights of the town as Jai Lal informs, "Demonstrations and processions are as forbidden as forbidden can be here and have been so ever since this regime came into power (324)". So the people had no choice, no voice - they just had

to accept every order and idea coming from above. It made all those in high post corrupt, even the ‘contractors’ who were exploiters of the labourers (302).

The collapse of al Najm is a living example of fraudulence and unlawful practices. As Abu Fahl informs that all claims of the star’s strong foundation and build was an illusion, a false promise. People were told that the concrete and the steel in the Star were so strong that you could “hang the whole of the Ras on one of those girders... it could hold up a mountain of rubble and a shopful of cars...” (244). Yet still it fell, to the horror of all! This was actually an illusion, a bubble produced in varied colours to please all, where as “the building was like straw with too much sand in the cement” (244). But actually the reigning authorities were “busy putting up palaces for themselves at home in England, or India or Egypt, America, Korea, Pakistan, Who knows where? Abu Fahl comments to the credibility of all (244).

This was all a farce, a façade; the multinational companies were projecting in building a memorable ‘Statue of liberty’ for al Ghazira, ‘with five angled pointed arms that angled out from its domed centre’ (198). But nobody wanted it as Abu Fahl gives body to the whole multitude’s thoughts “I was not surprised when it fell; I’d been expecting it” (244). Amitav Ghosh calls it a house ‘that nobody wanted’ and therefore it was destined to fall. But as Jamaica Kincaid puts it, “And so every where they went, they turned it into England”<sup>76</sup>. Constructing replicas of self can’t make anybody the same as the other. Bhudeb Roy was our first Neo-colonialist who put his own portraits everywhere in Lalpukur (99) to attract people’s minds towards himself, to make home in their hearts. But he failed, and so did the star. A reflection is after all far from truth! People working in the souq were no doubt, gleaming with joy over this incident (194). So Hajj Fahmy’s visionary speech booms in Zindi’s courtyard:

“Let me tell you now...why the star fell. It fell because no one wanted it. The Malik... nobody in the Souq wanted it .... They have not forgotten the Date Palm battle. None had been allotted a shop in the Star. The Mawali did not want... because of their Sheikh’s grave. The contractors did not care... the lovers, the smugglers... Jabal and his friends did not want it – they’ll be happier with the insurance money. Did even the Amir want it? Nothing that happens in al Ghazira, matters to him much” (246).

This is the reality of Neo-imperialism in practice today that those in power do not understand the indigenous people's feelings and just go on for their mission to establish any money minting source. As Ghosh maintains:

"Nothing was going to stop them getting what they wanted... the battle for the site was no longer a game. It had become a feud... a battle of honour. For them life was a war!"(254).

They were a different set of people as 'the Star was almost another country' (194). Amitav Ghosh reads positivity in this incident- the restoration of the souq, the annual fair, the local and traditional trades were to continue. Alu's lure in the rubble was the two sewing machines, again a metaphor for the native culture and its survival amidst all destruction.

The Al Najm is a lot different from the fall of the Shwe Dagon in *The Glass Palace* which marked the inner peace and the potential of indigenous by cracking down in Burma. But here too, the hidden hand is white which holds the sword to cut the East apart! How can we forget these histories? Amitav Ghosh reminds us that the past is not 'a foreign country, they do things differently there'<sup>77</sup>. Rather we are expatriates and extension of the same past and we should know this well! Because, by knowing and trying to know more only, we can "effect a mutation", as Ghosh puts it in *The Calcutta Chromosome*<sup>78</sup>. The efforts to know more, to discover more is the secret of a post-colonial life of unburdened self! There lies the way to go on, instead of sticking to the trodden paths. Ghosh ends the ongoing novel on this note only as 'Boss looks the other way':

"And so he turned to face the land before him, now grown so real, and dizzy with exultation he prepared to step into a new world" (423).

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*“They do not merely (re)-colonize land; they erase time...”*

Amitav Ghosh in all his novels explicitly invites his readers to focus hard upon the determinant status of communities, their memory and the making of history. *The Shadow Lines* constitutes complex meditations on the changing nature of origin, belonging and the human experience of history on the shifting planes. If post colonial philosophers declare late 20<sup>th</sup> century confronting the ‘end of history’ in an age of urbocentrism, technological totalitarianism and commercial commodification, Amitav Ghosh takes the backward route to sustain history. In this novel, he puts memory on a pedestal of discourse capable of replacing history. Thus, he explores the other side, the alternative which he shows that “it is not the blankness” (31)<sub>1</sub>.

*The Shadow Lines* makes a massive use of history by incorporating various social, cultural and political events in its fictional frame. Ghosh explores this ‘ending’ history in two very important aspects - first is studying the way historical facts are established in records and chronicles. So the characters like Thamma, Mayadebi - her sister, her high profile Governor husband: His Highness Shri Himangshu Shekhar Dutt Chaudhury (34), the Price family and Tridib are shown experiencing the Second World War, then Indo-Pak war of 1964 along with other important events affecting the social ethos.

The narrator is a third generation child who is a receptor of these events through class room teaching. But he comes out as the one who does not receive his lessons passively. Rather he rises as an agent of inquiry into history, beyond the prescribed books. Thus, *The Shadow Lines* carries the kernel of subversion towards these metanarratives as the narrator looks into private memories, only to find them at odds with what he is ‘taught’ in school! He is propelled to a position where he comes face to face with an instance of ‘subjugated history’. It was part of his own past, very much close to him. He comes to know how some portions of facts are connived at, or ignored to be entered in the annals of time. The narrator’s confrontation of one such incident can be seen in the instance when he challenges Malik, the young Marxist at

one of the most important things “that happened in the country when we were children” (220). This came as an unheard thing to these history conscious lads who had no idea about these riots the narrator had vivid recollection of. So Malik shut him up with the comment, “All riots are terrible... But it must have been a local thing. Terrible or not, it’s hardly comparable...” (220).

Their faces went slowly blank, and they turned to look at each other. Malik really had no idea what the narrator was talking about, he had to ask, “Don’t you remember?” But Malik remained adamant about his bookish knowledge who could remember the China war very well even though “... the war with China didn’t happen on your doorstep, but you remember that?”(221).

This particular ‘loss’ of history is what, the new historicist Amitav Ghosh brings forth in this novel. Thus, the narrator began on a strange journey: “a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking glass events”(224).

He finds out finally that it was not just a ‘riot of Pakistan, Khulna’ which he “strangely” remembered (224). It’s because these Calcutta riots ‘did not manage to make it to the front page’ (223). This is what makes this discovery significant to which the narrator was bound by blood! The central hinge of *The Shadow Lines* plot, Tridib’s killing in the Khulna massacre is an important example to show that the history we rely upon is not complete and unbiased. Rather it is an assisting tool of administration, a state apparatus formed in a particular fashion to serve purpose. *The Shadow Lines* also bargains that history is a narrative which goes through a process of writing, editing and rewriting at the behest of the governing class. Henry Sussman has a very interesting observation as he believes:

“History has evolved from a narrative process, postulating links between events splayed diachronically, into a conceptual machine; a food processor so to speak, of historical material, of events that have resisted oblivion”<sup>2</sup>.

Thus both ways, making or forgetting of incidents pass through this particular process. Henry Sussman also acknowledges that the efficiency of this machine is basically qualified by the turns in the language that makes it possible. Ghosh significantly puts a finger on this fluttering aspect of history - that it is ‘debatable’ considering the narrative space of textuality. The narrative has a crucial position in

history. The main battle in history is not always over land, power or position but rather on the representation of these material perspectives. Edward W. Said rightly says that “history is reflected, contested and even for a time, decided in the narratives”<sup>3</sup>. This power to decide the presence or absence of an anecdote in the historical narrations, their forming or deforming is essential to a great extent. No doubt, this ‘narration becomes the nation’ for modern critics like Homi K. Bhabha and Benedict Anderson.

History has never faced a challenge so despotic as to disintegrate its very being, its claim over the very fixity of its facts. The last two decades have seen various ideologies losing, unwrapping and shedding their notions and beliefs - the sacred corpus of ‘history’ is one of these. It is reduced to the level of a narrative, a blend of observation, memory and imagination from that of a monument, the edifice of all gospels.

Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* is a product of that changing tide only, which transformed the ‘holy’ history into “social self understanding..., avowing the historian’s close, intimate and personal ties to his subject”<sup>4</sup>. There is a decisive shift towards creativity and capacity to re-create. It is one of the earliest defying novels in India, particularly contesting the positionality of history as the master narrative. It dares to demystify and dismantle it to situate the historical in the political, social, cultural and economic life of a community. Starting from the very first page of the novel, Amitav Ghosh gives his New historic view that past is difficult to be linked up in a sequence, neat and comprehensive as lot of interpretative, subjective or at times even misrepresentative guess-work go into its arrangement. Ghosh shows it practically when the narrator says about his guide and mentor, an uncle named Tridib- “I tried very hard to imagine him back to my age, it was not easy...In the end... I had decided that he had looked like me” (1).

The narrator does make it easy by putting together things according to his whims; he is not bound by any rule. Can’t we say that at times, the past too is an arena of wishful thoughts and ideas? He also makes the grandmother have a different view, at the same time and place, “But my grandma was very quick to contradict me” (1). One may find this conveying the idea of the historical narratives changing from person to person. “My grandmother claimed that he... did not get along with his father” (6) - again a

kind of assumption can be found on her part here which does not convince the narrator. Past records can be fallible to a great extent, we can't pin it down in one single way. Personal views and beliefs colour our perception and presentation, therefore no narrative can be purely objective and the whole truth, not even history. It is made, processed and produced by not only the individual mind but also by language, which is arbitrary and relational in itself.

Haydon White says quite appropriately, "the facts don't speak for themselves but the historian speaks for them"<sup>5</sup>. And Russians have been wise even before the dawn of these revisionist theories, in believing the 'past' to be unpredictable. Thus the post-colonial narrator notes while ruminating over the long past childhood, and Tridib's role played in it- "...whether that'd happen today, I don't know. I can't tell: that world is close to me, shut off by too many years spent away" (7).

Tridib is more than just a character, a human being in this novel- he represents an idea, a question, a curiosity that plods the narrator in his journey to be a 'chronicle'(112). "Nobody has ever been quite sure... there was a casual self-mockery about... the things he (Tridib) said" (10). Tridib himself exclaims in an instance of narration about his friendship with May Price - "If you believe anything people tell you, you deserve to be told anything at all..." (12). This statement directly relates to his belief in the projected ideas and words expressed and his emphasis on the power of imagination. His manner also alludes to the fallibility of history, a rationalist doesn't believe in every thing that is brought to him/her. He's the new historical child with disbelief for all metanarratives, a Nietzschean personae that reckons that "there is no Truth, only truths"<sup>6</sup>.

Thus we come across many narratives and tales regarding one incident, through various characters' points of views. They span several generations, which help in establishing historicity as a human value. Anjali Roy captures this microstoria aspect of the novel, saying that "these little, personal stories around Indian nationalism supplement as well as give the lie to official facts"<sup>7</sup>.

*The Shadow Lines* presents such new and to some extent, overwhelming ideologies in collation with old beliefs- represented strongly by Thamma, Ila and some other characters. But the number of characters that Amitav Ghosh has spilled in favour of

the anti-establishment theory outnumbers them. It speaks for his philosophy as well. Still the plot doesn't read lopsided ever; the presence of both the female characters is far more affecting and potent. From the very beginning, Thamma appears like an agent of 'Order' – a hard working, meticulously sincere being. She is a new woman, to certain extent, considering the circumstances which she had coped with, working as a teacher and principal. She taught her son all by herself to aspire for the higher rungs of society. She lends the story a matriarchal figure that towers unchallenged with her staunch views about time as she warns, "it stinks if you don't use it" (4), a strong country and nationalism- "you can't build a strong country without a strong body..."(8).

Thamma is a traditionalist, a centralized and representative character, who provides a point of comparison to the narrative. The sock ribbing view of nationalism is the most distinguishing feature of her personality, which gives her the appearance of a 'war-mongering fascist' (78). Her objection to Ila's residence in England is one clear instance as she protests-

"Ila has no right to live there... It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years... of war and bloodshed ... everyone... has earned his right to be there with blood..." (77).

Such extreme nationalistic impressions make her most discernible as a traditionalist. Being the eldest, she is the living memory of those freedom struggle years; she was born amid and breathed on the nationalistic slogans. These memories kept echoing now and then, coming back to her imagination till the end. Her enchantment with the silent, Maoist terrorist and fighter classmate lingers for long. She always remembers that day with the proud claim that she could "have done anything to be free!" (39).

While this makes a small fraction of the novel vis-à-vis Thamma's life long journey, Amitav Ghosh hints something important through it. Maoist terrorism rampant in North-east today, appears in its germinal aspect in the novel. This was a secret association, nabbed by the British and then independent Indian government and yet it has survived all ravages of time and power. It also reminds of the contribution of Subhash Chandra Bose, another instance of 'dropped' history, a forgotten part of the mainstream, glorious non-violent part of Indian image. This is one of the subaltern

histories pointed out by Amitav Ghosh which he deliberates upon in *The Glass Palace* too.

Amitav Ghosh being a post-colonial historian shows a natural disbelief and dislike for grand narratives like the bliss of 'freedom' and the power of 'nationalism'. His struggle at the core is against historiography, dominated so far by the Westerners or the bourgeoisies. Because it has been misused and exploited to foster rhetorics like that of nationalism, unification and reconstruction of a nation anew every now and then by drawing some lines as borders here and there. Very idealistically, Thamma subscribes to these glorious tasks of nation building with a zeal undeterred forever. Even the central incident of the novel - assassination of Tridib doesn't unfaze her; wake her out of the slumber caused by these grand notions. Because, they have gone so deep as ideologies, instilled in us so intensely that centuries have taken to come out of such illusions.

Bertrand Russell finds nationalism to be undoubtedly "the most dangerous vice of our time, far more dangerous than drunkenness of drugs, of commercial dishonesty"<sup>9</sup>. It has been given to us as doses of opium since childhood; which has never led us beyond wars, misguided riots and violence. The very central event, taken in the novel, from history- the riots of Khulna in Dhaka can be traced to patriotism, bred by regional and communal jingoism. This turned out to be the "irony" which killed Tridib.

The riots of 1964 killed many, the official records could never give the right number ever as it happens with every massacre. This incident remained forgotten for years, neither was there any attempt to relocate this heinous day in the life of the nation. If compared to the Chaura-Chauri case, these riots had an altogether different fate. Shahid Amin's remark is quite telling in the way he phrases his disapproval- "To be a Gandhian in the spring of 1922 was to share in an authoritative recollection of this anti-nationalist riot"<sup>10</sup>.

Shahid Amin's words also reflect upon the fact how nationalist sentiments are used in such circumstances to serve against the very nation. If Khulna happened to be unforgettable for the victims of this cruel past, it was largely forgotten in nationalist lore. The people and the places scorched by the communal fires were erased over the



construction of the etching memory of the war. No doubt, our knowledge of the past is marred by omissions of the most vital facts.

But this is not the only part of failure attached to the territorial and patriotic nationalism and the portrayed history. It not only takes lives, it also betrays hopes and deceives people of their dreams. Nationalism did secure us freedom from the outsiders but it didn't happen to be the remedy for all ills of a suffering nation. It could not assure people like Thamma, of their collateral, of their safety and security from within. The onslaught of the Partition itself disillusioned people. Therefore, Thamma could never forgive history for the things that it denied her, "...the unity of nationhood and territory, ... the self respect and national power... like all the modern middle classes the world over..."(78).

Independence came as a historical event but common life remained same. It did transform India to a nation with boundaries but within it people didn't experience much alteration. Therefore, Ernest Gellner posits nationalism as a "theory of political legitimacy, requiring that the ethnic boundaries should not cut across political lines"<sup>11</sup>. It could mean that nationalism reduces nations to the level of a few lines and borders, which are supposed to separate one from the other both ethnically and politically, like a magic, which doesn't convince many. This makes the very title of the novel, as Amitav Ghosh renames these lines as *Shadow Lines*.

Amitav Ghosh has a groundbreaking presentation of history in this novel. It comes almost flowing naturally with the narrator's introspective 'chronicling' habits, waging war upon the essentialist and Eurocentric historiography. It is the historiography, which denied history to old 'civilizations' like India, Arab and China. About which Karl Marx' dubious comment went-

"Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empire on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society"<sup>12</sup>.

So Europe has boasted of having a historical 'consciousness' where as "the rest of the world relied upon the myths, legends and memories"<sup>13</sup>, with an historical or even anti-historical sense. Amitav Ghosh challenges this European notion by reliving the memories, rereading the legends which have historical stability but have been

superimposed by an essentialist historiography what Marx terms as subduing of 'warlike native tribes'. The Colonials used means to end all serious internal conflicts and heaved a sigh of relief upon the 'so-called independent Indian principalities existing on sufferance only'. Amitav Ghosh relates these very instances to the great movement of decolonization- the form of active resistance for self-determination and national independence, which finally won out.

The personal memories that Thamma shares with the young generation underline the truth that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder not against a supine or inert non-Western native. But it had been consciously alive even before 1857 in India. The same personal memories give the Narrator a discursive space of knowing history of both in East and West, the imperial power that bore a veil of coherence and stability for the outside world.

Unlike the majority of English narratives, *The Shadow Lines* begins with an Indian family's journey to England and first hand perceptions of the same. It's not an Englishman savouring the Indian exotica as a cliché. But an Indian psyche, which experiences the same aura of fear and instability in the war-torn Europe in 1939, making its history. Mayadebi and her family don't find it different in London from that of India as political waves were churning equally in both the places. India was in the throes of national movement against imperialism of Britain, which was itself in turn fighting with Germany. The common people at both the places could feel the tremor of the turmoil going on; were trying to lift up their spirits by indulging in bonhomie and a more humane, civil interaction. Ghosh shows that Francesca, Dan and Mike – all have moved closer; and –

"...their faces are a blur on the photographs. They are laughing – perhaps at the *Shaheb's* insistence on taking pictures of them... Mrs. Price and Mayadebi are standing behind the armchair with May in arms" (65).

Alan Tresawsen had the same opinion about life in Germany, people could foresee the effect of the looming war but not in its' whole magnitude. The author notes how everyone was being "friendly with everyone else," even old Mrs Dunbar had actually been "civil for the first time in living memory..." (66). Their consciousness for the changing time, their preparation for the onslaught can be sensed through the photographs Ghosh factually describes for us. This is one of his techniques to

introduce us to the chronology in concern. They were digging up a pit, an Anderson air-raid shelter for their own security, doing it like a domestic chore. They were doing it with the “exhilaration” (66) of the time but still the very photographs stand for their upturned position- their floating situation with hope and apprehension about the coming changes. War is imminently present in their heads. They knew in the heart of their heart that the reality ahead is not palatable. It’s a situation that’s out of their control and every moment following has the potential of a surprise. This fear makes their coterie closer and more intimate from within, forgetting all other misgivings or personal, petty jealousies. The narrator exclaims about the “colour of that knowledge” (66), about their prospect which had very few signs of arrival!

This event of London being in ‘the exhilaration’ thus becomes a tool of recovery and subversion for Amitav Ghosh. It strikes out the notion of England being stable and unified. This powerful country was under threat of the Germans and Nazis, like any other nation. She could be blown out by the bombs and torpedoes active overhead. Her pride of being the superpower could not credit her with the ability to rule everybody as colony with an un-setting sun on her horizon. It also wipes out the impression of every English citizen being a brave soldier, nationalistically-charged for sacrifice of victory.

The cluster of friends-like Alan, Dan, Francesca- by singing and walking with their arms clasped together, are not going to brave the bullets. But they are trying to lift the heavy fog of fear, going to their poor Bricklane rooms to die in silence, unresisting. They are preparing mentally for the fatalistic times ahead. They are rather the Shavian ‘chocolate soldiers’. They don’t worship “war as their religion” (77) as Thamma believed or as the Eurocentric histories make us think. War can never be the religion of a people who are friendly to supposed enemies, Germans and Indians. They can worship only one thing like the entire sane people world over, irrespective of what their governments do - life, peace and love. These people are heroes not for their celebrated urge to die for the nation, but rather for being jubilant in those stressful days. It is for their efforts to be together, to cling to each other, and to be alive somehow. Nationalism is critiqued here for it has lost the gloss and fragrance which could make people mad; ‘wanting to be free’ (39) of any kind of outward force.

Europe boasts of being a free society, free of racism and casteism- Amitav Ghosh refers to the very prevalence of this through a new technique. This is weaving story within a story, the essentially Indian and Asian manner of telling a tale. He represents Ila's situation as an Indian, as a Black, as a third World citizen through the bias-stricken character of Denise and Magda. Their combat is a replica of Nick and his friends- who practised colour, who expected 'everyone to be alike' (76) without leaving any space for individuality or reasonable differences. Europe appears to be a society equally torn apart with differences among people in various ways. It can't claim to be an angel-white society because angels love Blacks as well. Where does their idea of equality and purity hinge which they propound as the asset of their culture? It is simply flouted in the air by *The Shadow Lines*. They are as mean and divided as they accuse Easterners to be. The European idea of being a unified and discreet culture is as pretentious, their democracy as sham as they present others worldwide. It's a place where even children like Nick Price coming from tolerant families 'ran away home from school early' because he was "ashamed to be seen by his friends, walking home with an Indian"(76).

The author shows Great Britain failing as an anti-colour, anti-East, anti-big or small nation. It fails in showing the "courage to take the hard road that leads to accepting other races with a certain tolerance, love and grace"<sup>14</sup>, as Adil Jussawala puts it. The graph of Ila's life from an "exotic" being to that of an unhappy and heartbroken wife of Nick Price is an exemplum of the same. Only May finally rises up as the one whose "feeling of companionship is (purified of)... the deeply ingrained psychological animosity... and racial handicap"<sup>15</sup>. She could take up the thorny path of genuine friendship and a natural relationship with Tridib and the narrator beyond customary politeness and simulated cordiality.

The central event - killing of Tridib, has a whole foreground to be justified, explained and still it remains an ironic-'mystery' (252). When India made its 'tryst with destiny' in 1947- it received varied reactions. People in both India and Pakistan celebrated it as a memorable day; a much-awaited dawn of a golden era. But there were some who could not see any change in their situation. There were people who just remembered the partitioning event; people who were deported, uprooted, thrown across just for the

sake of one line. It was just one declaration in the government papers - leading on to a gulf, a chasm forever.

Basically Indian independence happened as an abstract thing, because of being accompanied by Partition and its violence. It did not provide people with any perceptible, over night overhauls. It was tangible only in a negative sense, a reality only in its violence and bloodshed. It changed the course of many lives, which would otherwise have run in their expected and customary ways. The ruling, privileged class, who kept to their abodes, or could get a lion's share in the new territories, celebrated the August 1947 phenomenon. Whereas majority of the common people were unable to join it, because it brought a new identity to them in the form of being refugees across the border. This aspect is well attended by Ghosh in his other novels like *The Hungry Tide* and *The Circle of Reason*. According to their religious affiliations, peoples' national affiliation was marked. Being a Sikh, a Hindu, a Muslim had become virtually synonymous with being a refugee and a foreign national categorically in the various parts of the subcontinent. Unfortunately they remained refugees for a long time, as an ugly aspect of these new, developing societies and nations. Thamma exclaims with disgust:

"When I came last time...it was the kind of place where rich Calcutta people built garden houses. And look at it now- as filthy as a *babui's* nest. It's all because of the refugees, flooding in like that" (131).

The poorest and the gullible ones took this deportation as their fate, resigned to it as we can see in the case of Khalil and Saifuddin. Khalil originates from Murshidabad, but now he is the work-shop owner in Thamma's ancestral Dhaka house. Saifuddin, the uneducated, unpolished mechanic is nostalgic about his first home town Motihari of Bihar, India but has accepted the shift across the border as something natural. State apparatus has worked here successfully. He never thinks of speaking against it, being poor and weak. At the same time, he feels fortunate in being well settled in the house of Ukil Babu. He is grateful for being allowed to stay with them, as he informs, "...there is a lot of trouble there now" (209). Khalil makes Thamma and others feel obliged that Ukilbabu is taken good care of by the non-Hindu family in kindness - "Why'd he bother to look after that old man, a Hindu too, when he could easily have thrown him out and kept both rooms for his family?" (209).

It's ironical how Ukil Babu is taken as an alien, a burden in his own house - as an immigrant. This irony is a gift of 1947- when India and Pakistan became two nations. Anjali Gera aptly observes in her article, "Des Kothay? Where's home?"- 'the word nation reverberates with pre-national echoes, brings out the inadequacy and violence involved in translating alien concepts'<sup>16</sup>. The moment of the two nations' creation at once marked the congealing of new identities, relations and history. In plain words- it became a moment of peoples being thrown into question once again, in a limbo.

Jethamoshai alias Ukilbabu is one such glaring case. He represents a section of people who did not fit in the mainstream nation as obvious and natural citizens. In spite of his high class, high caste, and luxurious life- he was a deserter in the land of his birth! It was all because of his religion. This disparity underlined the unnatural and inconceivable quality of the nationalist search for clarity and purity in the midst of blurring, mixing and uncertainty in existing conditions of all nations and nationalisms. The nations, everywhere have claimed to be defined by well-marked cultural, political boundaries. But such boundaries are never easily drawn and accepted with all the exclusion.

Brackett F. Williams classifies people like Jethamoshai as 'hyphenated nationals'- a peripheral category of minority and marginal groups that might be part of the nation but "never quite"<sup>17</sup>. He is Hindu- Bengali- Pakistani now as Montu is a 'Muslim Indian'. This marginalization on the basis of religion leads to the discipline and difference of 'them and us' in the same nation where one is born and bred for decades, but as an alien. This theory of national affiliation on the basis of religious affiliation makes whole religious, cultural communities victims of suspicion. It makes them defenseless, isolated and suffocated from within.

This resultant xenophobia of 'us and them' is projected veritably by Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*, telling us about the year 1965 events. When the narrator's schoolmate in Calcutta told them the cause of carrying soda instead of water in their water bottle. It was because their mothers had heard about the "Tala Tank- that the whole of Calcutta's water supply was poisoned"(199). The narrator notes a small detail in the exhumed rubble of that memory -

“we didn’t ask him any questions- not who ‘they’ were, nor why they had poisoned their own water. We did not need to ask... we knew the answers” (200). Tublu was confident that Montu will be knowing the real reason being one of ‘them’, “... he’ll know: he’s a Muslim” (200).

Thus in the particular context of 1947, the questions of religion and ethnic identities allegedly became the central determinants of privilege- that the ‘we’ of Indian nationalism can be trusted as true nationalists where as the other part can never be lifted out of the suspects, even after years of allegiance. Partition has not taken its place “on the frontier” only but right “inside” (151), amidst the people of India- a live memory. Such misplacing and change of identity didn’t take any time- but it just dawned on them. They were entrapped in this new periphery and couldn’t lift it up any way. This silent acquiescence is at par with the loud exclaim as Thamma wonders in a shocked tone- “What was it all for then- partition and all the killing and everything – if there is not something in between?”(151). She finds ‘no trenches, no soldiers pointing guns at each other...’ (151). This naïve belief in borders is reflective of nation’s definition as limited. Her dilemma is consonant with the central confusion of all nationalisms. Thamma is informed that this Partition is rather embodied in “disembarkation cards” (151) and visa formalities instead of being on land.

Thamma’s efforts to change the fate of Jethamoshai, by taking him “away from his past and thrust him into future” (136) stands as testimony of the same belief in the most shocking way. Ironically and most unfortunately, it was his being killed with two more important lives – Tridib and Khalil. The cause of this killing was not only the Mui- Mubarak scandal, it led back to the year 1947. It partitioned not only the land in two nations but the very trust and faith upon each other was fragmented. Ghosh critiques the idea of this division and shows its gravity. It has brought both the nations under perpetual threat forever. The violence of 1947 did not end there. It continues even today.

Therefore, Ghosh presents the strongest criticism of nation-theories and the subsequent reconstruction of nations. Because change of nationality by this kind of division is not a cut and dried object- obtained once and for all in some seamless form. The undercurrents keep flowing from one to the other side. Liberation by violence/ partitioning not only involves drawing of new lines on a map, unfurling of

new national flags and installation of new national governments. But this also comprises the tearing apart of individuals, families, homes, villages and linguistic, cultural communities that would once have been called nationalities. This also consists of the realization which comes upon gradually- that this tearing apart was permanent. It was impossibly, helplessly permanent like death. And that it required thus new borders, communities, identities and histories, forgetting the old ones. But this magical potion of forgetting and forgiving has not been discovered yet, so the turmoils occurring now and then, like the untimely deaths of Tridib and Khalil make a regular feature of our unfortunately very messy, disorderly history.

Thamma herself is forfeited, becomes a victim of this inconceivable grand change caused by 1947. She is puzzled for how 'her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality' (152) or why is she more 'foreigner than May' (195) in her own home town, like Tagore in Argentina (195). She had always associated nationality, like many of us, to the place of birth and religion but she's proved wrong in the face of new nation-building theories.

Amitav Ghosh can be seen believing in and telling different stories about the nation India, from a very different perspective. He weaves this magic by recovering, by listening to the past resounding in our present history. Ghosh believes in the close interconnection between state, nation and history in its modern incarnation. It takes in account not only the written records but also the unforgettable experiences, memories that are carried within families, from one side of the border to the other. This new belief also agrees to the view that no culture, no nation or community can boast of being discreet, distinct and separate. As Ghosh himself says in one of his articles *The Slave of Ms H.6*, "in the geography of human history, no culture is an island"<sup>18</sup>. Nations hinge on shared histories and communities.

Khulna and Calcutta events taken in *The Shadow Lines* prove this better than many of the historical accounts. Robert Dixon aptly calls the novel "a fictional critique of classical anthropology's model of discrete cultures and the associated ideology of nationalism"<sup>19</sup>. The reality is much different from the classical conception of cultures and nations in which Thamma believed, and because of which she criticized Ila's living in England. It also made her decide to "rescue her uncle from his enemies and bring him back where he belonged"(136). The reality is in fact a complex web of



relationships between people that cut across nations and across generations. Thamma is innocent enough to accept the power of borders and lines demarcating nationality. But Michael Bellig's observation about nationalism can further clarify this when he says, nationalism as an "ideology is so familiar that it hardly seems noticeable," which is built upon the qualities of 'innocence and intolerance'<sup>20</sup>. We are fed upon nationalistic intolerance consistently through all the basic means of life- media, text books to colloquial language we use and are exposed to. We are reminded of our nationality in a sustained manner everywhere, are conformed to the demands of a way of life, and thus make national communities. This works incredibly quick towards mobilization of a nation-wide chauvinism and calls for sacrifice or murder which sounds natural to us. It is by giving in to our assumption of uniqueness and individuality, the 'our' feeling.

We can include the brief memory of October 1962 Puja event in the Narrator's life. It's particularly when his father and Thamma were overjoyed by the news that "Nehru has told the army to drive those Chinese's back from our border. There's going to be a war" (219). The whole family was easily touted to the political and military glory of the past to continue the same in future, "Let's hope we teach them a lesson" (220), Thamma exclaimed with a hug to the child narrator. This instinct 'of teaching a lesson' is no less than the one of murder or genocide. It is a common aspect of the gentle mass during riots, especially the communal riots between the mainstream and peripheral citizens. George Orwell therefore observed nationalism to be a "power hunger tempered by self deception"<sup>21</sup>. But the same household of Thamma felt the euphoria of the war fading into "confusion" (220) when they realized their own weakness and failure in combating the Chinese and the fear of being seized by them- "we had wondered whether they were going to occupy Assam and Calcutta" (220).

This fear repeals their faith in the "reality of space... that distance separates, I believed in the reality of nations and borders" (219). He like many of the nationalistic mass believed in the integrity and power of borders to keep them safe and protected. But borders turn out to be fragile and incompetent, in many senses. The same borders delude Thamma when Tridib dies unnaturally in Khulna as a repercussion of the theft of the Sacred Relic in Srinagar. The child narrator simultaneously experiences his first

exposure to a riot in Calcutta, across the borders. Unfortunately Srinagar was not so much in convulsion as it caused in Khulna district in East Pakistan.

A newspaper of Madras, *Musalman* dated January 18, 1964 writes- "The trouble which started in Kashmir following the theft of the 'Sacred hair' should have remained localized but it is to be regretted that Pak citizens thoughtlessly created disturbances over it, subjected the innocent non-Muslims there to tyranny. This led to Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta and the innocent Muslims minority of Calcutta had to suffer"<sup>22</sup>.

*Sadaquat* in Urdu language, the so-called sole voice of Muslims in Indian subcontinent records " ...if the newspapers, the radio and the leaders of Pakistan had not behaved in this irresponsible manner, the mischief mongers of Khulna and Jessore would never have dared to attack the life and property of Hindus. Pak tried to exploit the Hazratbal episode for political gain by giving it a communal twist..."<sup>23</sup>.

Such clear observations coming from the Muslims' representative thoughts should have bridged the gap between the two communities of India. This is the perpetual 'gap' (200), like the one in a curtain through which Montu had been watching his school bus passing by the Gole-Park road, on the day of Tala Tank poisoning. Strangely enough, there was complete communal harmony during the demonstrations, held by the People of Kashmir, protesting against the Relic's theft. Hindus and Sikhs joined their Muslim brethren in mourning this loss. Their unified march indicated that it was a relic belonging to Kashmir, not to Muslims only.

Amitav Ghosh notes that the shrine was "a symbol of the unique and distinctive culture of Kashmir (225)". It sounds simply unbelievable today that communities did not accuse, blame or fight with each other. The dismay and anger of the Kashmir people didn't express itself in communalism or anti-Indian sentiment. But they exemplified the "power of a syncretic civilization" (225) which is 'thin' and incredible to us. Amitav Ghosh applauds the leadership of Maulana Masoodi, an authentic hero who is largely forgotten and unsung today as "any purveyor of sanity" (226). He perceives that the minorities in India do not turn to the pro-Pak elements for guidance and leadership, but repose their confidence in the native government. They don't live in a shelter rather they are very much home here. Ghosh candidly illustrates

the role of Maulana Masoodi in picturizing the efforts of Muslim leaders to preserve the national integration and harmony, perhaps deliberately. But that's the need of the hour, to make the nation realize that the minorities have matured, they didn't stay here just out of helplessness and lack of opportunity. But they have owned, and believed in the nation India as motherland.

Ghosh tries to remove the gap between Montu and the Narrator. But this assurance itself underlines, unfortunately, the contention with present day Muslims also. An Indian Muslim defending the nation at any cost has become a password to citizenship- which has been demanded of Muslims in India time and again. It has been so ever since Independence, in one form or another. The surprise, the striking feature of the Hazarat Bal episode is an example of that distrust in the minorities. The fear of their turning anti-national or their sympathy veering towards somebody outside has ever been a sad part of our history.

But what is significant in the context of the novel taken here, is East Pakistan became a victim of these rumours that some Hindu bigots had tried to desecrate the holy Relic. Amitav Ghosh writes –

“The premier of Kashmir declared that the theft was a mad act of some miscreants”, whereas Pakistan observed “Black day” and declared the swindling as “part of a deep-laid conspiracy for up-rooting the spiritual and national hopes of Kashmiris, and rumbled darkly about genocide” (226).

The Black Day march of Karachi on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1964 soon gave way to sporadic assaults and arson in places like Dacca, Narayanganj, Chittagong, Barisol, Jessore and Khulna. The Reuters reported of about one thousand Hindus killed in these parts because of the troubles brewing and riots flaring afterwards. When the adult Narrator looks back, he couldn't find any concrete detail about the Khulna riots of 1964 in the newspapers of that time. The simplest explanation which came to his mind was that everybody “believed in the power of distance” (227). They were in the illusion that national borders were there as walls, preventing outer influence and confining them in safety. Benedict Anderson comments about this aspect of modern states’ “belief” in the outlines and significance of the maps, as ‘maps mean power today’<sup>24</sup>.

Bill Ashcroft looks at the map “as a prime means of textualising”<sup>25</sup>. Because, the spatial reality of people is symbolically transformed into a place by annexation of a history. This place becomes a nation in the course of time. Inhabitants of such spaces as citizens and nationals are made to believe in the limited idea of the nation. This is the unrealizable quality of a search for clear and vividly mapped out nation. This is no less than a fantasy in the midst of all the blurring, mixing and uncertainty which actually exist in all the nations and nationalisms. Ghosh refers to it in the children’s play, as Ila confidently tells the narrator –

“...Don’t you understand? I’ve just rearranged things a little. If we pretend it’s a house, it’ll be a house. We can choose to build a house wherever we like” (70).

Thamma’s generation had willingly agreed to forget and ignore the ‘other’ reality beyond the newly drawn lines, to invent a new nation. The division of her ancestral house in Jindebahar lane of Dhaka owing to the two brothers in discord, can be taken as an allegory for the divided nation. Once the hard wooden wall was built and each family had “moved in to their own part”, a strange and eerie silence descended upon the house. The grandmother reflects that “instead of the peace they had so much looked forward to... the life went out of it” (123). But with maturing years, they started “liking the wall ... it had become a part of them... none of them wanted to venture out into the limb of reconciliation” (124). Very much like her estranged family, the subcontinent had believed itself to be independent of all past alliances. Benedict Anderson’s theory regarding constructed nations sounds true here that it is –

“... an imagined political community - imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign...rather than an inevitable product of sociological factors such as common language, race, religion and history”<sup>26</sup>.

India and Pakistan, like all nations everywhere had believed in this vision. They claimed to be defined and identified by well-marked cultural-political boundaries. But such boundaries are not perfect in keeping the nations separate from each other. The borders can’t stop memories and personal experiences of the shared pasts flowing across, or being ruffled by the winds blowing across.

Amitav Ghosh by retelling personal histories of Thamma’s dispersed family reveals this process of a collective will obtained to invent a new nation. Salman Rushdie

beautifully baptized it as “Imaginary homelands”<sup>27</sup>. Ghosh metaphorically presents the common consensus through Tridib as he says, “every one lives in a story, stories are all there to live in ...” (182). People like Thamma agree to ‘dream’ a new nation, believing in the reality of borders beyond which existed another reality, permitting only relationship of ‘war and friendship’ (219).

Ghosh proves these very dividing lines porous and indistinct with a reality, which makes in turn a pivotal part of our entity. He proves our assumption wrong about the national culture being a sanitized realm of unchanging monument, free from worldly affiliations. In the same way, India and Pakistan share the history and the identity together. Communities living on both sides still feel for each other, and are not limited to their own nationalisms or controlled by their respective governments. Because, the inherited memories of the past cannot be changed or erased from the minds of people entirely. It is inconceivable to think of a life and community reconstructed out of the difficult and contradictory ‘memories’ of the past. This is what *The Shadow Lines* unveils and thus confronts some fearful suppressed memories. This easily uncovers the simplified, seamless narrative of our national identity.

Tridib’s death in East Pakistan questions that national narrative which assures us to be safe inside the borders but the very cause which takes his life, is ironical. This death could catch him in Calcutta but it came the other way. Borders could not keep the Kashmir trouble inside, and Calcutta was communally infected not from within but without, from Dhaka’s paroxysm of killing, loot and arson. Because memories, past histories- be they good or bad, cherishing or painful- can’t be divided with the fencing of lands. Robi Chatterji questions this very philosophy of inventing new lands and nations in the novel. In spite of being the closest loser as Tridib’s brother, he could feel that it does not make any difference -

“What would it change? It’s a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide memory? If freedom were possible, surely Tridib’s death would have set me free...” (247).

Pierre Nora explains memory while enumerating it in relation to history, “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; ...thus history is a representation of the past”<sup>28</sup>. The narrator gives a mellow opinion of the same- “people like my grandma who’ve no home but in memory are very skilled in

the art of recollection” (193). Thus, the very technique adopted by Ghosh in crafting this novel is anti-essentialism. The narrator is like a questionnaire, he questions and inquires everybody. All of them around him tell their experiences, exposure to history with the help of their memories. He subverts the naturally presented and recorded national history. The Khulna riots contagiously enfolding and engulfing Calcutta drew people towards the borders, rather than separating them in their ‘Gondawana lands’ (223). The porous borders happen to be infallible like the shadow lines.

Nations and communities seem to deal with the moments of mob fury and rampancy like riots, in their past and present by the relatively simple strategy of drawing a neat boundary around themselves. They distinguish sharply between ‘us and them’, the fundamentally static notion of identity and call the trouble-creating an act of the other or an act necessitated by a threat to the self. However, just as there are far more fluid and uncertain boundaries than the claimed ‘natural’ ones of nations and states. There are also less delimited histories than the self-fulfilling accounts of these natural and permanent entities. Homi Bhabha aptly interprets that –

“... narratives of nations are originally polyphonic. The myriad voices coming from different locations and sides – the margins, minorities or diaspora communities are an essential feature in the national arena. They contest, contradict and complement each other resulting in a collectivity of a composite nature”<sup>29</sup>.

Edward W. Said also observes that because of Imperialism, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure. All are hybrid, heterogeneous, “extraordinarily differentiated and un-monolithic”<sup>30</sup>. Calcutta couldn’t connive at the untrammelled communal violence taking place in its neighbouring state which had been part of its household once- though partitioned now like the divided house of Thamma’s childhood. This event critiques another important ideology, that of national unity and natural blood relations’ intimacy and fidelity. Both prove to be fragile and difficult to be sustained for long.

The riots of 1964 in Calcutta having been “dropped into the crater of Silence” (230) makes the Narrator go back to his personal history of memories and experiences as a child. Amitav Ghosh in his lucid and expressive metaphoric way writes through the child’s view- as the shouts of arsonists and furious looters subsided around the school-bus; the panic, terror and suffocation felt by them took the shape of an

upturned rickshaw - "At that moment, we could read the disarrangement of our universe in the perfectly ordinary angle of an abandoned rickshaw" (203).

He could feel the streets and the city turning against them, the dispassionate lull was more horrifying than the uproar. The next lines written in the same vein are quite eloquent as he notes - "As I watched, one limb of the mob broke away from the main body and snaked out towards us" (203).

This is how national integration and the well preserved ideology of 'unity in diversity' fizzled out as a dangerous and life-threatening turn. No doubt, this rage against one's own 'brother' is an extreme and misplaced aspect of nationalism and chauvinism. A nation is constructed not only as a bureaucratic and state oriented community but also as a moral one. This is what gives nationalisms their greater or lesser appeal and staying power. This moral orientation usually takes the shape of militant, communal nationalism- by which violence is seen as a kind of patriotic baptism. Thamma's upbringing shows the same streaks as she objects to Ila's stay in England with the view that one should be in one's own country, where s/he belongs to by birth. Because a native citizen has to earn her right to be there with blood and a nation is made of borders drawn with blood. So, war has to be the prime means, 'the religion' (78) of fortifying a country and then only everyone inhabiting the land can be citizens proper, irrespective of any differences. But this idea of equality and fraternity is hinged upon very fragile lines.

Thamma herself desists from keeping her promise of being secular and non-communal. Earlier she believed that "Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: all become one family..." (78). But the same person changes to a totalitarian as she screams for a "proper fight... with tanks and guns and bombs" (237). She loses her sanity when India Pakistan fight in 1965 - and hurts herself in fury. She frightens the child narrator with these words - "... This is the only chance for freedom... we have to kill them before they kill us, we've to wipe them out" (237).

This kind of nationalism makes citizens lose their 'faith in the stillness of the earth' (204), because the very nation they inhabit can turn hostile any moment, without warning. Violence lingers some-how under varying names and causes. It has not ended with the violence of Partition, as do most of the history books in Indian

subcontinent. Such rampages within the borders lie outside the rhetoric of organized warfare with enemies across borders. Such changing views with the novel's characters further illustrate how nations are 'invented' by people instead of being real entities. Thamma's Dhaka home has to be given up, in order to adopt the new life in Calcutta. Thamma has willingly joined those sects about whom Salman Rushdie has written in *Midnight's Children*. His tone is acerbic –

“...the new mythical land – India ... was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which could only be provided by rituals of blood”<sup>31</sup>.

*The Shadow Lines'* painful turn of events, in massacre of her characters gives a clear sighted debunking to territorial and patriotic nationalism. It destabilizes the very discourse of nationhood.

Robi's growing up in the post colonial times “with the certitude of a unitary identity as a citizen of independent, secular India” is different from the fractured sense of the older generation. He did not witness decolonization and the gruesome ways changes occurred, that's why his views differ from Thamma's hysterical nationalism. But this placid mental state does suffer a shocking confront in the Khulna tumult. This particular incident in a way completes his post colonial identity; by “a deliberate fusing or dividing of already existing territories, glued with a new national mythology and unifying symbols...”<sup>32</sup>. The recurring nightmare reminiscent of the same Tridib homicide, is a proof of the insecurity carried within his heart. He tells wistfully-

“I have never been able to rid myself of that dream...ever since it first happened. I used to pray that it would go away...it stayed...I would have given anything to be free of that memory” (246).

Robi understands that the border-lined freedom and sovereignty are illusive and “mirage-like” (247). However, Robi's effort to go beyond flag-bearing jingoism, his efforts to assert his tolerance and sanity in the face of his personal trauma, come as a real ray of hope. For people like him India will always be based on an idea of multiplicity, pluralism and hybridity, whereas the fascists' ideologies are diametrically opposed to these. Rushdie rightly pronounces that “the defining image



of India is the crowd - and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous - many things at once. But the India of the communalists is none of these things”<sup>33</sup>.

Robi’s optimism for that Utopian India, “where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls”<sup>34</sup> is consoling to a great extent. He shows that such syncreticism can come out of a mutual understanding and maturity. Nationalism is not sufficient a means of arriving at this integrality because it perversely deepens the colours of diversity instead. He mocks the concept of exclusive national identity and pride, saying-

“...why don’t they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name?”(247).

But we know, as Robi knows that such narrow-minded freedoms aren’t of any help or use. They’ll lead to further distances and separations without proper respect and sympathy for each other’s individuality. Breaking free can’t grant sovereignty and freedom because these freedoms do not assure one of absolute security. The fear lingers as the narrator, Ila and Robi experience in Clapham as “three children of a free state, clinging together” (247).

Rashmi Verma finds Amitav Ghosh giving a perceptive insight into “the implication of the two nation theory and the tragic confusion created by the splitting of a vast country like India”<sup>35</sup>. This confusion is not over wars happening, but over the irony that it is fought by people in places which were part of one’s own country. This historic, unparalleled independence of India made people foreigners and aliens in their own place of birth. He frighteningly evokes the sense of distrust, loneliness and fear arising out of war between ‘oneself and one’s image in the mirror’ (204). It is this dread which Amitav Ghosh sarcastically attaches to India, setting her apart from the whole world (204). It is pathetic that we are defined by this factor of fear prevalent every where, not the culture or our rich heritage! Ghosh remembers this trepidation even in Egypt when he finds many similarities between the two nations except this one factor of an “Indian’s terror of symbols”. He thought of their world being “far gentler and innocent”<sup>36</sup>.

In the same observation, Amitav Ghosh intermingles the matter of family-feud. Thamma’s childhood was cocooned with grand ideas of nationalism but her family

vendetta causing house-division, undermines it. One can take this as imagery for the Partition also. Ukil Babu's fear that his brother's family may come and occupy his portion made him "welcome" (210) the aliens, people from India, from other state and religion. The fear from within was as grave and intense in him as from without. Jethamoshai seemed to have lost hold over his senses and normalcy. He gave clear evidence of senility when Robi, Thamma, May and Tridib went from India to take him. His noxious attitude towards Thamma's family was quaint but he also appeared to be truly secular, at the same time in his own homeland. He provided shelter to numerous Muslims who had fled from the Indian Bengal territories, which all of a sudden had become prisons of fear for them. Simultaneously his acerbic hatred for his siblings' family grew extreme and paranoiac.

Jethamoshai no doubt, behaves like a fanatic fitfully reminding one even of Gandhi in 1947-48. In his efforts to make peace and restore Muslims to all over India, he vowed of fast unto death as the last resort. Abul Kalam Azad observes<sup>37</sup>, "...the effect of Gandhi's fast was electric" and Dehlavi notes "Gandhiji made it possible for Muslims to continue to live in India"<sup>38</sup>. But it enraged some headstrong Hindu extremists as Gandhi's supposed concessions to the Muslims and his strong reaction against the theory to "India Shindia" (215). Ukil Babu seems to be a visionary, clairvoyant enough to understand that "once you start moving, you never stop" (215). The Bangladesh 'independence' in 1971 proves his fear true. Such events depict that state directs public and public can be reduced to a mere puppet life, because they can draw another new line anywhere (215). Tridib might have inherited his imaginative power when he advises the narrator that one has to be imaginative, in order to live a life of one's choice. Otherwise it's someone else's life that you live.

"... we could not see without inventing what we saw... we had to try because the alternative wasn't blankness – we would never be free of other people's inventions..." (31).

Amitav Ghosh's treatment of history is artistic and different because he psychoanalyses the victims of history. He presents Ukil Babu as one of those hurt by Partition, who could not rejoice like Thamma being safe in one's precincts won through nationalism. He remained unruffled enough to change his nationality. He could not exchange alliances just on the grounds of his religion, even though he must

have been forced to do so from all sides. That is what he expresses when he comes back to his real sense in one particular moment –

“...I know everything...once you start moving you never stop. That’s what I told my sons when they took the trains...I don’t believe in this India-Shindia... suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere...I’ll die here” (215).

Ukilbabu’s bitter words hint at his being disillusioned, with a feeling of having been betrayed by the whole façade of the Independence and decolonization. He believed none - neither the Indian government, nor co-religionist people or his own family including his sons. This time, the word ‘they’ (215) does not refer to the other community or religion tacitly as always. It’s for the people in power and authority, the state and his own Hindu Indian community. Partition of India must have provided him instances of witnessing so many grim and cruel events that it has simply gone unregistered on his conscious part of mind.

In other words, the pain and suffering caused in 1947 seeped so deep in this old man’s heart that apparently it was not visible. It had frozen inside him like a thorn, difficult to touch and bear the pain it caused. He rather forgets the whole trauma which suits his situation the most. He prefers desisting the hazardous memories, wearing this loss as a protection couch. He adopted this prison of complacency as the wisest thing. The singing of “God save our Gracious ...” (213) with May in a welcoming tone, instead of jerking her away shows that. He’d have been happier and more contented to be under the British than suffering the paroxysm accompanying the Division. Every emendation wrenches something away from the assumed permanence of life.

The lawyer’s condition also refers to the fact that it is difficult for people like Ukil Babu to melt with changing time and mould according to the space provided. He goes to the extreme point of avoiding it altogether which makes him receive the refugees irrespective of religion in his house. He does not quit it in search of a new identity. He is still in a subconscious combat with his brothers’ family. Freud called it ‘Repression and Sublimation’<sup>39</sup>, a play of memory and forgetfulness in a person. He buries down some memories in order to be alive but other unnecessary fears keep haunting him. Partition has created an assortment of character types- he’s in the lineage of Sadat Hasan Manto’s ‘Toba Tek Singh’<sup>40</sup>. He’s a completely transformed man in his efforts

to keep away from changes, fighting the tide of change like the legendary Miss Havisham of *Great Expectation*! But history is too imposing to be ignored.

Thamma's radicalism ignited at the onset of 1965 war with Pakistan also has some reasons. Tridib's death in Dhaka, in the hands of the furious mob becomes a tormenting memory for her. She is reduced to a victim of the "terror of symbols" like many others of the Indian subcontinent during the civil disturbances of not only 1947 or 65 but also the riots of 1984, 1992 and 2002. The incident of Thamma's selling the gold locket "for war" (236) well illustrates her feelings and mental state. It is noteworthy that she had always liked to be adorned with gold as a traditional, high caste woman. She had nourished this secret fondness and passion for gold trinkets (233) ever since childhood. She had never given ear to the gossiping relatives for wearing the ruby pendant chain even in her widowhood who viewed this as an act of defiance of the ancient proscriptions (235). Nothing could make her give away this beloved 'chain' but the war did. She screams in anger and pain upon the child narrator – "I gave it away. I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to, don't you see? For your sake; for your freedom..." (237).

Any incident of Muslims attacking Hindus became a sign of deep-rooted hatred for Thamma. It became an allegory for undying enmity and antagonism between the two communities - whom she started taking as almost two different nations. The incident changed her secular view to that of an extremist. The symmetry between place of birth and sacrifice determining identity touched a fanatic point with her, any modification in this rule smelt of horror, incarceration and death, or 'greed' (79) to her. The petrifying sense of being hounded out, hunted and then killing three people at once - remained heavy on her till the end. Such events tasted very bitter to people like Thamma, because even after Independence and Partition- things didn't change much. Neither of the two new states turned out to be what their proponents had hoped for.

George Orwell in the novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*, wrote like a visionary that, "at one time it had been a sign of madness to believe that the earth goes round the sun; today to believe that the past is unalterable"<sup>41</sup> is the same. History has been proved to be Janus-faced. In fact it is even more versatile; its reach is deep, wide and far. Therefore perhaps, the narrator tells Ganapati, in his monologic manner in *The Great Indian*

*Novel* by Shashi Tharoor – "...the recounting of history is only the order we artificially impose upon life to permit its lessons to be more clearly understood"<sup>42</sup>.

Even though the wise can understand the process of history, yet it is their "fate that they can never shape it"<sup>43</sup>. Ghosh does not completely take side with his great Indian tradition which has been condemned by Europeans to be "historyless". But he does attack those who have claimed and boasted of having a history; he proves their impression wrong. It is not only the Indian one but all national histories, have been guided by the Eurocentric historiography rules. Thus all such histories are incomplete and imperfect. Because histories hidden from public knowledge by people who want to be acceptable to all - are telling half-truths only. They are dishonest as they are keeping back information to themselves, by burying them in the past itself.

Amitav Ghosh proves it that all history has been a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as has been necessary. He shows it through the 1964 riots - an important historical event, which was evidently "swallowed up" and pared out in the processing. The early post independence history had gone through 'purgation' about which even the best university students of India (Malik and the narrator were in the University of Delhi) had no idea. Our history has mainly been a thumbnail one, placing Independence as an Edenic reference point in its larger narrative. In order to maintain the serenity and placidity of our history of 'Ahimsa', many of such crucial events have been denied the historical position, usually chopped off as inconsequential and local things.

*The Shadow Lines* portrays how 1964 riots can't be declared "local" (221), unimportant and inconsequential because they had changed the very euphoric, healthy living beings to lunatics almost. Thamma, Robi, Ila, May and after revelation, even the neutral narrator- all show signs of being affected. Tridib, Ukil Babu and Khalil were snatched away by the cruel hands of the deadly mob- could the scar caused by this incident ever healed for their family members and near ones? But the riots which killed thousands, "not very many less than were killed in the war of 1962" (229) were made to be forgotten.

"The riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination ... the histories and book shelves. They had dropped out of memory in to the crater of a volcano of silence."(230)

It simply disappeared from the collective narration of 'responsible opinions' of a nation alive to its pores, how? It dimmed without leaving a trace in the national, mono-mythical historical records. Isn't it a victimization of the totalizing process of history? It is largely done by homogenization, by grossly falsifying contingent reality occurring in historical events.

*The Shadow Lines* proves such historiography a failure, propagated by the icons of the West, specially Hegel, Frank Rosenweig and Jean Hyppolite etc. Their historiography coordinated 'superimposition and supersession'<sup>44</sup>. The act of superimposition propounded by Hegel is an axial grid work to crystallize a conceptual criteria of realigning an otherwise jumbled detritus of human activity. It basically aims at effecting a seemingly seamless welding of disparate spatial and temporal contexts. Whereas Rosenweig emphasised on the accord of rational and thus real, which is no less than the recipe for a self willed blindness of the powerful towards the local or 'microhistoria'<sup>45</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh's revisionist historiography project incorporated thus in this novel calls attention to the microhistoria-narratives of history. He investigates the methods of chopping off, fringing out small histories in order to present the perfected, flawless national history. He prefers the pre-modern oral discourse of story telling, very much like Raja Rao, upon that of the 'manicured', scientifically written documentation. He looks in the minor matters and unsung heroes' lives to recuperate the counter narratives, appropriated by official, bourgeoisie and 'ahimsa' -based nationalisms. Ghosh focuses on the regional instead of national. He revives the suppressed memories and conveniently forgotten, appropriated past stories. Even though it needs foregrounding the violent phase of Indian nationalism, which has been shrouded by genteel domesticity, silences and seamless accounts. Tridib's death was resultant of the riots spreading on both sides of the borders of the divided Bengal.

The narrator himself had witnessed his own nation's troublesome time as a child but he was protected from the truth that the borders could not save his world from disturbances. The secrecy and tacit hush palling over Tridib's death took as long as fifteen years to be revealed. Amitav Ghosh's lack of faith can also be seen by the manner he adopts for passing the truth to him. He gets dissimilar accounts by Robi, May and to some extent his parents and Thamma about the same incident. The

newspapers of the time do very perfunctory service. They give just a footnote news of the event and history simply skips and avoids it. These facts accurately re-enact the complicity of recorded history surrounding accounts inconsistent with dominant reconstructions which banish local history to oblivion. The author highlights these minor riots affecting the whole psyche of the subcontinent. They are maliciously denied their place in history because they are like a “chink” (233), a fissure of disruption and distraction in the centralized historiography’s neat narratives of battles with outside enemies, beyond the national borders.

“There were whole shelves of books on the war of 1962- histories, political analyses, memoirs, tracts - weighty testimony to the eloquence of war... another set of shelves- the section on the 1965 war with Pakistan”(222).

Malik the Marxist scholar finds 1964 riots as an imaginary thing, sordid and unimportant in comparison to 1962 war with China. This also refers to the centre and margin pattern used in grand discourses. He shows us how local events are taken as bits of distraction and how history is equated with “the national, the rational and the progressive, the programmed one... which can be narrativized, and theorized as the road to the future”<sup>46</sup>. In such meta-narratives the riots are generally forgotten as part of an unchanging expression of momentary madness, primitive misbelieve of state inspired manipulation and murder. Amitav Ghosh notes –

“...for the madness of a riot is a pathological inversion... of that indivisible sanity that binds people to each other independently of their governments” (230).

Thus Amitav Ghosh is in the league of the postcolonial writers who unearth histories through their creative writing and fictions which are not always so fictitious.

*The Shadow Lines* sounds quite prophetic as it encourages the narrator and so the readers as well to use one’s curiosity and precise imagination. Otherwise we’ll keep living someone else’s life, believing in the half lies of the mainstream historical discourses. Such discourses follow a neat and predictable course of evolution reserving violence and riots as exceptional and disorderly actions. They are often represented in records as being so overwhelming, so palpable and obvious that they practically disappear from the analyses. Such incidents are reduced to a set of statistics without any relevance to the reasons and repercussions, taken as historically

inconsequential. Where as we see in his novel that they hit strong upon the very fabric and mind of every generation in a society.

The 11<sup>th</sup> January 1964 newspapers carried both news - "curfew in Calcutta", and "Sacred relic reinstated" (223). But both were separately placed in fragments - in order to keep the sham of the plural, exceptional character of a newly liberated India. Because this has been the way of the proud national histories throughout the developed nations. It tends to exclude the dimensions of force, uncertainty, domination and disdain, loss and confusion by normalizing the struggle incarnated in history. They evacuate it of its messiness; make it a narration of resolutions and advances in time. That is why may be the dialectic of history took in Walter Benjamin's mind the shape of a paradox; that there is "no document of civilization which was not at the same time a document of barbarism also"<sup>47</sup>. All national histories bring forward the former aspect, withholding the latter one. Therefore, Umberto Eco in a deconstructive manner claims that 'truth can be identified with what is not said or what is said obscurely and must be understood beyond or beneath the surface of a text'<sup>48</sup>. Thus every time we discover a secret, a knot of our past can be a part of another hidden, secretive truth.

The narrator in *The Shadow Lines* reaches the same conclusion as he notes in the last line of his narration, "the glimpse of a final redemptive mystery" (252). Only our curiosity and incredibility towards the 'given facts' can take us to the real mystery of life, the final secret of our being. Because our knowledge of the past is marred by silences and omissions of the most vital facts. Amitav Ghosh points out some of the gaps and fissures in our celebrated history. He fills them up with lively events, colours them with a literary imagination, opening our mind's eyes and clearing the present in the shadow of our past. T.S. Eliot spoke of the pastness and 'presence of history in the present time'<sup>49</sup>, Edward W. Said also believed that 'neither the past nor present has a complete meaning alone'<sup>50</sup>.

So does Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* - that our present is shaped by the way we formulate our past. The representative narrator experiences "the past concurrent with its present" (31) everywhere. Be it the modified building of Victor Gollancs' publishing house in London (32) or the anonymous Jindebahar lane of Dhaka. He brings forth the importance of knowing the truest of records because a present based



on whims and pretensions, half truths can't retain a nation's harmony for long. They are necessarily fragile and open to question. Ghosh has given a glimpse of the truth that the nations and national histories are alterable and malleable. What we know and believe should be open, self-consciously historical and accommodating. We can't ignore the personal memories and histories of the eventful, living present changing into the past every moment. We are not honest if we are aiming only for larger unities in national narratives.

*The Shadow Lines* thus challenges the Eurocentric conviction in written historiography, symbolized precisely by the character of Ila. She articulates true metropolitan disdain for the periphery, banishing them to the hierarchy-bin as she once tells the narrator-

"...nothing really important ever happens where you are ... there are famines and riots and disasters... But those are local things after all- not like revolutions or anti-fascist wars, nothing that sets a political example to the world, nothing that's really remembered" (104).

But a complete and true history can't be recorded by conniving at incidents like famines and riots! Because small events and changes lead to the greater ones. Revolution can't take place straight at the national level of politics by rabbleroising. Revolutions begin at the level of small groups, sects and communities first, at a close quarter where people live. Amitav Ghosh thus 'writes back' to the imperialist historiography, which erases and overwrites the little stories of small places in order to polish the national edifice. He subverts the objectivist, so called scientific history by substituting stories with all of their veracity. He doesn't make his own mother, father or grand-mother tell the stories of the Dhaka massacre but presents it through two differing points of view- of Robi and May who had witnessed it themselves. He believes in the power of memory which Novick finds to be "a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present"<sup>51</sup>. After all memories can't be erased all over even if they're forcefully scraped out. Thus he makes literature a tool of digging out the buried and forgotten facts.

With so many intertwined tales and anecdotes from varying points of view make *The Shadow Lines* a mnemonic novel. It puts faith in the memories, in the oral truths rather than the records only. Thus, fragments of scattered history weigh more for validity in comparison to the Western belief in written Historiography. That's why

Anjali Roy thinks Amitav Ghosh “retells the stories of the minor personages and the unknown players of Indian nationalism”<sup>52</sup> to retrieve those counter narratives occluded or appropriated by official bourgeois nationalism through the circumscribed but close up perspective of the local.

Ghosh finds out the reality in fictions woven by people whom they hold to for life- “stories are all there to live in...” (182), irrespective of what the grand narratives say. Past by its very nature is alterable. But it can’t alter altogether if we know the importance of keeping alive our own memories, our own personal histories preserved in the form of fictions and myths.

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“*Recollecting some forgotten shreds of the past...*”

It is well known that chaos has been the scene of order's birth, breaking leads to making of another being. That's why Amitav Ghosh is all set to shatter barriers of various kinds in this particular work - *In an Antique Land*, to assert a new system. It may be found to be tempering with many fortified ideologies and constructs. *In an Antique Land* serves the canvas for splashing new colours for a conglomeration of various disciplines to assert the oneness of the world. Ghosh does this by mingling fiction and non-fiction together. But most significant point here is Amitav Ghosh's attempt at re-reading the world history encompassing events, cultures, rituals, beliefs and various aspects defining the so-far distinct continents. His mood is naughty as well as challenging which he pursues very seriously with a great scholarship at command.

So, *In an Antique Land* can be read both by students of literature and social sciences with benefit. Anthropological and historical elements make the very backbone of the narrative here. Stories, anecdotes and characters from across centuries and continents have been enmeshed in such a way that the reader feels sailing through the orbits of time and space unhinged, on a smooth ride. That's why critics have called it 'a traveller's tale disguised as history'.

Amitav Ghosh indulges in this intermixing in order to craft the multiple narratives that mark the postmodern approach. There's a pressure, a deepening demand for democracy in producing the multiple histories which can be called minority histories too. This is inherent today in all writings which can be unfolded with methodological innovation only as Amitav Ghosh has done here. This makes it very much of a novel with its themes and the nuanced style of expression mastered by Ghosh.

*In an Antique Land* defies the magic of West-propounded globalization, by showing that the original world hinted by the word 'antique' was very much a plural and multitudinous one itself. At the same time, this novel is also a counter narrative to show that the division of human reality was propaganda to create a notion of inevitability to the chasm of 'us and them'. Unfortunately the notion lingers even

today amidst the high promises of uniting the world under one sky. Thus, *In an Antique Land* has surprises not only in its structure but also in the very theme of the novel. It historicizes the very meta-narrative, the master-narrative of history, and beginning in G.W.F Hegel's 'spirit' philosophy and supported by all other erudites, ironically accepted by even the East. But Ghosh believes in becoming free of the colonized self by abandoning fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definitions. *In an Antique Land* can be read as a postcolonial work of resistance with an effort to 'recapture the self'<sup>2</sup>.

As part of defiance, Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* 'provincializes Europe'<sup>3</sup> as proposed by Dipesh Chakrabarty in his path breaking work. Ghosh is out to reveal some deep lying facts of the all powerful Empire, built over almost whole of the world, in a period of 100 years. Amitav Ghosh questions many of the established facts throughout the novel, which have gained the relic like normalcy and acceptance among people. *In An Antique Land* expositis how the normal history has been 'a gallery of downright follies" mainly<sup>4</sup>.

But first, let's look into the vast world of the *antique land* referring to Egypt by the title. The very name of this country summons one's childhood history classes about a grand civilization with supreme pyramids and giant like Pharaohs. It stands as a place of exotic beings, haunting monuments and landscape with a heavy aura of romance! Amitav Ghosh does not touch this much trodden path. He rather takes the medieval period etched in the ruins of modern day Egypt and tries to fit in some most ordinary people like Ben Yiju and his Indian slave Bomma and others in the 11<sup>th</sup> century of 'grand designs and historical destinies' (15). He has chosen to write a history of the ordinary people instead of the usual stuff – kings and queens! But it has a particular glory of its own; the charm of an ungolded past is rarely revealed in such an interesting manner.

*In an Antique Land* begins with the picture of the great Crusade of 1148 AD between Damascus and German Franks (15). This defeat became something unforgivable for Egypt and for the whole East, for the reason that it is known as the point of European entry to the 'savage world'. This marked the period of 'intense darkness' (32) which caused Egyptian 'bondage' with that of Europe for centuries to come! Before that it was a free land, marking the "boyhood of history- boisterous and active"<sup>5</sup>. But once

imperialism engulfed it and 'Orientalised' it, the real Egypt like many of the other Eastern countries came to be called an 'inert'<sup>6</sup> and passive area of profit for the West. This initiated the unending 'career'<sup>7</sup> of the West, the very business which went on unperturbed in a long future. No doubt, the 'Egyptian days': a proverb for 'unlucky days' (32), continued for many centuries. This is apparent even by the English insistence upon the metaphoric name "Egypt" instead of 'Masr', the real name meaning 'sweetness'. This signifies the overwhelming power that Europe bore upon this little but deep country. It affected the very identity of the province, using this nomenclature as a potential 'weapon'! (33)

But as history repeats itself, Amitav Ghosh also obeys rules of history by evoking the forgotten victory of 641 AD. While describing the 'Gate of On', reminiscent of the sanctuary of Sun god transcribed as the "Babylon", Ghosh delves deep in its past. He recalls how this area was guarded by two massive towers through which the flag of Muslim victory over the Christian powers had marched into Babylon under Amr Ibn-al- As (33)!

If Hegel believed that the "Christians of the West" were the ultimate "accomplishers of history"<sup>8</sup>, then he might not have remembered this particular Christian defeat, out of the many others! Ghosh has gone back in time very far, in order to prove that the West or the Christians have not always been the invincible rulers. Rather there is a "marvelous symmetry to the centuries- long processes of rise and fall of nations"<sup>9</sup>, as history proves. But the biggest fact facing us in the 'putrefying pit' (35), marking the site of Cairo victory, refers to this only. What is glinting and shimmering today as modern places might have been through its own period of 'un-enlightenment' or vice-versa; as all the towns like Alexandria, Aden or Qahira eloquently indicate in their present day dilapidation and 'tableau of decay' (29).

Ghosh, that's why, revives memories of the medieval Fustat under Fatimid Empire which witnessed the emergence of Masr as the nucleus of one of the richest and most cosmopolitan cities on earth! (38). Today the same Fustat is a 'gigantic, open refuse pit' (38), an immense rubbish dump! But let's not forget that these 'suppurating waste lands' (39) were at a time lands of bounty, gold, jewels and unfathomed knowledge, which caused an 'Egyptomania' (81) among the Westerners. The present day England



and America can't connive at their Dickensian ghettos of suppurating poverty and deadly starvation either.

The most important section of *In an Antique Land* is the Geniza part which holds various historical elements in it. The Geniza collection is a case of subaltern pasts, which have never entered academic history. Such subaltern pasts have been defined as stubborn knots which 'standout and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric'<sup>10</sup>. Ghosh is readily ruffling this in order to seek out facts.

Genizas were a part of the Jewish Synagogues in which they preserved their writings of every sort, to save God's name from being accidentally desecrated. It was one of the most essential and firmly believed-in practices among Jews who came in waves to Egypt for fear of Spanish Inquisition (57). This is ironical today that the Muslim Egyptians lent them home in their distress but the neighbouring Palestine is robbed off its homes and lands by the very guests! Ghosh notes, "In some profound sense, the Islamic high culture of Masr had never noticed the parallel history, the Geniza represented" (95). He also refers to the dividing border of Palestine 'drawn through time rather than territory, (which allocated) a choice of histories' (95).

The reverence for writing led Jews, especially in Middle East to build Genizas as 'large as two and half storeys high' (59) which could contain more than 800 years of writings; or as the White scholar Schechter put it- 'spoils of Egyptians!' (94). It is very significant that the Hebrews had written annals of their actions, at a time when most of the present enlightened nations were totally ignorant of writing. It distinguishes them in an eminent manner as their family chronicles became history for the future. Von Herder writes that this account derives singular weight from its "having been preserved for some thousands of years with almost superstitions scrupulosity, as a divine prerogative of their race"<sup>11</sup>.

Ghosh records, the last written paper made way to the Geniza in 1875 (57). There was a godly zeal for conserving their wealth of knowledge religiously. It could be the primitive way of collecting books in the library form which depended on the same kind of diligence and dedication. Charles Homer Haskins records that 'copying' was soon recognized as a superior form of labour, better than working in the fields<sup>12</sup>. But people's flagging zeal had to be stimulated by hope of eternal rewards. "A sin is

forgiven for every letter, line and point”, wrote a monk of Arras in the eleventh century<sup>13</sup>.

So, the Jews and Hebrews tried to preserve their writings – that’s a known fact. Egypt provided them with large synagogues, though original citizens never heeded to them. But our concern here is the Europeans’ renewed curiosity towards these preserves which attracted a numbers of 18<sup>th</sup> century scholars to Egypt over a long period of time. They came in trickles but went with ‘loads’ of papers, causing finally a ‘philosophers suggestion’ (82) to dominate Egypt with rule.

Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt in 1798, modelled on a ‘scientific expedition’ (82) which brought Egypt ‘under husbandry of the Western academy’ (82). Thus, there were no armies and soldiers who caused the metaphoric fall of pyramids’ sanctity. This time, it was an unquenchable thirst of a scholarly breed with ‘antiquarian interests’ (80) to mine the gems of Egyptian wisdom, which was so alien and unfamiliar in nature! Their target might not have been the useful commodities as much as their desire to assimilate alterity into a familiar space. Dorothy M. Figure beautifully interprets this in the narrative of Vasco da Gama’s first voyage by quoting Roteiro’s statement:

“In the name of God ... Amen. In the year 1497, to king Dom Manuel, the first of this name in Portugal, sent out to discover/ ‘descobrir’, four ships which went in search of spices...”<sup>14</sup>.

This began in a customary manner but Roteiro emphasized upon the difference between ‘discovery’ and ‘search for spices’. The army of scholars was definitely sent to Egypt for the same purpose – to know the unknown ‘darkness’ as the colonizers easily phrased it for self convenience. For example, majority of novels by D.H. Lawrence also strove hard for fathoming out the dark secrets of life and the world. The Europeans all travelled far and wide in the ‘service of new sciences’ (81); Masr happened to be an ‘incidental location’ for such a great accumulation of erudition and learning! She became a new and challenging landmass to be explored and claimed by Europe- ‘an object of Great Powers’ ‘attention’ (80). She could not be saved by any measure against the high riding zeal of European imperialism, thus fell an easy prey to the powers of advance armament displayed by the Whites.

The geographical position of Masr was another salient cause of her victimization - she made a potential bridge to the tantalizing 'Indian territories' (80). It can definitely be marked as the cause of the ponderous enterprise of Orientalism, explicated and divined so well by Edward W. Said and many others. Said acknowledges that Napoleon's *Institute d'Egypt* was the "single major exception of academic study of the actual Orient ... This led to the relationship of power, of domination and a complex hegemony"<sup>15</sup>. It helped British to establish and continue her empire for more than 100 years on 85% of the world. Thomas B. Macaulay could claim boldly about the way a handful of adventurers subjugated a vast country, the very possibility of which confounds reason!<sup>16</sup>.

Edward W. Said is prophetic in saying that Egypt was not just another colony: 'it was the vindication of Western imperialism', the triumph of English knowledge and power<sup>17</sup>. Thus, Egypt was 'made' by Cromer and England! Before this, the Geniza had been unnoticed as part of a living tradition. Amitav Ghosh notes Simon Van Geldern's 1864 visit to this site as fatal, as the beginning of a "sly allegory" on the intercourse of power and Historiography (82). This Judaic collection became a part of the vast communication network maintained by the British Empire. She provided the textual basis to the colonial exercise. Their written treaties became a means of claiming upon the territories silently, causing the centre to lose its hold. Ghosh depicts how their history writing became a way of wiping out, washing away and erasing the previous pasts of the natives without much resistance.

The construction of the Suez Canal with European assistance became a further stepping stone for the West – it made Egypt a 'pawn between French and British wars'<sup>18</sup>. Like any halting depot, Egypt became a site of loot and plunder of a most strange kind. Her position on 'the route to India had become her curse' as Ghosh notes. The British celebrated conquest over Egypt in 1882 for she served as a 'springboard', 'a jumping off point' to take those measured steps towards making of the European Empire<sup>19</sup>. Its antiquities and synagogues were plundered by the West through academic savants like Jacob Saphir (83), Fikrowitch (84), Elkan N. Adler (85) and Dr. Soloman Schechter (88) and many others.

Gayatri Spivak has referred to this intellectual role in subjugating others as very important, in "creating the hegemony...determining the production of history as

narrative of truth”<sup>20</sup>. Amitav Ghosh’s deep research is evident here as he gives details of all these men of letters mixing history and fiction. They came as guests to the elite families of Egypt like Cattouis (85), brought gifts like ‘the portrait of Queen Victoria’ (86) for them. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Cairo Rabbi and Cattouis family cordially helped these scholars like Adler to empty the Geniza. Adler’s collection of Geniza documents today makes the nucleus of the important Jewish Theological Seminary of New York (88) as he was assisted by many to ship off the sackfuls of documents.

Today St. Petersburg boasts of ‘the largest number of Biblical manuscripts’ (84), larger than all the European libraries put together. Fikrowitch enriched Russian archives by stealing from his co-religionists (84) in Egypt. Libraries in Cambridge, Oxford, Paris, Frankfurt, Vienna and Budapest—all take pride in their acquisition of large Geniza manuscripts without any guilt or remorse of being immoral! But the height of irony is that all of these apostles of knowledge got their efforts known to the world by publishing about their search without mentioning the source or root of this information (90). They all became famous by stealing things from this ‘greatest single collection of medieval documents ever discovered’ (59). Shirley Chew reads the Geniza episode as one of ‘cultural uprooting’ in the form of a tangled tale of greed, dishonesty and complicity<sup>21</sup>. Ghosh writes;

“Neither of the announcements mentioned the Geniza of Fustat as the source of the document...secrecy had to be maintained ...” for a greater discovery! (90).

These developments stripped and plundered the whole body of knowledge by dispersing it in the name of modern scholarship! Therefore the Geniza makes a forlorn corner of Masr today, the assault of time and imperialism have ravaged this great building to no more than a ‘huge rubble plateau’ (58)! The Geniza depletion can be read exactly in what Frantz Fanon defined as colonialism: it not only ‘empties’ the “native’s brain of all form and context”<sup>22</sup>, but it turns to the past of the people by a kind of perverted logic, distorts, disfigures and destroys it. At present the Ben Ezra Geniza is a pathetic “small hole in the wall, opening into an empty chamber” (58) with nothing but a reputation that ‘a lot of papers were found years and years ago here’. This is how Amm Shahata, the guide explains to tourists the significance of the place (59).

This is a demonic mockery of all those Jews working so hard for collecting each of the 'shard' and 'fragment' (95) having a written word on it and keeping it as part of worship. If the ancient Egyptian kings' erected their immortalizing pyramids and obelisks, the Hebrew-Jews' strenuous efforts at this accumulation could have served the same purpose. This is very much redolent of the Al Najm ramshackle in Ghosh's seminal work, *The Circle of Reason*.

Throughout these sarcastic 'pilgrimages' [as Jacob Saphir called his visit to the Synagogue, (83)], none of these excursionists tried to know the contemporary Egyptians. Only the old and monumental Egypt mattered to them. Their interaction with the local people was limited to their need selfishly, lurking around the pacification of the subject race. They began with flattery in their wisest way, "tempering their cupidity with selflessness and their impatience with flexible discipline"<sup>23</sup>. So, Schechter bore patiently the kisses of the Rabbi (93), spent few shillings on them painfully (93), while the "scoundrel beadles" (94) showered him with respect and, very grudgingly, he contributed to the aboriginal feast (93)! But was it the local people's greed, simplicity or the Anglophiles' sycophancy for Whites only that assisted them to haul up this extraordinary treasure of the Egyptians? Colonial historians call this plunder beneficial for the Jews that they should be thankful to the Christians for spreading their religion and knowledge to the far off corners of the world<sup>24</sup>. But this was not their motive, had they wished they could have done so easily by being the most nomadic people. A British historian comments that no people upon earth have spread abroad like these, as "parasitical plants on the trunks of other nations"<sup>25</sup>. Of course, Von Harder is conniving at Hitler's barbarism towards Jews! They have a history of being in constant flight which they are revenging in their present day war against Palestine, with forced encroachment on others' lands unobstructed.

The Egyptian failure in keeping their culture and history protected is rooted to something very profound and which is no longer a secret! Egypt was the El Dorado for the West, a 'land gilded in gold', and for winning it - the Europeans considered everything to be fair. They created Robinsonian 'Man Fridays' among the powerful elites like the Rabbi and other members. They could easily be placated not because of the petty European gifts but because there was power of military, economic, political

and cultural to gain them stunning results. They helped in creation of that grand trajectory of Imperialism explained so well by Ranajit Guha in “Dominance without hegemony and its historiography”<sup>26</sup>. He read Dominance, Subordination, Coercion and Resistance as the four pillars making up the ‘warp and the weft in the fabric of empirical history’. So, ‘order was enforced by the coercive apparatus of the state’. This Order extended to matters regarded as little to do with the state<sup>27</sup>, like in the Egyptians case - the Geniza manuscripts’ shifting towards West with a deliberate naivety.

That’s why Anil Seal could call colonialism in places like India a “British rule through Indian collaboration”<sup>28</sup>, casting a wider net to find collaboration was a game of persuasion for the British everywhere, leading to an unchallenged hegemony. The natives were sustained in such intellectual and moral state that despite their numerical superiority, they weighed less powerful and less capable politically. Rosalind O’Hanlon elucidates these British strategies very distinctly in saying that colonial power depended for its strength on the material ability to coerce which it brought with its armies and the Orientalist discourses of its “second, shadowy army of textual scholars, linguists, historians, anthropologists and so on”<sup>29</sup>. Thus, the smooth shroud of White man’s mission carried by the Imperialists is thoroughly perforated and stinks of “denial of coevalness”<sup>30</sup>. They never considered people of other regions with varying complexions and cultures equivalent to themselves. The racial difference was the most implicit aspect of the European mastery. Colonialism thus, made the most deceptive face of barbarism as Aime Cesair maintains;

“...I repeat, (colonization) dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise...conquest which is based on contempt and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it”<sup>31</sup>.

The exalted colonial enterprise was nothing but a gigantic act of pillage which caused whole continents to bleed, wrenching their human and material resources. *In an Antique Land* is a true picture of this observation if some truths can be believed in! This idea reverberates in all other novels of Ghosh – the cloth weaving in the *Circle of Reason*, the Poppy cultivation in *Sea of Poppies*, scientific and medical studies in *The Calcutta Chromosome* – all show this aspect of the civilizing missionaries.

*In An Antique Land* is subversive in myriad ways – one of these is reading the present through the past. Ghosh has written about it in an article that one of the “paradoxes of

history” is that it is impossible to draw a chart of the “past without imagining a map of the present and the future”<sup>32</sup>. It may go vice versa too. His experience as a research scholar, doing field work in Egyptian villages - Lataifa and Nashaway make him aware of certain cruel facts. Some of these are his alienation as a foreigner amid the naïve villagers with ever ready solutions for his ‘upside down’ (171) Indian country. The other major incidents included are, his rendezvous with the Imam and the security officers of Sidi Abu Hasira tomb. All these incidents point to the way our present time is beset with differences, ‘our and their’ worlds where things are set in a particular pattern within boundaries. Ghosh finds these ‘changes’ to be gifts of modernity in an age of globalization and in spite of globalization with its metaphoric oneness of ‘humanity’<sup>33</sup>!

In order to elucidate these massive transformations in the world culture, Amitav Ghosh who claims to be ‘a citizen of the world’<sup>34</sup> by a natural right, innovates a new writing style. He challenges the arbitrariness of all borders and fuses the lines of fiction and nonfiction. Time is the central element in his narrative and he puts it to the best tune by wrapping one age over another, by revealing the “subterranean connections and patterns of time’s movement”<sup>35</sup>. That’s why we have the 12<sup>th</sup> century ethos created in its full bloom in the winding tale of this novel spanning centuries and continents afar! He shows the deep rooted connections between Indian and Middle East which were sowed even before the all encompassing ‘historical’ time the West records and recognizes. There were developments of all sorts which, of course, took place without any interference or technological assistance of Europe.

Thus, Amitav Ghosh as a post-colonial writer heeds more towards ‘historical and contemporary relations between different colonized groups and nations’<sup>36</sup> instead of just the Manichean dyad of East and West. Ben Yiju and his slave named Bomma are two characters that Amitav Ghosh lifts out from some of the 12<sup>th</sup> century letters. He came across them in different library archives and collections spread over the whole Europe. This happened when he was doing a thorough and diligent search for his PhD thesis. Gradually with the development of time, he felt a kind of providential design making him encounter them at the most unexpected times and occasions.

“My path had crossed theirs again and again, sometimes by design and sometimes inadvertently, in North Africa, Egypt and the Malabar, until it became clear that I could no longer resist the logic of those coincidences”(99).

When life in Lataifa felt most weary amidst the seemingly alien culture, it was the slave of MSH.6 who made Amitav Ghosh feel “a right to be there and a sense of entitlement!”(19). Ghosh took inspiration from Goeitein’s great corpus of scholarship embarked on a ‘quest’ upon deep seas with a ‘blithe’ spirit (99). But very early in this indulgence he felt swept away by the ‘broad history’ of his work which was as challenging as conducting a ‘scattered’, ‘windblown trail of a paper chase!’(100). That is why this work of Ghosh strikes us as a wonderful experiment; his hard work glistens through it.

As a new historicist, Ghosh does not go straight to history books for his research but rather looks for the unknown, unrecorded information. He himself says, “I knew if my own memories had not been preserved in such artefacts like notes and diaries, the past would have had no purchase in my mind either” (320). That’s why he comes to find out personal letters, memoirs, lists of grocery and other purchases rendered through conversation and third person narratives that were hardly considered to contain any element of historical truth. The Ben Ezra Geniza collection comes as a wealth of information to Ghosh which provides him with ample materials to sketch out the whole biographies of these various beings.

Thus, we come to know places like Aden, Fustat, old Mangalore and Cochin as spots buzzing with all liveliness around us. Letters and vessels commuted across the Arabian and Indian oceans as frequently as planes do on our airports today. There was a whole convoluted nexus of traders as friends and competitors, maintained through an agile communication system based in letter writing. That’s why Amitav Ghosh found Khalaf Ibn Ishaq’s letter of 1148 AD opening ‘a trapdoor into a vast network of foxholes’ (16) with a real life continuing uninterrupted.

Ghosh is able to supply almost a complete family tree of Ben Yiju– with brothers Mubashir, Yusuf and sister Berakha, friends like Madmum ibn Bandur (155), Yusuf Bin Abraham (156), Abu Zikri Sijlmas (158), Ishaq Ibn Khalaf, Mehruz (158), the slave Bomma, Ben’s newborn Suroor, along with Moshe, Shamwal and others. We come close to their social and religious life, besides their occupation of trade with its



emoluments and bereavements. We come to know about their family rituals and gift exchanges, showing their warmth and affection. Thus, shipment of cardamom, cargo of silk and house hold goods like frying pans making way across India and Aden (18) can be found in records very much like the “*almakana al Hindi*”/ the water-pump machine manufactured in India (73) used in Mabrouk’s family in the 20<sup>th</sup> century! If loads of pepper from India as many as to ‘seem to our fancies to equal the dust in quantity’ (175) were shipped from India to Middle East, ‘paper, Arab gowns and scarves, sweets’ (268), and kitchen appliances likes ‘soap, goblets, sieves and glasses’ (269) were taken to India from Aden and ‘Mother of the world’(80). An engaging picture of domestic life is sketched imaginatively from such ‘textual traces’ as he records the ‘flow’ of objects signifying human culture<sup>37</sup>. So, a Malabar girl could wear her wedding trousseau designed in Sicily (328)! *In An Antique Land*, in short, offers an archaeological framework of a great mercantile civilization flourishing in the East.

Amitav Ghosh brings alive the places like Aden, Cairo, Aidhab, Alexandria, Mangalore, Gujrat and many others. Aden was an important port of 12<sup>th</sup> century for trade flow (16); it was an extraordinary and congenial place (159) with fusion of poetry and commerce in full swing! The Victorious Cairo was a bureaucratic town (37) - ‘a busy place, crowded ... a bustling nucleus’, (37). They all come sailing on to our view, communicating a ‘sense of place’<sup>38</sup> very frequently through Ghosh’s description, collected from the Geniza materials.

Ghosh gives a real feel of regular travels between continents of Sahara, Asia and Mediterranean, removing the aura of epic-places for us. Mahdia with its wonderful views, Qus as a meeting place for pilgrims, Aidhab as a land of great traffic of Indian, Yemeni travellers and Haj pilgrims – all seem to be happening around us. Ghosh locates them in their time with reference to crusades, wars, flood, and rise in oil prices (17), ship wrecks (18) and piracy incidents. As he utilizes details and description of cars, automobiles in *The Glass Palace*, to locate the ethos in which characters like Saya John, Mathew, Neel and Alison live. This is a technique that Ghosh uses even in *The Shadow Lines*, giving features of photographs, people’s response to the sudden click of the camera, to set the point of time.

The feelings of awe and wonder come acutely and cunningly upon readers when Amitav Ghosh hints at some of these places' absence from the very face of the earth. Aidhab is one such instance which 'suddenly' disappeared in the middle of 15<sup>th</sup> century: "it simply ceased to be, as though it had been erased from the map" (176). He also reflects upon the state of Bangladesh which seems to be 'ripped off the world history' (204) as its sweet culture of bonhomie looks vulnerable to the neighbourly politics. History is thus, the tale of non-presence and nonappearances also which we can believe in to preserve all. But it's inconceivable how much more there is, which has not been recorded or made a mark upon the sands of time!

Bomma's life, as traced by Amitav Ghosh is one such pursuit which is literally an attempt to bring alive a person and the associated accounts buried deep in the abysmal necropolis of past. It is more of a challenging task for the reason that Bomma was a non-entity; a slave amidst the 'tornado' of grand chronicles which had caught Ghosh's eye and mind as frenzy. Ghosh begins this novel in a beautifully evocative manner, giving at once the centre stage to none but Bomma;

"The slave of MS H.6 first stepped upon the stage of modern history in 1942... His was a brief debut, in the obscurest of theatres, and he was scarcely out of the wings before he was gone again..." (13).

It is most significant that the slave comes from a moment in time when only the literate and consequential people could make it to the records. They must have had 'a power to inscribe themselves physically upon time' (17) which itself is so fickle and fluttering. Bomma's is a most unconscious and accidental occurrence, proving those 'barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world,' (17) happen to have been preserved. Bomma was more 'a prompter's whisper than a recognizable face in the cast' (13), harbouring on 'footnote' (18) in the annals. But still he was preserved unwittingly in the Geniza collection scattered over places like 'tiny threads woven into the borders of a gigantic tapestry' (95).

Amitav Ghosh's extraordinary skill and interest is exhibited here by the very choice of history he has made! He has not tried to look into the opulent records of 'Sultans and Wazirs' (17), the powerful and consequential persons. What enchants him to join the bandwagon of new historicism, re-writing the world narratives is the elusive Bomma! This socially imperceptible character made Ghosh "return to a rigorous mode of

empirical research to recover the historically situated subjectivities” of this awful web of traders and their slaves operating between North Africa and South West India during the Middle ages, as observes Robert Dixon<sup>39</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh’s selection of letters and ‘fragments’ sufficiently transmit the ‘human warmth and glow’, sharing the private life of these characters. Thus, this ceases to be a dry piece of anthropological history; rather one reads it as a story, a fiction. This fictive ethnography thus, blows hard on the pretentious authority of a similitudinous history created by the West and the elites.

*In an Antique Land* is a strong and unreserved critique of Hegelian historicism which claimed the West to be the pinnacle of the overall development of the ‘spirit of history.’ No wonder, Leela Gandhi reads *In an Antique Land* as an ‘anti Hegelian meditation’<sup>40</sup> by choosing to unveil an East-ward move of history. Hegel had consigned the East, especially India and China to the ‘pre-birth’ of history, which did see the first rays of the Reason’s sun but remained an infant. Amitav Ghosh is out to prove here that the East and the Middle ages were not ‘dark’. Rather this ‘darkness’ is as fabricated as the much hyped ‘light’ of the West!

*In an Antique Land* thus unearths many truths which were used to veil the naked greed of the West. It is proven by now that Hegel and his kindred souls were unable to understand the medieval age and the Eastern culture, having as much power and possessions as any other land! In fact, the dominant narratives of the West, propounded all over the world like an inheritance, underline the European intention to subdue and subjugate the other histories. Hegel refused to accept varieties of ‘philosophy’ standing for idea and power, saying that “Reason is only one and single. There is no second and superhuman reason... Philosophy is reason apprehending itself...”<sup>41</sup>.

A deep study of the European intellectual tradition presented as stretching back to the ancient Greeks comes clear as fabrication of European history. This claim represents the unbroken ‘genealogy of thought’ which excludes the East as pre-modern, pre-political in the stagist Historiography. That was the conceit which made J. S. Mill’s historicist argument consigning Indians, Africans and other ‘rude’ nations to “an imaginary waiting room of history”<sup>42</sup>, ‘not yet’ capable of self rule! Amitav Ghosh in

writing about that high culture developed without any European hand presented through lives of Ben Yiju and others like Sijilimasi, is cancelling such allegations. They appear rather a fable, a concoction of “hegemonic ideology that made its own interests look and feel like the interests of all”!<sup>43</sup> Thus, *In an Antique Land* puts the West and the Hegelian idea of homogenous and secular historical time in a position which is out of joint with itself, without any integrality.

Ghosh thus presents this interlinked cosmos of India, Middle East and North Africa, to be precise, flourishing and achieving high goals in all spheres of commerce and knowledge. It had a prosperous civilization of trade system, a social cultivation which could recognize sophisticated from the savage. This culture had its own scores of scholars and travellers who chased the ever-widening boundary of knowledge as diversion and profession. Nothing in this glittering, ‘warm’ (18) universe seems to hint that it bloomed without that ‘consciousness’<sup>44</sup> which the subaltern historians have to unearth out of the marginalized figures of the hegemonic historiography. Rather these people show an indomitable spirit to go on and achieve more, revelling in the inherent freedom of man ‘for being man’<sup>45</sup> which Hegel exacted to be among the Germans in the best form. It was “a (freedom) higher than the Greek”, whereas in the East, only one man is free...”<sup>46</sup>. Nowhere, we have these travelling business agents having any kind of constraints created by their king or Amirs. In fact, they were relieved to cruise to any part of the universe. Amitav Ghosh writes about the unregulated accessibility of the Indian Ocean:

“Even at their worst, (the raiding expeditions) were a nuisance rather than a serious threat to commerce. Neither they nor any of the powers of the Indian Ocean, no matter how large or well armed, ever tried to gain control of the seas or to take over routes by force!”(257)

The openness of their universe lent its bounteous nature to the very citizens, as the relationship of Ben Yiju with his fellows shows. Khalaf Ibn Ishaq wrote in his letter, “I was glad when I looked at your letter... became joyous and cheerful...” (18). They exchanged gifts of “things which have no price and no value” (16). But of course, this unfettered social system should not be considered as lawless. For Ghosh laboriously unfathoms the causes of Ben Yiju’s prolonged stay of 18 years in India, leaving all his near and dear ones behind. The most obvious reason was his marriage with Ashu, the Malabar Nair woman whom he manumitted (227) and who bore him children. The

other hard found reason was something related to his 'unpaid debt' (161) or 'a blood feud' (162), which obliged him to keep out of the laws of the land. This served him as a rigorous punishment as letters to his brothers depict his despair-

"I ask you, my brother (57), come to me under any circumstance and without delay ... take all the money and riches ... this is better than strangers taking it"(303).

But this deportation is no less disciplinary in comparison to what Foucault has measured in the modern control system of panoptical prisons in his work, *Discipline and Punishment*. He finds this punishing less but punishing better, by the whole state as vehicle of control<sup>47</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh also gives an exhausting list of men of letters and travellers eager to know about other places. Abraham Ben Yiju was a scholar, well versed in doctrinal and religious matters with 'a personal inclination towards the literary'. He was an 'occasional poet' (154) whose career followed a natural progression, beginning in 'Al Friqiya to Fustat, to Aden (154) to Malabar, Cochin and many other places. Madmun Ibn-al Hasan Ibn Bundar (155) was the chief representative of merchants- a man of great substance and influence, played a key role in the Indian Ocean trade (155). Amitav Ghosh testifies that "there was no lack of travellers in Ben Yiju's circle. At least two of Madmun's friends deserve to be counted among the most well travelled men of the Middle Ages, perhaps of any age before the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Abu Said Ben Nethanel al Dimyati(157) and Abu Zikri Judah Sijilmasi(158). The Geniza papers preserve details with dates and places, bearing witness to a "pattern of movement so fluent and far ranging that they make the journeys of later medieval travellers such as Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta seem unremarkable!"(157).

This comparative manner adopted by Ghosh is naturally demanded as well as deliberate. Like many good or bad things, this evaluative style began in the West. They always measured the cultural distance existing between the West and the non West in assertions like "first in Europe, then elsewhere" kind of structures. This is how they legitimized the primacy of their civilization, which thrived on annihilating and eradicating our own pasts of Arabic, Persian, Sanskritic and many more cultures. Amitav Ghosh is referring to this deep irony of politicized history which we all have acceded and adopted. This is challenging the very history as a narrative, a textual

exercise. We believe our history to be democratic but Ghosh reveals Historiography as an art of mastering the problems of telling stories by overlooking the multitude of tales, erasures, aberrations, gaps and silences. This history writing has been proffered as a scientific exercise but this idea is fraught with falsification as Peter Novick says, “objectivity is unattainable in history”<sup>48</sup>, only plausibility is possible. Ghosh shows this in his equivocal explanations that he gives regarding his searches. He doesn’t claim to tell the whole truth throughout the book, rather hints at the revealed facts’ subjective nature. The instance of Ben Yuji’s marriage is a charming example. Same as Ben Yiju’s reason of staying out of his native place which was not a ‘voluntary idea’ (161), Amitav Ghosh comes to know for sure.

But the best example to expound this historiography is Bomma. The author of this novel through this slave character opens up the whole process of ‘finding out’ Bomma from the nadirs of history. It was like looking into the shifting sand dunes for a lost needle. The presence of Bomma was inscribed in his absence, in the most paradoxical manner. No doubt, Ghosh himself describes his pursuit of Bomma a scattered search, randomly through the writings of Goeitein like the “windblown trail of a paper chase within the broad sweep of history” (100). At a time the problems encountering Amitav Ghosh seemed mountainous in contrast to his zeal for the search. Besides the distance of place marked with “deserts and wars and mountains that separated...”(173) the two Indians in Egypt, there was also an obstacle of language affected by time. This was a ‘seemingly impassable barrier’ (101) inscribed in the language constituted of Judaeo-North African Arabic sprinkled with Hebrew. It preserved the flavor of a very small sect of people based in a language declared archaic today. But as history resurfaces in the most unexpected spots of places, the dialect of poor villagers from Lataifa and Nashaway seemed to keep some traces of this language intact and alive. Ghosh’s surprise filled tone is almost audible to the readers as he writes:

“... as I followed the slave’s trail from library to library, there were times when the magnifying glass would drop out of my hand when I came upon certain words and turns of phrase for I’d suddenly hear the voice of Shaikh Musa speaking in the documents in front of me as clearly as I had been walking past ... Lataifa and Nashaway” (105).

This presence of the past but plays truancy with the author because the present world is still beset with a ‘clash of civilizations’ in a more and more devious manner. Such

fragments of texts that cause ‘an ironic interplay of absence and presence’<sup>49</sup> give the readers a fleeting sense of a spirited life, unaffected by the treacherous waves of events unfolding around. Shirley Chew finds its resemblance in the “trace of a butterfly... that gleams from... ruins and buried Chinese pottery”<sup>50</sup>. There is fragility about this narrative, characteristic of all such grand narratives of transcendent authority which adds to its post-modern conviction.

What transpires across all these erased ‘shreds’ of information is sufficient to relocate Bomma in a history. These drifting strings of past and present times in the form of language, and rituals defy the authority of time as a leveller. Shakespeare beautifully presents time as the cruel hand with a scythe in one of his sonnets. Some aspects of these ‘ripped up’ incidents remain submerged but alive. Bomma is an apt discovery; an example of the same, how he survived across this desert stretch of centuries is revenge upon past itself.

In terms of Gayatri Spivak, Bomma can also be taken as an instance of ‘cognitive failure’<sup>51</sup> embedded in the traditional, successful and true historiography which the Subaltern Studies group challenges. It is ‘a sanctioned failure’, a ‘success in failure,’ which is inseparably present in the colonial narratives. But Bomma’s tale is a synecdoche for the whole corpus of *In an Antique Land*. It is elaborated fully in the trailing inquiry of Bomma’s hushed footsteps under his master. So, beginning with the very name Bomma which Ghosh adduces to be an uncommon name for a slave (248), to the location of the commonality of the same name in Middle ages Mangalore (249) as the title of a Tulu Clan (250) - is a long journey.

This leads Amitav Ghosh to an interesting discovery about gods who were ‘subalterns’ in the past. He finds out how even worshipped deities had to fight against the fortified Hindu mythology. As a sardonic understanding of politics’ power, the *Bobbariya Bhuta* transformed from the marginal spirit of a Muslim trader to that of a pure potential Hindu god enthroned beside Vishnu. This particular Mogera community used history (270) most profitably ‘to replace the past in order to claim a future!’ (273). This is well reflected in Arundhati Roy’s unsparing assault on the renewed fascism of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hindu India when she said: “But even if it were true that there’s a Hindu temple under every mosque in India, what was under the temple? Perhaps another temple to another god...”<sup>52</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh has very tacitly attacked the long tradition of the 'hierarchical ideology of caste' (274) through this finding which was a cause of British justification for imperialism itself. *Sea of Poppies* (2008) depicts this English game in an illustrative manner. Perhaps this casteism could be called one way of providing collaboration to the colonizers who exploited it to gain power. Sumit Sarkar presents a similar instance of a sect of Chandals' studied attempt to change their status. They started using the title 'Biswas' for Sanskritization and by 1880s, they anxiously represented themselves as 'Sudras' and aped the prejudices of the higher ranks<sup>53</sup>. Ben Yiju also shows this Indian tendency working on his decision to arrange the marriage of his daughter Sittal Dar for he wanted a bachelor of pure blood and caste.

The last thing that Amitav Ghosh discovers about the slave is the most conscious act on Bomma's part – his choice of permanent coexistence with the master Ben Yiju by escorting him to repose in Egypt (349). Finding out Bomma is a celebration of the unknown brought to life. It radiates upon a past declared non-existent! Ghosh reifies a new part of the pre-colonial Eastern culture in this close and cordial relationship of Bomma and Ben Yiju. It is the much different aspect of slavery – in the liaison of a master and servant. Being a slave was not toiling under servitude without a will or interest. It was rather the relationship of 'a patron and client' (259), in which Bomma's career-graph initiated as a helper to that of a business agent (18) and a trader.

Amitav Ghosh offers ample evidences for this gradual and definite progress. This also reveals that the Eastern practice of slavery differed from the European one based on their colonial expansionist mode during 16<sup>th</sup> century especially. Rather it was one propitious means of "gaining entry into the highest levels of government" (260). Perhaps a modern understanding of this composite and chequered part needs one to look back to an India abound in colourful personalities in its shifting patterns and kaleidoscopic images. Very much like Bomma, Malik Amber is one such example in the Mughal period who was brought as an Ethiopian, Hubshee slave but who rose to be a powerful military commander and Regent in one of the South Indian Sultanates<sup>54</sup>.

The Eastern serfdom followed a logic completely contrary to the 'modern' expectation of this status. Amitav Ghosh suggests the 'curious' and 'confounding' reaction of contemporary conception to this idea as part of the modernization brought through colonization. He significantly alludes to the modern idea of individual freedom too.



The Greeks took pride in their emancipation but the fact is 'their freedoms were themselves built on slavery'<sup>55</sup>. Asian slavery is thus revealed to be much more tolerant and humane.

Leela Gandhi in interpreting this part of *In an Antique Land* refers to the Hegelian paradigm of master and slave to be in circulation as a trope for colonial historicism<sup>56</sup>. Hegel propounded history to be comprised in a progressive movement toward the radical freedom with a self positing consciousness, from the night of East to the dawn in West. It alluded to the West as a self certain position of the master, in contrast to the subjected slave in East. Robert Young rightly calls it a 'White mythology' for wresting the freedom of the Non-Europeans. On the basis of this binary opposition, the West constructed the inexorable plot of racism reducing people from other parts of the world as a 'nobody', inferior and the easiest as the 'other'. V.S. Naipaul refers to the modern history of colonialism as 'a fairy tale, not so much about slavery as about its abolition, the good defeating the bad!'<sup>57</sup> No doubt, he calls history 'a five cent stamp' with so much of fraud in it.

Hegel confers historicity and power of spirit only on similitudes. He does not entertain or accommodate 'alterity' or strangeness of any kind. Amitav Ghosh proves this ideology as myopic and asymmetrical. He subtly rewrites a new interpretation of this muddled up paradigm in terms of a spiritual kinship exhibited in Eastern Sufism and Indian Bhakti. Perhaps this is why Homi Shroff read this novel as a 'sublime journey'<sup>58</sup> into the human life of medieval past.

Amitav Ghosh as part of his scholarly practice goes back in time to fetch illustration of the selfless relations between the 11<sup>th</sup> century Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni and soldier Ayaz. They represent that cherished human bondage as an 'embodiment of perfect freedom' (261). Thus, the perfect Sufi-love spiritually transformed the world conquering Mahmud to become 'the slave of his slave' (262). *Duties of the Heart* by Jewish mystic Bahya Ibn Paquda (261), a Sufi text of Talmudist Moses Maimonides, the South Indian *Vachankaras* of 12<sup>th</sup> century are some cogent examples of that lost tradition. Such nexus made a backdrop of inspiration for many in the middle ages, Ben Yiju and Bomma show them as no exception to that. It seems that as the modern and universal idea of freedom, democracy and liberalization has changed, the relation of master and servant has also been affected to an 'unbridgeable chasm' (263).

Western methodology of advancement allegorized in the hierarchy of 'Development-ladder' (200) is causing a new imperialism today which does not recognize any presence of Bomma's world and beliefs. Because the 'price of progress'<sup>59</sup> is very high. It engages people with power and without it in an endless, circular conflict. Ghosh himself deduces this fact in saying that the 'new world order is designed to defend the rights of certain people at the expense of others'<sup>60</sup>. This is a world in which the 'interests of the powerful define necessity, while the demands of the poor appear as greed!' (94)

In contrast to this situation, the medieval age seems to be a replica of a possible earthly paradise which could accommodate variety of religions, cultures and rituals in a beautiful confluence. This is where *In an Antique Land* reflects the recent understanding of the porosity of cultural boundaries. It is a sharp critique of Western classical view of traditions as pure and cultures as discretely different. Rather every culture and every place has influences of the other.

Ben Yiju's relation with traders of so many places, speaking different languages and worshipping different gods, the merry life of Jewish Ben and Hindu Ashu blooming forth in kids, the master and slave from different continents living and working together with full trust – are instances to show how differences were not internalized to create any gulf between them. Rather they thrived together supplying strength to each other. That's why Clifford Geertz reads *In an Antique Land* as depicting 'a mobile, polyglot and virtually borderless region'<sup>61</sup> of the world. This novel shows that Greeks, Muslims, Jews, the Orientals and the Christians- all contributed in the building of Cairo, 'Egypt's metaphor for itself'. How Masr was the "mother of the world- the *Ummul Duniya!*" (33). James Clifford appreciates Ghosh for unfurling 'an extraordinary world of travel, trade and co-existence among Arabs, Jews and South Asians'<sup>62</sup> in this novel's engrossing subplot. This directs us to the roots of cultures going through unexpected 'routes' for making a colourful wonder, called the world.

But somehow with progress of time, that strong bond and natural growth of it, maintained between different places on the world map, has suffered a permanent wrenching out which even the codified globalization has not been able to heal. It only causes an ironical reminiscence of those really good, old days –the new trends are simply a façade of commercialization of some countries, set out to make customers out

of the poor countries! That unified, multi-cultural region is divided today like the rest of the globe into singular and separate nations. Arundhati Roy aptly says, “free markets do not threaten national sovereignty...they undermine democracy rather...”<sup>63</sup>.

The voyage of the Portuguese Vasco de Gama leading to the discovery of 1498 is taken as a significant event by Amitav Ghosh. He wryly hails this year as a ‘decisive’ moment which was to cause an “unquenchable, demonic thirst... raging ever since, for almost 500 years over the Indian ocean, the Arabian sea and the Persian Gulf!” (288).

It gives ample proof that the West always viewed the East in terms of conflict, and encounter! They emphasized upon crusades and later wars as points of struggle between East and West. They feared the Asian Emperors affecting the preservation of ancient freedom from mass enslavement. But *In an Antique Land* reveals the very reverse picture. They could not understand the rare cultural choices made in Asia. For example, the philosophy of nonviolence in India was something enigmatic to them which they interpreted ‘as a lack, or failure’ (287). That’s why Hegel could not figure out the Chinese culture of absolute equality, called it a refinement ‘without any freedom!’<sup>64</sup> These confounding features are rooted in the West’s refusal to accept the alternate ways of responding to life. Thus, the violent and war proficient Western ideology came as determining a changed world history marked with ‘a disjunctive violence’<sup>65</sup>, which rendered their old understandings ‘defunct’ (288). Keki N. Daruwala in his novel, *For Pepper And Christ*, calls this an epoch making event, perhaps in a more tolerant manner than the post colonial Ghosh. He finds this “bringing the East and West closer - in trade, conflict and colonialism”<sup>66</sup>. But still they all agree that such discoveries caused an intervention aimed at cancelling the heterogeneous non-Western pasts in order to falsely homogenize the present! Amitav Ghosh writes about Vasco de Gama’s arrival:

“...within a few years of that day, the knell had been struck for the world that had brought Bomma, Ben Yiju and Ashu together, and another age had begun in which the crossing of their paths would seem so unlikely that its very possibility would all but disappear from human memory”(286).

Vasco de Gama’s immediate return to Calicut was much like Columbus’, following the European dream- “a Christian vision of being the first man, Adam”<sup>67</sup> to know the world, name it and rule it! Under the nose of the whole Europe, Portuguese of this

small kingdom were searching the seas for map-makers, and sailors “obsessed with the task of plotting a route to India”<sup>68</sup>. But as Daniel Walder elaborates the opening of the world has been a complex ‘European enterprise’<sup>69</sup>. These discoveries ironically proved fatal for the new lands, causing death in the form of battles, enslavement of the original inhabitants leading to an unprecedented exploitation. This spread of European power makes the most astonishing part of modern history, but texts like *In An Antique Land* lay bare the truth of their ‘civilizing mission’. Las Casas’ collection as back as 1552 is one such book making a chilling reading:

“... a trading and evangelizing mission had been transformed into genocide,... people were treated worse than wild dogs in the headlong rush for land and power!”<sup>70</sup>.

This kind of colonialism began with cessation of an equation enjoyed amidst geographically distant lands. Then it ranged from a denial of cultures, histories and values outside the colonizers’ frame to a systematic negation of the other world! The changes accompanying imperialism were so massive that at this time, it is difficult to form concrete pictures of “trans-regional networks resisting the hegemony of Western techno-industrial society”<sup>71</sup>.

Colonialism is most naturally credited with the gift of modernity to the East, a place with ‘a stunted and infantilized spirit’ as Hegel called it. He thought it to be very fortunate that the West over came it. Hegel praised Alexander for bringing Greek ideology to this medley of “utter barbarism, bent solely on destruction... lands entirely sunk in indolence, negation and special degeneration”<sup>72</sup>. Rudyard Kipling seems to follow his footsteps most religiously when he said, “The East of Suez... was the location where the direct control of providence ceased and the mark of the beast expressed itself”<sup>73</sup>. But what Hegel and Kipling in these deriding interpretations have done is packaging the past and identifying it with labels. Romila Thapar calls it “a tyranny to force interpretations into a single category so that the infinite shades of differences within them disappear”<sup>74</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh breaks free from such Eurocentric vision of East and her history through this present novel. He establishes that there was a normal diversity and richness of nature flourishing the pre-hegemonic East which was nipped out by the external interference. Ghosh rips out this tyranny of labels and speaks about the

‘silence of some particular unlit zones’<sup>75</sup> of the world history. He thinks it important that the silence is broken out, otherwise it is considered as absence of mettle and value.

But *In an Antique Land* is also above any simple and homogenous interpretation. It is true that colonialism was an overwhelming experience for the East, especially for India and Egypt in this novel. But this invasion over our social, cultural and aesthetic frames was never total. The post-colonial inquiry of this novel shows that the British did impose their exploitative and repressive forms on the palimpsest of history but as Nayantara Sahgal says, “the British residue is simply one more layer added”<sup>76</sup> to our Indian consciousness. The original structure of these civilizations can’t be called to have been completely erased. It sheds light upon those points of contacts with the ancient civilization of Ben Yiju and Bomma, which is still alive in inarticulate beliefs and religious practices of Indian and Egyptian people.

Amitav Ghosh’s narration of personal experience as a student in the two villages of Egypt constantly reminds him of his Indian life and culture because of the similarities sprinkled upon an unfamiliar site. The folk traditions shaped by mythical tales (266) and phrases, the legends of powerful Saints like Sidi Abbas of Nakhlatain (65) and Sidi Abu Hasira of Damanhour (329), the borderless Sufism still taken as cure for the ailing heart are gleaming reminiscences of those gone days. In the material sense of the present world, the ‘Gulf-gilded’ (285) parts of India are living illustrations of Mangalore remaining perfectly true to its medieval heritage’ (285). As its ancient connections with the Arab world have gone deeper than a mere collection of artefacts or a rich holiday on its beaches. A good number of its residents are now employed in the Persian Gulf and its suburbs are “awash with evidence of the extravagant spending of its expatriates” (245).

*The Circle of Reason’s* middle part lucidly presents this aspect of our unbroken connection. Ghosh gives a good data of the old Mangalore and old Cairo’s signs visible in the new towns and houses. He also adds an impressive list of places with altered names, lingering from the medieval times in modified states. They now lie hidden in quiet anonymity. They all ‘seem to have drifted away from their roots’ (283). But their ‘metaphoric’ bearing is an evidence of the Eastern way of giving shape to its luxuriant and kaleidoscopic diversity.

Amitav Ghosh's discovery of Bomma's religion reveals the fragility of religious borders like the sanctity related to language and cultures. Bomma's god was a mixture of both Hindu and Muslim belief, like Abu Hasira's origin in Judaism but coated heavily by Islamic credo- underlines the syncretic nature of our concepts. Perhaps this assimilation is much easier than finding out the seams of our history, culture and other aspects! Khwaja Gharib Nawaz attracts a multitudinous mass in contemporary Ajmer 'mowlids' named as Urs. It is the biggest allusion of our syncretic past still alive. The continuities of past and present make an interesting part of the ethnographic study of the novel.

*In an Antique Land* is very much an allegoric analysis of the two times providing a dialogic connection. This dialogic and composite presence of the past is evidently inscribed in the complex temporality of the text. That's what gives this novel a braided narrative of double timing lending it a beautiful creative structure. These modern cultural and historical divisions are apparent in the kinds of conflicts the narrator has with the Egyptian villagers. The second narrative is the author's personal experience, engaged in his research; working and living as a tenant of Abu Ali in Lataifa.

Amitav Ghosh as a budding anthropologist is very easily made aware of his strangeness and irregularity with the place of his choice. Unlike a usual ethnographic, his experience is really worth writing about as Amitav Ghosh has done in *In an Antique Land* – he himself was surrounded by questioning villagers everywhere. No place was free of a curious native, be it the lonely cotton fields, the tattered roof room (61), the marriage banquet, the *souk* (188), the mowlid (67) or the truck ride to Nashaway. The author always gives his good and brave front but there are some intimidating situations where he feels 'tormented' by the 'barrage of inquiries' (200). Amitav Ghosh reflects: "I saw myself shrinking, dwindling away into one of those tiny terrified foreigners" (30).

India was no more than a place notorious for its 'hot chillies' (46), Sati system (46), Cow Worship and tormenting Gandhis! (46). A lot many of them found his 'Hinduki' business (47 and 51) quite unappetizing and invited him to 'be one of them' ranging from an educated person like Ustaz Mustafa (46) to an ignorant woman like Busaina. Thus, his search for a familiar language on radio (31), dreams of Cairo (32) instant friendship with Ismail and Nabeel or the eccentric Khamees - all underline his early

apprehensions of being in an incompatible place. But very soon, he overcomes this barrier as he chased Bomma's foot prints on the shifting sands of time, like an 'elusive relative' from India.

The water pump machine imported from India earned Amitav Ghosh a marveling (73) respect in the eyes of young Jabir and Mabrouk. He imaged, "where I'd have stood... if mine had been a country that exported machines, bigger, better and more impressive cars... planes and tanks..."(74). This is a mark of a difference that Ghosh was subjected to from other anthropologists perhaps who came from the European countries. They could boast of all those signs of progress Amitav Ghosh conjures up in his soliloquized, lonesome state.

Amitav Ghosh finds the *fellaheen* of both the villages of his lodging very serious about modernization and development. The consciousness of their own poverty and anachronism of the material circumstances made them feel 'ashamed' (200):

"(they were)...never innocent of the knowledge that there were other places, other countries which did not have mud walled houses and cattle-drawn ploughs ... as ghosts displaced in time..."(201).

Amitav Ghosh's acceptance of such specters of the past in the form of poor facilities like wood-straw oven 'still' used (200) in India is not believed by the villagers. It made them skeptical of his bewildering assertions, his 'home truths' came as something overwhelming and shocking to them.

One of the most important incidents during his stay in Egypt was his encounter with the Imam. Amitav Ghosh esteems it significant enough to entitle his illuminating collection of prose pieces as '*The Imam and the Indian*' published later in the year 2000. This heated encounter about scientific and technological development in the form of contrast and comparability is a symbolic episode. This is a claim for getting 'civilized' by fitting into a frame of a particular identity. This provides an easy membership to supposedly natural communities by adopting the mega projects of nation building. This is the project of modernization as a camouflage to capitalism. But this neo-civilization, lent in modernist teleology, "stamps upon the local and the previous forms with a derogatory image"<sup>77</sup>. That's why, we see Imam Ibrahim telling Ghosh;

“Can’t you see that (burning the dead) is a primitive and backward custom?... How will your country ever progress if you carry on doing these things?” (235).

Even the chief investigator at Sidi Abu Hasira tomb in the colonial style office (338) tells Amitav Ghosh- “You are an educated, man, you should know better... Is it religion to believe in Saints and miracles?”(340) Thus, this neoteric teleology has no space for the old practices, like herbal medicines (192), traditional every day rituals and ‘poverty’- ridden equipments like cattle-drawn ploughs and donkey carts (200). This is again a kind of homogenization which takes the out of –the- current-order usages and beliefs as “enclaves of backwardness, as realism of rural stagnation against the dynamism of the urban, industrial civilization of Capitalism”<sup>78</sup>, says Arif Dirlik.

This narrative of modernism has enraptured the minds of all, especially the third world citizens like the fellaheen. That’s why the scholar ‘Amitabh’ has difficulty in convincing them that the present world is still marred by islands of wealth, surrounded by deep waters of poverty and suffering, with a handful of success stories amidst droves of deprivation. Amitav Ghosh calls it our ‘romance’ with modernism which makes ancient lands like Egypt and India to clamour for more and more modern techniques - “our guns and bombs are much better than yours....second only to the West” (236). It makes them shed their ‘state of walking fossils’, ‘relics of the past’ to be fired with a vision of the future! (193). Latest gadgets like that of the Imam’s ‘injections’ (192) look to them as ‘talismans of times yet to come!’ (193).

So, everybody is ‘travelling West’ (236), that’s the blunt conclusion Amitav Ghosh draws out of all the confusions and conflicts. It is the science, tanks, guns and bombs only that matter now - the ‘only language... discovered in common’ (237) by the two representatives of superseded civilizations. Ghosh himself writes in *Countdown*:

“The bomb is much more than a weapon...It is a great vessel filled with all the unfulfilled aspirations and thwarted dreams of the last fifty years”<sup>79</sup>.

Amartya Sen also observed that “weapons of mass destruction have a peculiar fascination today”<sup>80</sup>. The power generated by these weapons is sundered from the inhuman brutality and genocide which measures its potency. The moral element is annulled as Ghosh says that today use of words like “right, or good, or willed by God” are mere absurdity (237).



These changes stand as an allegory for the whole world which is 'vying over' the power of 'modern technology' after losing their individuality and self definitions. This violent aspect of science is nothing but a colonial imposition, received gullibly by the elites of new nations like India, Pakistan and Egypt – they all associate “mystical hopes and beliefs”<sup>81</sup> to these weapons of mass destruction.

So, the regional cultures are washed out by a universal scientific rationality. The very indigenouslyness is taken as an impediment to a full fathomed adoption of that political form of modernity which is embodied by the hardened nation state. The Imam is a fragmentary example of all those landmasses roped in the competitive capitalism shaping up a whole century all over the world. It appears as a madness of international scale with an unthinking acceptance of modern myths, stereotypes and animosities, which began with imperialism. It flouted the human adjustment to nature, heterogeneity, indigenous ideologies and local knowledge, by the new hegemony of conquering spirit, rigid political forms and universal scientific rationality.

This refurbished system is a scalar dynamic, a homogenization by posing 'global commoditization'<sup>82</sup> which sees 'straw ovens' (200) as 'displaced ghosts' but accepts 'electric furnaces'(235) as civilized practice, unlike the Indian pyres. Amitav Ghosh analyses it as the 'ladder of Development' (200) in which the old traditions and usages are put within the 'unimaginable' section, as primitive and savage. This is the new interpretation of an 'historical civilization' which forms 'time as absolute and epochs as discrete' (201). There's no fluidity or mixing up allowed in it. Ashish Nandy also observed that the third world countries developing rapidly had to make themselves 'pliable to schemes of engineering, designed to eliminate the pluralism of their traditions'<sup>83</sup>. Nandy's mocking admiration for the success seems true as he says:

“...developmentalism has won converts and recruits over whom even the most self-aggrandizing and nakedly adventurist forms of colonialism could not triumph...”<sup>84</sup>.

So, the whole world seems to have fallen in sway to the new culture of development and consumerism. Amitav Ghosh shows that the new regime has its own share of oppression and violence. It is enacted in a single minded pursuit of 'growth' without any sensitivity for the cultural, intellectual or emotional needs of people.

In the verbal combat over tanks and bombs, both the arguing sides – the Imam and the Indian young scholar, sound childish and stubborn. Their challenging tone underlines the fact that the philosophy of modernity has been monolithic and coercive in nature. It solidifies the fluid definitions. It has disintegrated the peaceful areas making them yield, in turn, to ever dissatisfied selves like that of the Imam. Ibrahim's anger over Amitav's curiosity for his traditional remedies points to that exiling situation by which he feels 'out of time' – "why do you want to hear about my herbs? ...Forget about all that; I'm trying to forget about it myself" (192). All the fellaheen seem to undergo a state of self-alienation. The Imam's acceptance of Allopathic medicine is epitome of that myopia for one's own rich and heterogeneous culture. He's an unconscious model of Hegelian ideology which aims at seeing the whole world in a monochromatic way. But in this process it tears away the old mutuality between city and village, developed and developing. Strangely the notions of inequality have further deepened in this world of crumbling walls and universal beliefs. This disparity is rhetorically evoked by Amartya Sen in an Indian context:

"Some Indians are rich; most are not. Some are very well educated; others are illiterate. Some lead easy lives of luxury; others toil hard for little reward. Some are politically powerful; others can't influence anything. Some are treated with respect by the police... with opportunities of advancement, others are treated like dirt... lacking any opportunity..."<sup>85</sup>.

Perhaps this close-stitched seam of difference is what Amitav Ghosh had transmitted to the guests of Ali's marriage ceremony which made all to gasp in disbelief. They had viewed the Indian 'grasses as greener' owing to the distance and development burgeoning around them. His effort to break this totalizing picture passed as incredible to them. Amitav Ghosh graphically catches their reaction: "But to my utter bewilderment, the more I insisted the more skeptical they seemed to become, until at last I realized, with an over whelming sense of shock, that the simple truth was that they did not believe what I was saying" (200).

The Vasco da Gama episode bears an unchallenging effect even today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It comes alive as a rejuvenated piece of yesterday when Amitav Ghosh with the taxi driver Mohsin planned to visit the post-mowlid tomb of Sidi Abu Hasira. It was reconstructed recently in a 'sleek concrete', 'newer and expensive' style (333). It seemed not only incongruous, but rather 'its presence seemed almost an act of

defiance' (333) in that poor quarter of Damanhour, the dusty village. The old, nondescript place had acquired all the modern, European paraphernalia of an important historical monument, dotted with 'mistrusted' (333), uniformed presence of state authority. Suspicion and skepticism clouded the officials' vision most naturally, as Amitav Ghosh alludes to their dark glasses (338). It occurred on the basis of the anomalies Ghosh represented there as a non-Jewish, non Muslim, non Christian (334), a scholar of Indian origin with a flawless command on Arabic! They could not forge any connection between him and 'the tomb of a Jewish holy man in Egypt' (339). His interest in it was a puzzling thing and a genuinely irritating mystery to the head official (339).

The author felt helpless in explaining his reason of being there which trailed back to the close-knitted ties of 12<sup>th</sup> century India and Egypt. Because of the splintering of these links, the disintegration of their bondage; no evidence is any longer visible in concrete forms. The signs of those times are either scattered out with the 'fragments' of 'manuscripts' across the world and preserved in the 'bowels' (348) of great library archives. Or they are buried deep in 'shards' of 'pottery' (39) or 'rags of silks'(39) rotting in ransacked places. Suddenly, Amitav Ghosh feels victimized by the hard blows of time, as he could not refer to anything that could 'give credence' to his story:

"...the remains of those small, indistinguishable intertwined histories- Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim, had been partitioned long ago" (339)

This realization came to Amitav Ghosh as a sudden jolt that there was nothing at all in Egypt, as remains of that wonderful time spent in harmony by Ben Yiju and Bomma, to justify his presence and 'challenge the official disbelief'(340). The severe apportion of the past has been so complete, of such a scale that no ultra-modern globalization could heal it! This has divided the very human reality by differentiating cultures, histories, traditions with inhuman consequences. This caused an inevitable division of humanity into 'us and them'.

Gauri Vishwanathan comments that the model of syncreticism found in the medieval age is no longer available. Because in the modern age, religions and cultural differences are so overwhelming that "the possibilities of all dialogues as solutions are weakly sought either in an overarching, totalizing brand of official secularism; or in

ethnic particularism”<sup>86</sup>. Ghosh feels guilty as the renewed state system wished him to do so, that’s why he writes: “I had been caught straddling a border, unaware of the fact that Historiography had predicated its own self fulfillment”(340).

This event also explained to Ghosh that Historiography, at times, is a tool of erasing its own past, by hegemonizing it, by manipulating it or by committing genocide upon the seemingly silent historical figures. In another instance Ghosh observes that ‘history is notoriously not about the past!’<sup>87</sup>. The word ‘Partition’(340) is used suggestively by Amitav Ghosh to signify the extent of this history writing game initiated by Europe and now followed by neo-imperialists and elites of modern nations. *Orientalism* by Said, *Subaltern Studies* by Guha and group, are attempts to unmask this modernized old plot. The officer’s claim to ‘protect the tomb’ (340) at any cost sounds the most ironic thing in the context of this knowledge lent to us by *In an Antique Land*. Because this newfangled protective fencing around beliefs, religions and cultures betrays the most human need to come in contact and interact. This is nourished by the neat categorization maintained in formation of nation states. That’s why Ghosh himself shows the narrator accusing Thamma, the grandmother in *The Shadow Lines* of taking borders as separating walls. She wanted nations to be like “neat note books”<sup>88</sup>.

It is evident that the new governments understand a language of essentialist identities only, herald differences of myriad kinds. Thus, *In an Antique Land* is a counter narrative of the nation states also which makes enemies of friends, neighbours and fellow human societies. This kind of nationalism impinges history in a nightmarish way, reducing it in an undifferentiated and monochromatic manner. This is why Javed Majeed finds *In an Antique Land* evoking the medieval world as the basis of a critical perspective on modernity. This face of modernity unlike the messianic deeds breaks off the common structural affinity with discourses of purity and authenticity. Amitav Ghosh seems to privilege the earlier times of cultural hybridity, racial mixing and economic exchange.

The villagers’ wide-opened ‘bewilderment’ has its mirror image in the ‘genuine puzzlement’ of the Monument bureaucrats (339) and the young scholar’s sudden realization (340) of the lost part. By these incidents Ghosh hints to the betrayal of the long history of the old ‘world of accommodations’ (237) under effect of the modernist gamble. But Amitav Ghosh transpires as a Post-colonial person who is not against

development, rather the prejudices of Westernization, its deeply flawed structure of unspeakable violence and triage- is what irks him. This is apparent in the way he ends this exhaustive work.

The epilogue of the novel gives snapshots of the Gulf war, preceded by the Sicilian battle wreaked upon Mahdia (300) and Ilfria in 1145-46(301). Ben Yiju's friend Madmun dies (315) in the first narrative, Nabeel vanishes in the 'anonymity of history' (353) in the contemporary one. If everything related to ancient and 'sacked out' (241) past is savage, the modern wars of WMD are wilder and more primitive in their intention. There's an amazing similarity between the two tumultuous times across centuries. The Christians in Western Europe were massacring Jews in 'a frenzy of religious fervour affected by sermons of clairvoux' (300):

"At about the same time a hundred thousand Christians and Jews were massacred by the Almohads in Fez, and hundred and twenty thousand more in Marrakesh" (301).

It resembles any general count of the mayhems caused in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Bosnia or Palestine, taking place every day in this civilized world. Everybody aimed at converting others to their own religion; today the fight still remains over power of religion disguised in fights over oil, water, lands or woods. Nothing has changed the inhumanity of the human being, not even the psalms of progress bear any ability to stop this. Today we have wars for democracy and peace- which make the most heinous face of unity and equality if that's the truth.

Thus, *In an Antique Land* aims at forcing the modernized countries, the metropolis to rethink their history in the light of de-colonization process. Amitav looks for alternatives beyond nations, nationalism and universalization. This is a work with a message to resist hegemony of any kind. It is the recreation of the self as a postcolonial, anti-imperialist subject which is central for Amitav Ghosh. He is also choosing the path of syncreticism as a solution to all the problems related to sects, nations, ethnic identity and religions wreaking havoc on humanity. It can maintain harmony without disproportionate power division.

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“Science...reason do not belong to countries. They belong to history - to the world.”

*The Calcutta Chromosome* is one of the rare writings devoted to revise the history of medicine in the literary form. This novel comes as a powerful ‘bullet’ from the ‘post-colonial’ armoury of the Eastern conscience to shatter various myths and discourses about the large non-European, Orientalized world. *The Calcutta Chromosome* can be called the celebration of that “single moment of discovery, which changes the script”<sup>1</sup>, “writing in” the unnoticed facts to change a history forever!

The prime aim of the author, Amitav Ghosh in writing this novel is not only to return value to the “race of wretches..., chaff of human seed” (35). It is also to refurbish the doctored and distorted records of Western imperialism still in power, in disguised forms. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is thus, a reasonable study of East and West, living in a divided position so far, bearing their own flags of Science and mysticism, reason and impulse, ‘consciousness’<sup>2</sup> and ‘trance’ (7). Hegel and Kant were predecessors of this view that European modernity grasped “the real in contradistinction to the ephemeral non-reality of non European existence”<sup>3</sup>. But this novel breaks all such compartmentalizing manners of distributing knowledge in a few convenient narratives, of shaping it in categories and tables. Amitav Ghosh is repositioning knowledge as a philosophy, which is pursued and strived after as a practice by all humanity in individual ways. The ways of seeking knowledge may vary but this is a journey undertaken together by all. It would be wrong to advocate a uni-linear route and destination for a multitudinous world. Amitav Ghosh is not ready to accept the monumental “ladder system”<sup>4</sup> distributing humanity on its different floors of development on the basis of the region one inhabits or the complexion one bears.

The novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* is set in an unknown phase of the future but the story is heavily sprinkled with past instances. They hang predominantly as we can never escape our past doings inscribed all over our present. It goes back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century India, covered under Colonization of the British and, at large, of the West. This colonialism thrived fully not only in the political and economic aspects but

also in the intellectual sphere. The very mental ability and consciousness of the whole East was apparently at stake which the colonialists assumed to be non-existent among the subjects or to be inferior, as explicated by Edward Said in his masterpiece, *Orientalism*.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* presents a third aspect of Western view regarding the Eastern intelligence – its involvement in the acts of witchcraft, at its worst. But Amitav Ghosh reposes it to the best – showing the native mind at work parallel to any other, even finds it going far ahead and defying the easy, “conventional and comfortable”<sup>5</sup> classifications. Amitav Ghosh regards all such categorization to prove that the rule of difference as reflected in this divisive policy was at the very heart and mind of colonialism.

Partha Chatterji has argued that “politics of difference”<sup>6</sup> nourished the rulers’ claim to be stronger and capable of ruling over others, negating the very presence of others. Hailing nineteenth Century as the ‘age of science and discovery’ was one part of this claim. If the West was enraptured by the fever of research and discoveries, the East for them was in a state of ‘delirium’ and ignorance! Gyan Prakash describes this period to be ‘seized by modernity’<sup>7</sup>, subjugating India to a further level of colonization. Historians and critics alike call science and modernity as ‘tools of Empire’ to sustain its power along with their other designs.

Mark Harrison reads medicines’ role as a ‘tool’<sup>8</sup> to be the most familiar theme in the historiography of colonial medicine to date. No doubt, David Headricks entitled his book with this very obvious term of empowerment, i.e *The Tool of Empire*<sup>9</sup>. He lists medicine as a very crucial element among several of Western technologies, for the success of European expansion and domination over large parts of the globe. It was propounded most benignly as the latest addition to the White man’s ‘civilizing mission’. Whereas the fact is that their noble attempt at improving the health of colonies was marred by various ignoble ideas.

Their principal aim was to keep the Europeans in the tropics and especially the army troops away from diseases who were the ultimate guarantors of imperial rule. Medical facility offered an improved labour efficiency for a longer time. Medicine became the best instrument for penetrating the remote areas of colonies knowing them, to become

a means of 'social control' over the indigenous population. Over and above, as Michael Foucault bitterly observed that keeping the soldiers in good health was a colonial need, they could not afford their deaths. "Once trained in military, value of a man increased than that of a labourer" and "a soldier could not be permitted to die, because of illness"<sup>10</sup>. It would have harmed their first priority of economic prosperity. It was also to change the general impression about the colonized territories as the *White Man's Grave*. As Philip D. Curtin has written, the Europeans had to prove that their weakness in the coastal West Africa and Asia was "not racial but a lack of immunity to yellow fever and malaria in particular"<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, maintenance of public health system as part of colonial legacy was not necessarily for altruistic reasons. They knew that they themselves would be affected if their colonial subjects were ravaged by contagious diseases, Dietmar Rothermund noted<sup>12</sup>. The colonized, of course, came secondary as beneficiary in this project. Their primary involvement was measured in another way. The colonies made the best laboratories, providing Western science studies with the best opportunity to practise the trial and error methodology, subjugating them to guinea pigs' position. The quarantine makes a shameful part of British history, questioning their very basis of humanitarian feeling. It was a glaring misuse of power in adopting Draconian measures to impose their drugs and potions upon provinces.

Foucault read this as the 'new form of governing man in the seventeenth Century'<sup>13</sup>, for controlling the multiplicity, and utilizing the natives to the maximum. It was done by schooling, 'arm'-ing or, 'hospitalizing' them, where the native person was literally at the colonial doctors' disposal. He further adds that medicine and the enlightened 'mad doctors' contributed to the "impure and unethical progress of science which has since been utilized for technical warfare and annihilation"<sup>14</sup>. It was the real subjugation in a way, much like Michel Rieu's definition of "power", which is "the capacity to make the whole social body evolve to the power owning person or class' own profit"<sup>15</sup>. So, military camps became 'open-air laboratories' as Amitav Ghosh refers to Secunderabad stationed regiment of nineteenth century Madras Infantry in 1895 and writes:

“On his way up, Ronnie sticks needles into anything that moves. When he pulls into Begumpett, he begins to offer money for samples of malarial blood - real money, one rupee per prick!”(60).

*Mian Mir* Camp of Punjab and Calcutta labs are known in the same association - the military could call any poor fellow to be laid on the testing bed to lend something to the colonial scientists' tube or microscope. It led to the recruitment of a 'small army' of informants and middlemen to chase natives towards the lab-doors. Abdul Kadir (61), Mangla and Lutchman are shown doing this job as representatives of an indigenous group. They lived in close proximity to the colonials and worked as allies. For them, colonies were for multipurpose use - they could be schooled as fish to move in a direction, could be armed to fight for the masters and also utilized as whipping boys. Thus, shockingly new medical therapies like quinine and inoculation were applied to Indian population without any regard of their sensitivity.

This very fact is revealed of the Janus faced nature of colonial medicine in the present work of Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome*. The colonialists won their difficult battles with the demonstration that if they killed natives, they were also armed with a healing magic. Sometimes they were charlatans par excellence too, who promised to heal everything. But an abnegation of medical ethics has been seen very much as part of their trade technique. They cared about Cholera or Malaria because it caused the highest number of deaths in their army, specially. C.A Bayly informs that “Cholera spread along the lines of Lord Hasting’s army in 1817”<sup>16</sup> which demanded their utmost attention. Their implicit bias in “contemporary medical journals against diseases connected with poverty reveals the failure of medical humanism”<sup>17</sup>, as puts Deborah Madden. She also informs how syphilis-afflicted Blacks were denied treatment in US and Germany around 1932-72 committing an ethical misconduct in human research.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* also has one such incident showing the Western medical bias, now aped throughout the world against HIV/AIDS patients. The central character, Murugan was notorious for his 'over-dressing' (42) in spite of changing seasons and fashions as he was a syphilitic patient. His family had “to leave the city out of shame” (238). It is evident how various prejudices are used for human illnesses rampant everywhere. This instance reminds of the Indian belief that sinners suffer

diseases at par, and how physical remedies involved purification of soul and habits too. Have we really come far from our old days of superstitions?

But Amitav Ghosh gains in stature as a rebel to break all of these notions in his different novels. If Tridib adhered to imagination for knowing things, beside books and classes in *The Shadow Lines*, Arjun and Hardayal Singh use their 'trained' hands against their own masters, without any guilt of betrayal in *The Glass Palace*. This latest work of Ghosh shows the scientific experimentation conducted by Ronald Ross and others as subjects of an indigenous group's study. This counter-attack seems most scathing by the author Ghosh who loves switching roles across the marginal and the central characters. This is what happens in this novel, as Meenakshi Mukherji puts it, "The White man's research on a tropical disease gets appropriated by the native subalterns for a different purpose"<sup>18</sup>.

L. Murugan, the 'disappeared' (30) employee of *Life Watch*, a global public health consultancy sounds crazy to everybody because of his constant tale bearing about the Malaria research. He is the embodiment of the 'other Mind' hypothesis, fitting in the league of Amitav Ghosh's creations like Balram, Tridib, the *In An Antique Land* scholar and *The Hungry Tide* Piyali or Fokir: who look at the alternative ways of living life. He could find out some "systematic discrepancies in the account of Ronald Ross' Malaria research" (31). But he had to struggle a lot to convince people about it for years as Ross was already a canonized scientist by winning his 1906 Nobel Prize for the same! Who could think of challenging such an authority but a 'crank'(31) like Murugan, by writing papers entitled "An alternative interpretation of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Malaria research: is there a secret history?"(31). He became a self-claimed 'expert' on the topic. His strange moves lead the readers on a search trail with more than latest technology.

Amitav Ghosh's choice of a future time in looking for some lost roots makes *The Calcutta Chromosome* at once a 'medical thriller, a Victorian ghost story and a scientific quest'<sup>19</sup>. But writing a sci-fi could be imagined as the most disciplined response of a colonized person. About it James H. Thrall muses, that Amitav Ghosh has "borrowed this Western genre for an alternative purpose"<sup>20</sup> of questioning the precedence of Western rational inquiry. Amitav Ghosh interrogates the very nature of this notion proving it to be fraught with falsehood. As a post modern writer, Ghosh is

bent upon discarding another ‘grand narrative’<sup>21</sup> of history in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, choosing a very attractive mien of a mixed genre. He has made an elaborate case for “those forgotten underlings who do the spadework for all those grand discoveries”<sup>22</sup>, which Ross and his ilk thought to be the grand purpose of the precious, superior human life. His memoir shows him to be a snob in the garb of a most generous charlatan persona –

“Great is sanitation- the greatest work, except *discovery*... that a man can do. But you, o cleaner will always be a Pariah. Fret not however, for these dying children shall live, and some day this hideous slum shall become a city of gardens, and it is you who will have done it”<sup>23</sup>.

Ghosh has really chosen the underlings of the dazzling era of British authority, the Pariah and the untouched class of people to topple down a well guarded narrative. His experimentation brushes true life closely as the characters are constantly in dialogue with the past in order to grasp originality, lost in the palimpsest of chronicles. These are the records which have suffered a global invasion under European modernity. It promptly shattered the myriad “non-capitalist social formations... and replaced with its own replication”<sup>24</sup>. In doing so, it took every alterity as terror or lack, which seized them with urge to annihilate and wipe out. Murugan proudly announces his love’s labour in saying:

“I have tracked him (Ross) through every single one of those 500 days: I know, where he was, what he did, which slides he looked at... It’s like I was looking over his shoulder...” (44).

After all rewriting a history is not an easy task.

This lusty compulsion is referred to by Antar’s sudden realization of the International Water Council’s task of ‘dust counting’ (5) years after. He discerns these efforts as ‘History making... with their vast water control experiments: they wanted to record every minute detail of what they had done, what they would do. Instead of having a historian to sift through their dirt, looking for meanings...’ (6). Now it is Amitav Ghosh’s turn to do the dust counting job.

That’s why the scattered characters become agents of discovery ‘chosen’ (254) to ‘change the script’... and write’... (254) the truth again! They travel back and forth in time, from metropolitans to miniscule villages, ultra-tech computers to ‘miniature



figurines hidden in back walls' (36) of stately architecture. Amitav Ghosh makes every minute detail worth a key in unlocking the mystery behind the 1906 Malaria remedy phenomenon. He replenishes the centre stage with 'fringe' people (89) who were never taken as significant in any concern in the previous system. Ross, Farley, Cunningham and other elites or the 'highest category Babus'<sup>25</sup> as Tabish Khair puts it, are made to give way to the Coolies or subalterns like Lakhaan/Lutchmn and Mangla. The sub-elites like Urmila, Sonali Das, Antar and Murugan, Phulboni are compelled by these two to write a new story. Even the unnamed street urchin becomes a guiding force in his teasing way.

Amitav Ghosh's scholarly panache' for details and utmost complete information of the things of his interest is apparent in *The Calcutta Chromosome* also. He can write about Malaria and its background better than a doctor and a medical historian. Like Ronald Ross, he wants 'everyone to know the story. He is not about to leave any of it up for grabs, not a single minute...' (44), any more. He does not want to keep any blank space anywhere to be apprised of one's whims.

Amitav Ghosh introduces us to Malaria as a friendly and frolicsome character who could 'survive all conditions mimicking symptoms of many diseases' (47), being omnipresent. Like colonizers, Malaria had encroached upon earth throughout its map, and had a record of being the all time biggest killer among diseases. Malaria rose up as the only other power to grapple with for the omnipotent European army of settlers, military men, businessmen and scientists together. Nobody could resist its 'attack of the shakes' (47). The European 'dynamite and Gatling guns' (47) were of no comparison, were "chicken feed" (47), to Malaria. It was a bigger threat than the British or French to each other. Malaria research literally became the 'zeitgeist' (46) as Murugan informs to the wide-eyed Antar. It literally gave an impetus to new sciences like Bacteriology and Parasitology. It reached "right to the top of the research agenda... making governments to pour money into Malaria research everywhere..." (48) without any thought. Perhaps, the nuclear bombs come next to Malaria as Amitav Ghosh reveals the frenzy concerning this "scientific puzzle of the century" (48).

Ghosh takes us to the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century as it woke up to this big shooter colonizing and ruling over all alike. Laveran, Robert Koch, Danilewsky, Romanowsky, W.G.

Mac Calhem, Bignami, Celli, Golgi, Kennan, Nott, Canalis and all others joined together to fight off this greatest terror (49). Finally Ronald Ross beat them all as a ‘lone genius’ working in India without any proper ‘arrangement’, any ‘lab’ or ‘journal facility’ (48). He ran away with the “world Cup” (49), to the shock of a thundered community of scientists. But *The Calcutta Chromosome*’s magic is spelled by someone else, who guided Ross to reach the result from the darkness of an unheard silence! This concealed quiescence is the revenge of the East upheld by the novel – revealed only teasingly, unfastening knots in steps. This is disquieting like the *mysterious caves* of Forster’s vision of India. This mystery and murkiness weilds a secret power of its own, which remained unfathomed to the intelligent Farley. He ‘disappeared’ (129) in a perplexing manner, if this euphemism reserved for Murugan could be reused.

Farley’s last letter hints disturbingly to a new revelation, writing that “everything is other than what it appears to be, a phantom of itself” (129). No doubt, when this ‘unfinished narrative’ (128) is completed, it causes the meta-narrative of Western Science and Historiography to suffer a teasing disorder. *The Calcutta Chromosome* stands for the wisest belief, proving that “never again will a story be told as though it’s the only one”<sup>26</sup>.

So Murugan has his own version of how Ross made his discovery which baffled his employers. His personal conviction of this made *Science Society* to revoke his membership and cause estrangement from several of his friends and colleagues (31). Nobody was ready to come out of the Euro-centric ‘phantom’; it was to deny the whole Western civilization’s triumph by ‘medicine and hygiene’. They flaunted it as a gift to the whole mankind, as Anna Mac Clintock says in his ‘Soft-soaping Empire’<sup>27</sup>. This sheds light on a leviathan trajectory of how colonization was made to spread along various routes. *The Calcutta Chromosome* tracks some of the devious ones here.

British and French companies, their products and railways reaching within far off places of India were backed by the motive of capturing all areas possible directly or indirectly. In the present novel, Syed Morad Hussain alias Phulboni as a young man is shown employed in “Palmer Brothers Company of soaps, oils and household goods” with an extensive distribution network (212). Phulboni was sent to Renupur, a small, remote village for “survey” and commercialization as a new recruit (212). A village

like Renupur having a railway station hardly in use was something inconspicuous and incredible. But this is proof of the colonizers' clairvoyance in sensing profit out of such places. Railways were built at a very rapid rate in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, for which money came from Britain but not directly. As Rothermund argues "the European industrial revolution was financed to a great extent by India itself"<sup>28</sup> – the plunder of Bengal, like the scramble of Africa had enriched them bounteously.

Most of the imperial powers built railways for such purposes only which went straight from the bridge heads into the hinterlands. Wherever the hinterlands like Renupur and Barich (212) were suitable for cash crops production, for export, for opening of new markets – as "the new railways played a crucial role in linking such places to the world market"<sup>29</sup>.

*Sea of Poppies* also shows this aspect in a very convincing manner, as the bankrupt *zamindar* Neel Rattan Haldar moans for the loss and pillage caused by the Western capitalists in Indian colonies, who 'sowed their lands with suffering'. They became "the hand of destiny... straying far inland, away from the busy coastlines, to alight on the people who were, of all, the most stubbornly rooted in the silt of Ganga..."<sup>30</sup>.

Renupur station was a surprising point at an obscure place with no population around. At the most, it looked almost deserted. The official purpose for construction of this station was "safety" (213), as the author informs. But one can guess that it is an overt euphemistic expression. One can add Gandhi's view here as he expressed in *Hind Swaraj* –

"...demands for more railways, modern medicines and laws is to make India 'English' and to have English rule without the English men"<sup>31</sup>.

The whole world had taken oath to depend upon the story of Ross, as he had told it! (44). No doubt, Nicholas B. Dirks takes Colonialism as a 'trope for domination and violation' together <sup>32</sup>.

Murugan's task involved not just removing the film of colonial domination over the world's vision. It was also to assemble the shattered and violated past of the colonized together. Working very much on a new historicist pattern, he feels, "All I have is bits and pieces, no beginning, no middle and definitely no end" (209). This observation bears a great significance in a broader context, expressing the view that no history and

narrative can claim to be complete. The presence of breaks, gaps and aberrations will remain there to give a scope for new thinking. Amitav Ghosh's attempt is to repair some of these fractured and hidden parts of the history.

Thus, armed with an impeccable confidence of knowing something extraordinary by the general terms, Murugan is set to reveal a deconstruction of the self-professed Western superiority of science and medicine. Amitav Ghosh shows a reluctance to conform to these traditional patterns, 'unwilling to go into the realms of intellectual fabrication that fed the ideology of imperialist anthropologies'<sup>33</sup>. He achieves this assurance through his search for connections and analogies away from the dominant discourses.

For this, Ghosh has to choose an unprecedented position - available today only to the subalterns. This is like being in an unexpected corner and acting from there to make an emphatic change. This very plot of challenging a well established idea from the weak quarters of a subaltern is no less than a fantasy. But, a fantasy which makes one to use credibility - one does feel flattered enough to believe in this impossible premise of scientific reality. As Claire Chambers notes Amitav Ghosh uses confusing boundaries between realism/fantasy, science/religion, truth/fiction deliberately, propounding a dream couched in a most rational manner<sup>34</sup>. This dream is seeded in the way *The Calcutta Chromosome* unhinges the Universalist claims of European scientific powers. Amitav Ghosh's strategy is producing a 'counter science' which can be termed as *subaltern science* also. It is a baffling return to Eastern traditionalism with a vengeance. It is represented by a cult group whose rituals are far more rational than stereotyped. They are far more modern than the latest laboratory scientists in their target. They are trying to test and evaluate a religious aspect of their society into reality - the reincarnation theory. This instance is a symbolic revolt against the everyday subalternity suffered by non-Western histories.

Amitav Ghosh shows the mysterious backyard group of Ross's colonial bungalow, working as assistants of the lowest rank busy in experimenting with human bodies and pigeons. This motley assortment of "poor-illiterate men and women in *Lungis* and *saris*, few students, Nepalis, several prim looking middle class women unexpectedly sitting together" (138). This cluster is headed by Mangala, a woman, a doubly subaltern character. Her theory of body-change or corporeal restoration is based upon

soul-migration theory of Hinduism and its mythology. She was far ahead of her time, as the same scientific objectives are making headlines today as advanced biological studies of chromosomes and DNA, Retroviruses, and cloning mutations are giving way to a new lingo in science.

The particular scene regarding the human sacrifice as captured through the intellectual elite, Sonali Das' view is mysterious and terrifying to the extreme. Ghosh picturises it comprehensively –

“... as she dared, she looked again into the space by the fire. She caught a glimpse of a body, lying on the floor... The drumming rose to a crescendo: there was a flash of bright metal and a necklace of blood flew up and fell sizzling on the fire... (140)”.

The chapter ends with Sonali's collapse in the darkness, naturally! This hallucinatory ritual centering the all other innocuous ones evokes a strange kind of feverish delirium which breaks the hyper real. Vishnupriya Ghosh reads this scene as proof of the porosity of all discourses. She writes –

“The textual membrane of the medical, realist discourse is sutured with the religio-philosophical realism ... magical in Western postmodern literary criticism”<sup>35</sup>.

Mangala gains an iconic status for her audience who was not a hocus- pocus practitioner, but she had “a certain rate of success with her half way effective treatment...” (204). The novel ends with an impression of her as a soul-restorer who experimented with scientific instruments and a raw and intuitive imagination. Amitav Ghosh appreciates this freedom from scientific rules and laws, being ‘out of the loop!’(207).

This is the most postcolonial characteristic of the novel which assures the readers that colonization could not penetrate as deep as to eradicate the very originality of continents like India. Ghosh celebrates it as a triumph of the subaltern, of the ritualistic East. This part of the world did not have to wrench itself of religion in order to know and explore the unknown territories. They behaved in balance between different aspects of life, as *Wall Street Journal* comments, Indians are capable of living in several centuries at once<sup>36</sup>. No wonder, Sunita Williams and Kalpana Chawla, both Indian space travellers undertook their remarkable scientific expeditions crooning Hindu *Bhajans* and worshipping their little *Ganesh* deities.

Amitav Ghosh is referring to this aspect of Indian life only, dismantling the colonial myths of India being riven with innuendo and powerful superstitions and evangelical zealotry without any scientific temper or aptitude. This is equivalent to playing with and shattering down the enormously believed classification of colonial knowledge. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is an attack over the Western hubris of discovery narratives, shown and advertised all over the world. No wonder Mangala Bibi could be accepted as the pioneering, struggling scientist of the biological cloning practice, as the postcolonial version of the old reincarnation belief. She worked underground with a spectral corpus. It proves how medical discourse is contaminated with religio-philosophical 'truth' in hidden forms. In fact religion provided a base to science, provided an ontology, epistemology as well as practical code of ethics, as politics does to communities.

It can't be denied that religious practices often reflect an aspiration for an improved life, growing from and going beyond daily experience of the world. It is part of the ideological superstructure in countries like India where it centres all other activities. David Hardiman, while researching for Salabai's conviction among Adivasis comes to know how "religious congregations" around 1922, dictated a clean life style, belief in Gandhi and national movement for independence<sup>37</sup>. Advocacy of Pulse-Polio movement is still using Friday mosque prayers and Church sermons, keeping an old Indian tradition alive! These Devi movements also appeased people to adhere to smallpox inoculation, the new treatment of epidemics. They held Sitala Devi ceremonies in villages, dressed-up a chosen woman as representative to do the propitiation rites: in turn spreading awareness, as Hardiman adds<sup>38</sup>. This could be read as reinstalling Hinduism as a living heritage, as modern as it is ancient.

These instances make Indian religious life to be saner and rational unlike the way Europeans always viewed them to be non-enlightened and nonsensical. Edward Said and Peter Hulme have written about this myopic aspect extensively. These European opinions had swayed many natives too, as V.S Naipaul and Salman Rushdie have nodded to several times. As late as 2008, Rushdie writes "there is no particular wisdom in the East, all human beings are foolish to the same degree"<sup>39</sup> - very clearly acceding to White power. His *Satanic Verses* also has been widely read as

demarcating the world in two types, “attributing reason and secularism to the West in contrast to religion, revelation and superstition to the East”<sup>40</sup>.

But *The Calcutta Chromosome* reveals that European acquisition of the merits of rationality and modernity for itself is attended by ambivalences and contradictions. Amitav Ghosh suggests that there have been different neotic modes used by colonized, subaltern societies for discoveries and knowledge. The colonizers were unable to comprehend these within their narrow and Eurocentric versions of rationality. At times they deliberately declined to accept the Eastern wisdom or give them space in the ‘ladder of development’<sup>41</sup>.

Thus, Amitav Ghosh presents the human sacrifice scene as an exact opposite of the so far associated irrational barbarism to it. It is “reinscribed within the subaltern discourse as a form of discovery, of futhering life...” as explains Tabish Khair<sup>42</sup>. It is proffered as a planned and purposive activity. It was a proposed means of personal improvement as well as for health and prosperity. In Western terms it was very much of a rational activity, an investigation into the unknown facts of life. Mangala and other Indians are as civilized as any European to undertake this responsibility. In a way, Ghosh is returning the narrative agency to them – powerful enough to bag them any award of recognition like Ronald Ross.

This is restoring historical agency outside its Eurocentric definition to the Indian subalterns. It is displacing the sovereignty of the British Raj and its allies which claimed agency and historicity for itself solely. The acclaimed critic Tabish Khair associates ahistoricity to “divisibility and chaos”<sup>43</sup>, which made India and other such non-European, non-nation states weak enough to be tutored by the Raj. They could do it by using repression and violence instrumentally in celebration of their god-like authority. *The Calcutta Chromosome* reveals the contradictions, tragedies and ironies inherent in this proffered tale allegorically in Ross’ life tracked by Murugan. The novel is intensely navigated by Ross’ *Memoirs* published in 1923.

Amitav Ghosh gives ample indication of Ronald’s and at large Western preoccupation with their Historiography through his diary- keeping habit. He was writing his own history; a strong symbol of his egoistic nature. He also designed 20<sup>th</sup> August as World Mosquito Day to commemorate his finding (32). J.W.D. Grigson and Countess

Pongracz show the same natural instinct of preserving their records. Amitav Ghosh writes -

“And where ever he goes, Grigson takes notes ... he keeps a diary, he keeps a journal. When Ypsilanti College bought his collected papers in 1990, they had to hire an 8-axle truck to ship the stuff out...” (76).

J.W.D. Grigson is obsessive about collecting information about everything, leaving nothing; Murugan emphasizes; “and that means nothing” (76). The Countess also is seen “noting down everything that happened to her *guru*” (171), Mme Liisa Salminen, meriting to a leading disciple. Her records became the best source of locating this Spiritualists’ Society.

Mrs. Aratounian who lived an Anglicised life, loving BBC news (105), without learning a word of Bengali (93), also knew the importance of such a habit. So, unlike any such experience, the New Russell Exchange Auctioneers’ clerk exclaims about lack of paper in the debris of her sold out house. He tells Urmila and Murugan, “Here, there was no waste paper... nothing. No newspaper, old books, nothing” (251). They really could not find a single bit of paper in the whole house. She had cleaned the place out like the Europeans had done to the Egyptian Geniza. The ‘religion of silence’ had taught her to value information which could place itself in the unlikeliest of all places. Two most crucial information like D. D. Cunningham’s leave sanction in January 1898 (117) and C. C. Dunn’s Madras journey (168) are thrown towards Murugan to fill the missing links in the most astonishing manner, through the fish seller. Ross is shown to be very possessive about his letters, which Edwin Nye and Mary Gibson read as his efforts to keep the edifice of his achievement prim and pure, “carefully saved for posterity”<sup>44</sup>.

Murugan makes fun of this characteristic, this religious zeal for a proper self-presentation when he tells Antar, “Ross...decided he’s going to rewrite the history books. He wants the world to know the story like he’s going to tell it...” (44). Ronald was one of those Westerns who were trained by birth to “load their dirt with their own meanings” (6), instead of being interpreted variously. But Amitav Ghosh has toppled down this pipedream most ingenuously, using the same records against him. Amitav Ghosh is applying the counter scientific dictum against *Memoires* which said, “...to know something is to change it and after knowing something you only know its



history” (88). By knowing Ross’ success story, we are able to make many possible changes in it, which makes *The Calcutta Chromosome* a thrilling read.

Claire Chambers notes that “the silences and omissions in *Memoirs* about Ronald Ross’ Indian labs and workers provide fascinating suggestions of constructing a story”<sup>45</sup>. Amitav Ghosh has utilized this opportunity most shrewdly in an English manner. This autobiography reveals many possibilities of suppressing and disguising facts which have been creatively filled in by Ghosh. In this act, he is doing the job of a subaltern historian, as Rosalind O’Hanlon has written:

“...the historians who write in the *Subaltern Studies* idiom, do a filling up: of making an absence into presences, of peopling a vacant space with figures - dissimilar in their humble and work-worn appearances, but bearing... the marks of a past and a present which is their own...”<sup>46</sup>.

Partha Chatterji also recognizes this task of “filling up” the emptiness, the “representation of subaltern consciousness in elitists’ historiography”<sup>47</sup>. Amitav Ghosh is recuperating the fringe characters of the novel, their capacity to take purposeful action, rather than being blind followers of others.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* opens the seals of the elite and European sociological determinism by noticing the twists and turns, pointing the suppressed possibilities in the traditional, grand history of colonialism. This new history is no less than imagining a new human entity arising from the counter science devised in hidden laboratories<sup>48</sup>, as Diane M. Nelson opines. For this postcolonial discovery, Amitav Ghosh has linked malaria with colonial tropes and troops to weave the tale. Thus the British power wielded through troops and armaments established their colonial power – medicine being another helping factor. What this particular novel demonstrates is that the medicinal advancements undertaken in colonies like India were equally assisted and contributed by the natives.

The particular case of malaria taken in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is an allegory to the European colonists’ aim of establishing their version of the world, its chronicles and facts. But of course, this was a target almost successfully achieved with force and coercion. This also involved silencing all others - the alterity; who thought or worked out life and its mysteries in a different way. The British stay in India is an evident

instance for the author concerned, whose birth was merely nine years away from the newly independent nation.

The colonial legacy continued in myriad ways along the author's growing up years. The previous generation was ripe with memories and the peculiar experience of a colonized life to enrich his competence and cognition. He did find many of the natives who had lived with and around the British colonists – as close as to be inside their very homes, offices and laboratories. The Indians' presence was essential in all kinds of works as can be imagined.

Bernard C. Cohn's illustrative essay also proves it that the colonial rule converted a number of titular Indian employees like *Dubashi, Dalaal, Akhund Gomastah, Pundit, Munshi, Vakil and Shroff* into instruments, and helpful beings<sup>49</sup>. The local people's negotiation and assistance was very much required everywhere by the colonials. This gave both sides' people a chance to know each other. Cohn gauges the official sources like *The Letters Received from its servants in the East, The Fort William India House Correspondence* to trace the changes in forms of knowledge which the conquerors defined as useful for their own ends. These records of 17<sup>th</sup> Century show – “...names and functions of Indians ... scattered throughout ... employed by the company, or with whom they were associated, on whom they were dependent for information and knowledge to carry out their commercial ventures”<sup>50</sup>.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* takes the predicament of medical and science ventures of the colonials. But as natural, the master had too many things to tell and instruct the slaves. In fact, the master wanted the servants to act in the very way as he wished – demanding an unquestioned compliance. This obsequious submission was the most favourable help that the colonials received, if believed to the power yielding colonial narratives. But living together always leads to a cross-over, a compromise or compatibility, naturally for both good and bad. With this grounding, how can the dominating group claim to be free of any local effect? This logic comes as the very first interrogation to the Eurocentric history. If conquest of India was a conquest of its knowledge and treasures, then they did select the reasonable parts of it before wiping out the rest! This is what Ashis Nandy observes in *The Uncolonized Mind* -

“The West does not incorporate India in spite of its theories of martial races and ignoble and noble savages. But India does incorporate the West”<sup>51</sup>.

This is what *The Calcutta Chromosome* reveals through the Sealdah station-bound characters, straddling within the Calcutta labs as the purest exemplum of nativity. Murugan, Urmila, Sonali and others cannot be called the original, blue prints of the real Indian culture, as they were born in the middle class. They got their education and work experience in a multi cultural atmosphere – their very personalities had shelled off the rawness, the ‘untouchable’ quality (in the double entendre sense) borne by Lutchman, Mangala or the Station master. They are the primordial representative of the aboriginal India. As Gandhi also claimed that real India lives in villages or what Wordsworth celebrated in his country-side poetry, encompassing the peasants’ real passions. But as these very persons are shifted within the colonial bungalow precincts - they are sure to get enfolded by the ongoing activities over there. Their unseasoned and unrefined minds reacted to or grasped the colonial methods and styles much quickly. As Murugan reports that Mangala took to the slide-making job as naturally as a duck takes to water! (202), “And a quicker pair of hands and eyes I had never seen before...” (123). Her unoccupied mind and idle life responded to the new chore with all its openness and alacrity.

Mangala and her illiterate coterie’s ease with the lab work can be read in the light of James Livesey’s essay “History of science”, where he associates the new hospital and medical practice services with confinement<sup>52</sup>. This new arrangement was a complex unity in which a new sensibility to poverty, unemployment and ‘idleness’ formed part of work ethics. Idleness was intensified by the commercializing and commodifying policies of the East India Company in India. It is an aspect taken by Ghosh even in *Sea of Poppies*, showing people jobless and dawdling because of mechanization as well as opium’s easy availability. The Sealdah station is an illustrative of the same feature, as D. D. Cunningham informs Farley about Mangala –

“... I found her where I find all my bearers and assistants; at the new railways station ... Sealdah... That’s the place to go if you need a willing worker – it is full of people looking for a job and a roof over their heads...” (122).

The Sealdah station, an embodiment of colonial power, was the best place to catch untrained and supposedly ‘un-conscious’ natives of Hegel to dazzle and blind them in

slavic tasks. Cunninghams' assumption of 'untrained and uneducated' assistants "preferable to be surrounded by over-eager and half formed college students" (123) is also reflective of a colonial politics. He justifies it being easy, "one is spared the task of imparting much that is useless and unnecessary" (123). His age could be guessed at a juncture where a man needs to be free of unnecessary juggling to concentrate on work. But this reluctance to share information to "eager" college students also hints at the lack of desire to employ young Indians studying science and medicine. Cunningham, like all colonialists knew scientific education to be powerful. People like Philip Altbach announce that for a long time, Indians were not allowed to this discipline of research and study directly<sup>53</sup> because science was an insignia of superiority. The colonies were provided liberal education mostly, keeping medical and technical teaching excluded for a long time. Thus, they produced lawyers and educated scribes for the lower ranks of administration. But above all, colonial education was mostly of the elite, the general masses had to wait long for their share of 'enlightenment'.

This mentality is reflective of the recognition of the hierarchical status of "science moving from the domain of strategic knowledge to the rank of accessory to the ideological arsenal of power"<sup>54</sup>. So, even though science and medical education were introduced in India, the IMS was established in Calcutta as late as 1855 but the teaching standard was much 'inferior'<sup>55</sup> as Mark Harrison informs. The *Indian Medical Gazette* was very unhappy with the quality of medical graduates from Indian universities and medical schools in comparison to the British recruits. This is reflective of the kind of education and training given to the Indian students with which even D. D. Cunningham was not satisfied. The 'Other'-biased treatment is very clear in this new British enterprise. Perhaps it won't be an exaggeration to add here an important observation made by Robert Southey about the very English language, replicating their racial bias every time they differentiate between "I" and "You"! He finds it a remarkable peculiarity that each time they write the personal pronoun, the Great "I" with a capital letter, "as an unintended proof of how much an Englishman thinks of his own consequence"<sup>56</sup>. All of these little details convey that colonialism

- was a profoundly thought out mechanism of keeping others at an abeyance interspersed in the very daily life and routine.

Another significant theme of *The Calcutta Chromosome* is the subjugation of Indian scientific knowledge on way to pave a smooth history of British and European Sciences. They brandished Western sciences as symbol of modernization and always assumed its sun to shine brightly over the esoteric and non-modern East. This is the technique of subjectivity through 'negation', calling the other either absent or below and inferior. They tried to put Indian knowledge on the absent list by scouring them out. Ashis Nandy finds the real meaning of the myth of modernity to be equal to a 'cultural genocide'<sup>57</sup>. As he scans world history, he finds that modernity has often come in a barbaric way, by inscribing oneself over all others.

By grafting the vernacular Laakhan tales of Phulboni onto a formal literary genre mixed with sci fi, Amitav Ghosh insists upon recuperating subjugated knowledge of myths, folk narratives and fiction, as concurrence of past with present. He means to show these as the ground of rational understanding rather than regarding them as fallen or inferior scholarship. Linking the ghost story to the scientists like D.D. Cunningham and Farley, Ghosh goes beyond the colonial Manichaeism. It had divided the world in an imbalanced binary system which Ghosh as a postcolonial writer proves to be the result of brute force muffling the alterior utterances. By depicting the Eastern practices as elusive, spectral and superstitious; the West tried to ghost away the presence of wisdoms. Perhaps this is what Jacques Derrida interprets about "ghosting" as the process of dematerializing the body<sup>58</sup>. This is a process of violent exclusion and denying the facts, or to put it straight, Orientalizing significant part of half of humanity.

By discrediting the Western pre-eminence over science, *The Calcutta Chromosome* shows the possibility of affecting the 'interpersonal transference' of knowledge<sup>59</sup>, as John Thieme beautifully interprets it. The novel proposes to erode the barriers between elite and subaltern purveyors and recipients of knowledge. Tabish Khair briefs that "the West has been deliberately blind... in ignoring the crucial Indian and Chinese contribution and underestimating Arabs as a phase of mere transfer"<sup>60</sup>. Contrary to such norms, all of these Eastern cultures have been very critical in their observation, analysis and practices. Gyan Prakash terms the West propounded modernity as "...eclipsing the little knowledges to empower an elite that enunciated the discourse of science"<sup>61</sup>. *The Calcutta Chromosome* discloses that the secret of

science life is an imposing domination over the colonies which secured a living, nourished by the blood of subordinated subjects and local wisdoms. The whole text of the present novel gives traces of violence inscribed on it - be it the sacrifice of pigeons (127), of Romen Halder (140) or piercing of Murugan's foot by the phantasmal 'test tube' (132). Science's authorization over all others consists of a process of 'cultural appropriation' with an inappropriate negotiation between inadequate knowledges. That's why Farley's suspicion regarding Mangala and Lutchman's knowledge of slides and Malaria research mounts to an obsessive spying.

These two persons, Mangala and Lutchman had been constantly with Ronald Ross, helping him as lab assistants. Both of them were the 'idle' natives chosen by Cunningham to help him. Amitav Ghosh shows them to be far more intelligent, and by the climax, it seems the famous scientist was chosen by the two to put their research on to a pedestal. Ghosh writes, "He thinks he's doing experiments ... And all the time it is he, who is the experiment on the Malaria parasite..." (67). As Murugan informs Antar that they were in search of a new philosophy, a new Counter science, shrouded in secrecy. They used silence as a technique, secrecy being their procedure. They refused 'all direct connection ... because to communicate, to put idea into language would be to establish a claim to know'" (88). The Counter science took it to be the first thing to dispute.

Murugan's search makes him vow that 'Ross' search was rigged' and Ronald Ross had never 'managed to work out the stuff himself' (101). Murugan's research shows Lutchman as a young guy walking into Ronnie's life, doing everything for him for three years. He felt that; "Every time Ross went running off in the wrong direction, Lutchman was waiting to head him off and show him the way to go" (200). He explains that such new developments began in the most innocent way as 'monkey-see, monkey-do kind of stuff' (202) but 'microscopy ... was still an artisanal kind of skill of that time...' (203). It gave Mangla a chance to evolve her genius, 'unhampered by any conventional training' (203). She saved Ronald Ross from studying any Zoological classification, she could easily decipher differences between *Culex* and *Anopheles*. She did not even really care about malaria, that's why she "started pushing Ronald Ross towards the finish line" (203).

It is apparent by the end that Mangala was working towards something altogether different, something bigger than the malaria bug for which she needed Ronald Ross to make her ‘final break through’ (203). She never was the servant, towing the line. Rather she herself was the guiding source for these educated veterans of the field, for whom “ambition was a virtue”<sup>62</sup>. From Farley Elijah’s letter, it is found out that Mangala was actually using the “Malaria bug as a treatment ... for Syphilis” (204).

Mangala was working with her own unrestrained intuitive manner, which took her to the stage of “curing Syphilitic paresis” – the final paralytic stage of syphilis (204) by inducing malaria in patients. She had stumbled upon this “variant” (204) of the main research in 1890’s, much before Julius Von Wagner Jauregg proved it in 1927 to win his ‘football match’ – the Nobel Prize. He did the same as Mangala was doing with her ‘underground network of people’ (204), injecting Malarial blood by an incision to cure syphilis. This crude method worked and was in use until Antibiotics was invented for “building the immunize system” (205).

Ghosh’s discovery is that, Ronald Ross was not the lone genius; in fact he was supported by a native Indians’ group. But this part of the search is erased from the written records. The imperial history never mentions it openly. Revising the given narratives reveals that Cunningham was not doing his research, it was the people in the lab, his servants and assistants, “the pretty wild mix of them” (201), who were doing his work.

Mangala’s continuous experiments embodied in her ‘primitive horse breeding method’ (205) also took her to hit upon the treatment of ‘cerebral Malaria’ (205). This aspect of Malaria is quite hallucinogenic which can resemble any of the aboriginal ‘spirit possession’ fits (205). Ghosh intelligently links this commonplace phenomenon of spectral sights, idiosyncratic behaviour to a possible disease, unheeded for a long time. Psychotherapies are employing the same techniques which were discarded as superstitions of the East in the past. By the unfolding events, it seems very probable that Mangala had run into a dead end by 1897. This interrupting void made her desperate to have Ronnie figure the whole thing out and publish it (208). Laakhan was another subaltern “helping” her (209) in this project of Mangala’s becoming “a god ... a mind to set things in motion” (209). He was the “point man” (74) in many senses as the whole story proves.

In spite of all these similarities and transference of knowledges and discoveries, Mangala- Lutchman's tale is branded as *Counter science*. It was just because D. D. Cunningham and Ronald Ross's work was scientific, done in the labs of John Hopkins and Calcutta. Mangala's was not because it was undergoing in the backyard, in the *ante rooms* or *out houses*. Farley was able to witness their secret ceremony headed by Mangala as an enchantress in the anteroom (127). Sonali Das' being an unconscious participant in the ritual of human sacrifice performed by Mrs Aratounian in the dead of the night in the abandoned, old house (138) - give evidence of a secret cult. They were doing something which was against time and its tide deliberately. But this is a future vision ensconced in the most unsophisticated and primeval methodology, that's why it could not get any buyer.

The Classical Western discourse has been monistic. It is undeniable that when the West started spreading its power over India and her neighbouring areas, it made all of its previous forms of knowledge to be muted and 'ghosted'. Many of her medicinal and herbal treatments were publicized to be fallen, useless and deceptive. They forcibly made many of such traditional groups to hide or go underground. This was partly incomprehension and mostly for strengthening their colonial rule. *The Calcutta Chromosome* gives one such instance. When Farley got a chance to see the rituals of the Mangala-Lutchman sect in the Cunningham labs, undergoing some kind of treatment, Farley's conscience called out to him to go outside and tell them not to waste their hopes on whatever quackery this women offered. He felt the need to expose the falsehoods that she and her minions had concocted to deceive those simple people. He felt the compulsion to say, "It was his duty... to tell that this false prophethess was cheating them" (126).

This White scientist's thoughts can be explained on several grounds. The suspicion about this alien group's activity is rooted to his Oriental view that their activities were bereft of 'reason'. The very first idea was of course, the incredibility, the disbelief about what Mangala was doing. As he gauges the activity after Mangala's own claim of understanding the role of Laveran's rods (128) naturally, his mind is spilled over with queries. Ghosh translates them as -



“How had a woman and an illiterate one, at that acquired such expertise? And how she succeeded in keeping it secret from Cunningham? Being untrained how had she come to exercise such authority?” (121).

The other interpretation of Farley’s reaction is a feeling of insecurity, the terror of the “other”. It made them view everything about the colonies with “a panic of malign natives’ plots... afflicting the Raj within India and outside it”, as C.A. Bayly informs<sup>63</sup>. The British surveillance system had its own gaps, distortions and misinterpretation of what it came to see and know in India. This is a cynicism which made the Europeans take everything native as abominable and deleterious. Bayly’s further dossier makes it evident as he takes Shoolbred’s book for analysis. This scientist shows a reluctance to recognise the native inoculation expertise for treating some diseases. The advocates of vaccination from Western practitioners reacted with contempt to the idea that vaccination was already known to ancient India, as revealed by Vedas of Indian priests<sup>64</sup>. This is one of the numerous reasons why the case of medicine is seen as a complex interaction between the British and Indian systems of knowledge. This interaction brought symptomatology and Pathology together, leading science and tradition to a cultural contest. Ranajit Guha illustrates it with the Indian conviction that the “body was merely a register for the gods to inscribe their verdicts against sinners”<sup>65</sup>. That’s why they turned to priests instead of doctors, for a ritual expiation to wash off sins instead of a mere physical cure. It could also be the reason of a particular kind of ascetic look of the *Vaids* and *Hakeems* of the yore days. This is evident in the way Mangala worked out her instinctive discernment of diseases like syphilis and cerebral Malaria. Her very mannerism, her diction and language give resonance of the religious rituals though she was practising something very scientific subconsciously. Amitav Ghosh posits it like this -

“Farley had steeled himself ... but he was unprepared for what he saw next. First the assistant went up to the woman, Mangala...regally ensconced on her divan, and touched his forehead to her feet... In a manner of a courtier or acolyte he whispered some word... she allowed her hand to rest upon each of the birds... to ascertain... her mouth began to move as though muttering a prayer... a scalpel,... a single flick of her wrist ... flow of blood... severed neck...”(127).

In another instance, Mangala is again shown as Mrs Aratounian "...carrying a bamboo bird cage ... seated herself by the fire ... a small clay figure and touched it to her forehead" (139). A look of extraordinary sweetness came over her face as she raised her voice and said in an archaic rustic Bengali: "The time is here, pray that all goes well for our Laakhan, once again" (140).

In the future presentation of the same idea, Lucky alias Lutchman is seen by Antar bowing to Tara alias Mrs. Aratounian alias Mangala's feet (185) with the same reverence. All these scenes replicate the fact that the invisible people believed Mangala to be extra ordinary; as 'a witch or a magician or a god or whatever... possessing a cure ...'(204). Murugan deduces that there cannot be smoke without fire-

"If a whole crowd of people believed that Mangala had a cure, or a halfway effective treatment it must have been because she had a certain rate of success. People are not crazy... to travel long distances to see her..." (204).

There must be something to convince them. This is where Amitav Ghosh thumps the reality, overturning tables that Mangala had reached to the cure of syphilis, working in dark behind the technically trained scientist, using "the birds as test tube or an agar plate" (205) and utilized human body for understanding the strange and spectral symptoms of cerebral Malaria.

There is something odd in the celebration of modern science as deliverance from despotism and baneful shibboleths by free and unprejudiced inquiry. *The Calcutta Chromosome* shows that science's very foundation lies in colonial domination, very much fettered to the profanity of colonial difference. As the 'progress story' was narrated and enumerated everywhere it encroached intimately upon the cultures supposedly sunk deep in superstition and terra incognita. The indigenous coterie of neoteric experiments is one such institution which shatters many of the colonial myths. As Gyan Prakash observed:

"Science was expected to conquer their false beliefs, and institute the true knowledge, of the laws of nature that would place devotion to the almighty on a new basis"<sup>66</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh shows that this new god was very soon located in an unfair means of merchandise and directing new sciences to the same persuasion. They dismissed the

'sacred' of the other civilizations as myth or at worst as superstition. They stressed on secular societies to carry on their 'colonization' agenda.

Amitav Ghosh illustrates this feature in scientists' compulsion to join associations and slogan shouting their beliefs at every cost. Ronald Ross's very entry in the lab-life from that of a colonel is troublesome. "In fact the century's biggest breakthrough in Malaria research has happened recently but it's passed Ronnie by" (59), as Murugan adduces. Meckel in 1840s and Alphonse Laveran in 1880 (59) had come to know of microscopic granules of black pigment in the organs of Malaria patients – the Malaria bug. But nothing worked against Pasteur's Parasitology in the Paris Academy of Medicine – none bought Laveran's finding (59) of Protozoan critters. This was one of the politicized moves, in which "some of the biggest names in medicines get busy refuting 'Laveranity'. Only Italians held fast to him ... came to be known as 'born again' Laveranites" (59). So Golgi in 1886 could prove him right again.

Ronald Ross was on the 'anti Laveran bench', he wrote against his theory for some time. It was only by a deeper indulgence with Manson, the fileria scientist which opened his eyes. He "converted" (60) overnight and walked along with Laveran dreams to Begumpett, to pursue the Malaria bug further. This was where he met Abdul Qadir in June 1895 whose 'blood guides him through all the critical phases of his research' (61). But none of these background facts are known today. None of the Indians helping him have been ever mentioned, neither as philosophers, friends or teachers guiding Ronald Ross, "the wall flower" (60) in his discovery. Another hushing incident is found in one of Ross' letters to Dr. Manson about his appointment of Lutchman as "the guinea pig he's been looking for" (63). He writes in a mysterious way –

"Don't for Heaven's sake mention Lutchman at the British Association... he is a *dhooley* bearer, a government servant. To give a government servant fever would be a crime!"(63).

This incident is a clear proof of subjugating the bodies of the colonized to the discipline of scientific experimentation and observation. This control system is an intimation of another history emerging from sciences' authority that it has played various fictitious phases of its own. Scientists in the past have accepted and refuted things impulsively unlike the general view that they are neutral and reasonable beings.

Laveran was discredited by all for a long time, “considered to be heading for medicines vast graveyard” (115). Although his real value was accepted after a decade, only to cause a ‘reinvigorated research by many like Ross’ (60).

As the plot’s development shows, Lutchman’s arrival made Ronald Ross even confuse and ‘disprove Manson’s theory’ (63) with his blood samples. Lutchman became indispensable for Ron’s smallest possible ‘kit’ (65). In ignorance of mosquito family differences Rosnald Ross was helped by this ‘*Angel of Fate*’ (66), and to name the Anopheles ‘the dappled wing mosquitoes’ (66). The benevolent title, ‘Angel of Fate’ is the only term used for Ronald Ross’s critical assistants from India! Nothing else is mentioned about them anywhere, in the whole chronicles regarding this Nobel-winning scientist.

But their presence and their significant role in the research is unconsciously revealed by Ronald Ross’s terms of ‘mosquito man’ (65), ‘Angel of Fate’ and ‘Hospital assistant’ or ‘Attendant’ (66) and even a “wonder case” (61). Strangely these facts are camouflaged in religious imagery expressing the unbaked scruples of Ronald Ross just on the threshold of his venture. As the following paragraph shows –

“Next morning, 16<sup>th</sup> August, when I went again to hospital after breakfast, the *Hospital Attendant* pointed out a small mosquito seated on the wall...” (66).

Next day a “jarful of anopheles” is sent to Ronald Ross with the same Attendant, Ronald Ross writes, “Sure enough, there they were... hungrily trying to escape... the flask which the *Angel of Fate* had given to my humble retainer!” (66). On August 20, 1897, Ronald Ross records in his diary, “Eureka! the problem is solved” (66). He himself reveals that Lutchman had come to know of “the hot tip about mosquito species” while ‘gambling in the hills with happy natives’ (67) in a remote village. This fablesque pouring of Ronald Ross’s inner thoughts in his diary, couched so well in a *Pilgrim’s progress* diction clearly suggests the contortions/distortions in his tale. His Anopheles episode like all other parts of the whole Western scholarship, galloping high within Indian labs - is reflective of the expropriations involved in their narrative. Perhaps this is the reason ‘truth’ is called by some to be a weak ideal; it needs to be supplemented by social and political authority to survive. Mangala’s case best illustrates this phenomenon.

So, moping over facts, Ronald Ross writes his own version of history and succeeds dazzlingly forever. He does this with everybody, be it Mason or Golgi, not only Lutchman or Kadir- he trampled over all others to bell the cat and win! This policy is what Omkar Bhat refers to in showing a Guru explaining to his disciple about the Gora Sahib's power of intelligence -

"...the Sahibs have taken knowledge from the Arabs, Greece and India... have woven the thread of knowledge gained from these very books into a better fabric"<sup>67</sup>.

The Europeans capitalized on everything be it the commodities like cotton, opium, blue dye crops, niggers, coolies or even knowledge. Colonialism presented accumulation and distribution of knowledge from the colonies as a very normal story.

But Amitav Ghosh is again one of the first and few writers to express resentment against scrambling of indigenous knowledge and scholarship in *In an Antique Land*. The Geniza cleansing and manipulation of its wealth of medieval books and letters' collection is a shocking tale of erasing non-European cultures and traditions. Ghosh writes that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, "Egyptomania swept off Europe"<sup>68</sup> and Egypt's antiquity and geographical position became her curse. "Philosophers rather than rulers thought of conquering her", destining her for "the husbandry of Western academia" for a long period of plunder. This conquest became an "allegory of the intercourse between Knowledge and power". This episode in Eastern history marks a gargantuan loss of various sorts.

The same project of recuperating lost histories and legacies is taken by Amitav Ghosh in *The Calcutta Chromosome* - here it is the specialized case of medicine which bears deep marks of exploitation and appropriation by the colonials. J.F. Royle and White Law Ainslie as the early historians of medicine acknowledge that the native knowledge of India in medicines is 'part of mankind's treasury'<sup>69</sup>. But they found it unfortunate that the modern Indian medicine was in a state of empirical darkness, in spite of 'great progress in arts and sciences'.

People like Ainslie and Bayly do agree that the distinction between theory and practice of Indian knowledge had been exaggerated by Europeans. C.A Bayly's study proves that 'a quiet and long term investigation of Indian medicines was very much under way' as Indian collection and system of Indian inventories of plants, herbs and

mineral products show<sup>70</sup>. As early as 1640, Dutch and later on British had a systematic preparation of Indian Materia-medica in their records to use them and brandish their mixed up discoveries as 'causes celebres'! This kind of inquiry of Indian medical practices and search for native information affirm their caprice to put the native physicians to the back seat but also to avail whatever vigour and cure the indigenous medicine might yet possess.

Ronald Ross and D. D. Cunningham in *The Calcutta Chromosome* are very much keeping up to their ancestors and inherited characteristics of misappropriating Indian erudition in various fields. The 'Angel of Fate' is never given a name or origin in the entire *Memoirs* - even though Ronald Ross was led by a pretty flock of Indian, non-elite angels towards his banging success! None of his lab-boys who showed him the path to his scientific salvation is given space beyond that of a mute and dumb servant. This is a violent dis-incarnation to rub off a history.

Claire Chambers finds Amitav Ghosh making an important point that science, technology and medicine were not conveyed to India by the British in a one way process. But "a series of cross cultural exchanges translations and mutations have gone into it"<sup>71</sup>. So, the Western science portrayed as a legitimizing form of knowledge is a very 'rigged' idea. It is a dishonest claim in face of so many assaulted incidents. The West simply used it as a weapon of power to silent and rob off so many cultures and histories like that of India.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* makes it very clear that the English medicine in India was contradictory in some cases. More over it was diffident because of the crusade of monopolizing and universalizing ideals. To hog the whole limelight was an inherent avarice with them. Amitav Ghosh shows some other scientists fuming with their nationalistic zeal and working vigorously to triumph over the world. For example, while tracing Manson's life, Ghosh gets to know his high aspirations. So when Dr Manson was back in England from China, where he had become the Queen's head honcho in bacteriological research, Doctor Manson wanted to get the Malaria prize – "for Britain", he says, "for the Empire..." (58). This was a generation believing that "discovery was the greatest work!"<sup>72</sup>. He was a Scotsman but in 'game time he roots for Queen' (59) because the power of dynamites (47) lay with Her Majesty's country. The power of the Crown and her politics had far reaching effects. But Amitav Ghosh

is also hinting that Manson's alpine ambitions might have been infuriated by some Chinese Angels of Fate too like Ronald Ross.

Amitav Ghosh traces Ronald Ross's unusual background in spite of which he could "beat the governments of the US and France and Germany and Russia, he beat them all..." (49) and ran away with the Nobel Prize. All of a sudden, this big general in the British Army in India 'was bitten by the science bug' (45) got himself inflated with the desire to write the Ross name 'large' (45) on the virgin territories of the Indian Medical service. He joined this field not with any humanitarian concern but to give a full circle to the Ronald Ross family history after their excellence in "civil service, Geological service, Provincial services, topped with colonial service..." (45). It was for satisfying an ever hungry ego, to be pampered and applauded. He wanted to continue the legacy of the English superiority.

These examples can be read as the seedlings of Eurocentrism, against which the post-colonials are still fighting. This desire changed the very humans to inhuman, changing them to machines to rule over others without any guilt or conscience. Because the colonial enterprise and conquest, as opined Aime Cesaire, was "based on contempt for the native...inevitably changing them who undertake it"<sup>73</sup>.

The very first criterion of Western statesmanship is this powerful zeal to institute oneself by uprooting the other. Every mean and route gets fair in pursuing this over-bounding ambition to name and announce oneself. Amitav Ghosh ruminates about it in saying –

"Biologists are under so much pressure to bring their findings into line with politics. Right wing politicians sit on them to find genes for everything, from poverty to terrorism, so they will have an alibi for castrating the poor or nuking the Middle East. The Left goes ballistic if they say anything at all about the biological expression of human traits..." (207).

Malaria vaccine took so much time to develop because its bug keeps altering its coat proteins unconventionally (207). It was beyond the imagination of a trained scientist to find out the '*Calcutta Chromosome*,' as Mangala could do; being 'out of the loop' (207). But who could have believed this discovery which was so 'out of joint', so eccentrically different because of the discoverer? So, Ronald Ross and party gave it a 'better' and acceptable formulation- borrowing it and legitimizing the same as one's

own. It has been a part of their habit, after all; to grab things ‘with force’ if not getting them by polite means, as Gallagher analyses the colonial denomination<sup>74</sup>. They obfuscated the local knowledge’s contribution and the gifts of cross cultural interaction without any remorse. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why Mark Harrison says that “the fate of indigenous medicine under colonial rule has attracted more attention and demonstrates both competition and accommodation between Western and traditional systems”<sup>75</sup>. This convergence and divergence cost the aboriginal failure of some of the old arts and skills. But such a perception replicates this historian’s Western point of view again which is in contrast to the writer Ghosh’s feeling of loss and pride simultaneously.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* stands for a post-colonial confidence regained by authors like Amitav Ghosh, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri. The novel puts suspicion at the very heart of the plot which haunts every character of all three time-frames. Its ghostly shadow falls upon every tale, every anecdote to expose the twists and turns of Historiography. Amitav Ghosh’s skepticism about the origin and progress of Ross success d’estime is also a surmise against “the fixed boundaries between West and new cultures, traditions or identities”<sup>76</sup>.

Mangala’s participation in *The Calcutta Chromosome* discovery is a final blow to the Western hegemony on new sciences and medicine. There is no failure of consciousness on her group’s part as subaltern. Rather her counter science was streets ahead of orthodox medicine in its research, having long known the Anopheles’ and the various symptoms of the Malaria bug. Ronald Ross appears “a clueless pawn under this group’s gazing eyes”<sup>77</sup>. It reflects upon the colonizers to be suffering of a failure of conscience, moreover. Ghosh shows the Indian culture to be an active participant rather than being a supine recipient.

Furthermore, as a post-colonial strike - *The Calcutta Chromosome* subverts and reorganizes the ideology of science as propounded by Europeans. As an essential post-colonial piece of literature, *The Calcutta Chromosome* is constituted in the counter discourse, a ‘Counter science’, rather than a homologous practice. It offers ‘fields’ of counter discursive strategies like Hindu rituals, deity worshipping, sacrifices and reincarnation beliefs to the dominant discourse. Very much keeping to Helen Tiffin’s definition, the post-colonial Amitav Ghosh “does not seek to subvert



the domination with a view to take its place but.... to evolve textual strategies. These continually 'consume' their own 'biases' at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse"<sup>78</sup>. For such purposes, Amitav Ghosh uses Magic realism and allegory besides New Historicist techniques to evolve the real Indian culture in its true colours.

The most effective and constant weapon of this Counter Science was under-estimation by the colonial scientists of the time. They kept advancing step by step under cover of secrecy and self imposed silence, in a subversive manner against the "blasphemous pride"<sup>79</sup> of the Whites. James H. Thrall thinks, that this counter group "disrupts colonialism's sharp opposition between suspect Eastern esotericism and the normative force of Western rationality" by presenting an inherently rational and mystical order<sup>80</sup>. Amitav Ghosh's mingling of religion and science is a question itself, posed against the unchallenged authority of Western science. It had risen by dismissing the earth bound philosophies of the East, viewing religion with contempt, as sign of intellectual degradation. As if there was only one way of proceeding in technology, by renouncing the old myths and modes of thoughts. If the historic disparity of access to technological advantages is undeniable because of reason, the sway to a traditional assumption of Western scientific superiority is further irrational. Because it means refuting a complex interseeding of Eastern and Western approaches to scientific up gradation.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* as a medical detective novel tries to resolve this constriction of rationality and religion. It embraces the very Orientalist notion of India as 'other worldly and mystical' using it as a special gift to inscribe a new history. Amitav Ghosh is simply contesting for a confluence, or syncreticism as he does in *The Shadow Lines* and *In An Antique Land* - a world which 'is not imbalanced. He hopes and fights for a world which gives equal space to a low caste Lakhaan, to Kadir, Mangala and Phulboni along with elites and the prosperous.

It is evident by the way all personal errands carried by all of these different characters from different back grounds coming together- they all progressively converge upon one idea. The fish- buying scene can be called the nucleus of the novel's plot. Murugan from US meets Urmila, the young street vendor-cum-teasing urchin becomes a connection between them and Romen Haldar. Finally, all of them are

connected to the subaltern bunch performing their 'scientifically' sacred rituals. All three time frames converge here in simulation- Antar through Murugan, Tara and Mangala through Mrs Aratounian, East with West and past with a future-bound present!

The counter science is presented with images of a hazy mystery, fantastic aura and a brooding 'piercing' (229) silence to symbolize East. But this is a magic-realist technique, to transgress the idea that there is more than one way to perceive reality. The aboriginals' advanced knowledge of Malaria transmission process, beginning with the 'mosquito' cognition, is simply defeating the European Ronald Ross at his own game. It is the inherent freedom of this cult which remained uncolonized by the strength of which they could use White men craftily. They too had a theory of the West! Though their methodology was esoteric, mystical and so in Western opinion, fictional; Phulboni, the awarded Bengali author becomes an unconscious spokesperson of this occult school; as his low, rasping voice engulfed the lecture hall-

"The silence of the city has sustained me through... For more years than I can count I have wandered the darkness of these streets, searching for the unseen presence that reigns over this silence... the time of the crossing is at hand, I know, and that is why I am here now... to beg... to the mistress... that most secret of deities..., to show herself to me..."(27).

Phulboni appears to be one of the most earnest worshippers of this secret deity, 'Silence'. He is so devoted that he could leave everything behind to be a 'vessel' of 'cross-migration' of souls, at her behest, like Romen Haldar. Let's remember that Mr Haldar was a self made man, coming from nowhere, "without a coin in his pocket" (56); very much like Raj Kumar of *The Glass Palace*. But he appeared to be a connoisseur with a fine taste for things- be it the attractive girl friend in Sonali Das, his sartorial sense, his love for football or his core contract business of 'restoring' (137) old architecture for modern uses. Both of these artistic characters are enchanted by traditions - Phulboni in search of a 'lost' opportunity, Romen is eager to save lost heritages. So, the counter science of restoring the old Indian legacy of wisdom is sure to enrapture them strongly enough to sacrifice one's very life and being.

These instances are replete with the shadiness of spirituality which is the 'other' side of mortality- as something magical, and inadmissibly 'excess'. This alternative practice of proving reincarnation as possibility relies heavily on secrecy. It is a

deliberate attempt to segregate out of the modern and monistic way of survival-adopting the very opposite of connection and declaration. It is an attack upon the Europeans' penchant for self promotion and self representation everywhere which is far from being reasonable and unprejudiced. By this methodology, Amitav Ghosh shows his persistence about reinstating subjugated knowledges of the East. The opposite of Ronald Ross is an extreme, much like *The Circle of Reason's* Balram who insists upon Phrenology as a science most rationally.

In the case of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the extreme person is not only Murugan but also the author himself. John Thieme finds all of Ghosh's works answering Gayatri Spivak's immortalized question about subalterns in positive<sup>81</sup>. Here he has an added dimension to this positivity that there is no weak voice. If most of the time a voice is silenced, sometimes this muteness is deliberate to testify a greater power! Asian cultures have been taken as hieratic ones, "essentially priestly and concerned with the sacred"<sup>82</sup>. Ghosh uses the same out look to interrogate the complete denial of other philosophical traditions in mainstream philosophy of science. Sundar Sarrukai alludes it to the wide spread belief that modern science is a product of Western civilization solely<sup>83</sup>, whereas the fact is other than that. The subaltern group of Mangala could fragment the grand structure of established scientific facts by the very means of using stereotypes and superstition.

The Counter science point can also be discerned as the native rewriting to the colonialist original which Bhabha deciphers as 'not a copy but a qualitatively different thing in itself'<sup>84</sup>. The natives' unchanged belief in religious meditation through their own cultural and linguistic medium is 'a form of defensive warfare'. The 'human sacrifice' practice can be taken as the most unimaginable form of Indian alienation and 'otherness'. But the intention of this modus operandi is almost 'mimicry' of the European noble mission. Murugan explicates to Antar that this little group wanted to invent a technology 'for transmission of information chromosomally'. They aimed at "a fresh start' to begin all over again ... once the body fails ... another body, another beginning" (91). It could be a technology that lets one improve in the 'next incarnation' (92). The Europeans had been declaring and professing no lesser objectives of defying death – the greatest of all diseases. The Western health care professionals had turned down Eastern alleviation methods with a hubristic belief. It

blithely asserted that they as exponents of Western medicine possessed all of the answers needed to preserve and improve the colonial health. But many questions have remained unanswered.

The exotic and out-landish methodology for a supposedly scientific experiment is a practical insurrection against the discourse of colonial authority. It is located in the natives' interrogation of Western science within the terms of their own system of cultural meanings. It is changing the colonialist script in performance by estranging and undermining it. This is a perversion of the English message at will, meant to make an absolute exercise of power impossible.

J.M. Derret seems to acknowledge this indeterminate freedom of colonized people in saying that the Indian tradition had been in charge throughout. His words seem to fit most aptly in *The Calcutta Chromosome* case that it was the British who were "manipulated, the British who were the silly somnambulists... my Indian brother has learned to move ... as it suits him"<sup>85</sup>. Ronald Ross and Cunningham seem to be those sleepy colonizers who could not estimate the natives around them in any way other than the stereotype. The virtual biographer of Malaria, Murugan could swear of their self assumed myopia about Abdul Kadir and Lutchman tricks in saying - "Ronnie would not have noticed if Lutchman wore it on a T-shirt. Lutchman sticks to him... never lets Ron out of his sight" (65). He becomes part of Ronald's essential kit of power wielding scientific tryouts. "All the time it is Ronnie who is the experiment ...But he never gets it; not to the end of his life" (67).

Amitav Ghosh has taken the duty of breaking down some other myths too in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. He is brave enough to discredit some of the Eastern beliefs and practices also, unlike a conventional Western one. His attempt to showcase Mangala as the 'genius', the thinking head and the most comfortable choice of the intermixed group is a very courageous act. It is reinstating an Indian female subaltern on a lost position because if science has 'man' kind as the point of initiation, Counter scientist must unravel 'woman' as the flag bearer.

Amitav Ghosh seems to agree to Oyewumi that "the histories of both the colonized and the colonizer have been written from the male point of view"<sup>86</sup> – women are peripheral if they appear at all. So, *The Calcutta Chromosome* being a New Historicist

novel, dismantles such histories and puts woman not only forward but in her most natural place- equivalent to man. Perhaps the Eastern societies did have a space of reverence for woman in the old days, as some of the ancient rituals show. Hinduism has more of female goddesses and deities to worship than any other religion. Female embodiment of the praise worthy power was used commonly in ritual orchestration. Even in the science affected days of early colonialism- India kept cultivating new divinity in 'Mariyamman- the goddess of small pox in South India'<sup>87</sup>. Salabai in the Surat area<sup>88</sup>, Sitaladevi, Mangala bibi and Bonbibi in various regions of Bengal, used by Amitav Ghosh himself in his novels like *The Hungry Tide* too, give evidence. The clay figurine found on the back of the Hospital wall (36) encompassing the female is noteworthy. Her adoption of the scientific tool, "the semi-circular instrument" (188), explained as the primary form of microscope, within her physiological being, represents her to be more than rational, counterpoising Ronald Ross's masculine mind. No doubt, Murugan guesses instinctively that she "was the demi-urge of Ron's discovery, the one behind the whole experiment" (188).

The Theosophical society is given a good portion in *The Calcutta Chromosome* plot, which is significant for the same 'female centrism' idea. Some critics read this society's role to be crucial for the formation of the Indian National Congress association. This revelation is as subversive as the discovery of Jesus' wife in *The Da Vinci Code*. The initial part of a central incident of Indian independence movement history is as little known as the fictitious story of Mangala Bibi. This is another major incident of the novel with the strategy to radically shift the narrative perspective from the rightful heir to the ones, whose cultures and histories have been destroyed and stunted. This aspect of the novel also underlines the subaltern history which Spivak defines simply as 'a space of difference'<sup>89</sup>.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* shows Pongranetz group to be the antagonist to the well known Madame Blavatsky Society. This is putting a doubly subalternised philosophy on to the fore. So Amitav Ghosh takes such minority bunch of people in the orbit of his writings whose presence was crucial to the self definition of the majority section. These clusters were capable of subverting the authority of those who had hegemonic power. Both the counter associations are shown to make such a thing possible. Such activities are indication of the presence of the 'uncolonized minds'. It reveals a

pleasant fact that these Indians could contain their self confidence and self value in spite of a prolonged exposure to the West.

Ashis Nandy finds such persons carrying the “intimations of an inner conviction that they would not be swept off their feet and that they could use the Occident for their own purposes”<sup>90</sup>. The Lutchman - Kadir experiments and aims show that they retained their freedom and indeterminateness in spite of a penetrating and ‘panoptical’ colonization. So, Ronald Ross is not able to see all, not even close to what can be seen apparently. The other group could carry on with their explorative acts beneath his very own nose. His degrading attitude towards them furthermore blinded him. He found them stereotyped half- witted rustics, as he tells Elijah Farley –

“She’s just the sweeper woman ... a bit of a dragon... Don’t let her put you off; there’s no harm in her ... Don’t pay her any attention...” (119).

This is very similar to what Abdul Jan Mohamed interpreted as the enforced recognition from the ‘other’ amounting to the Europeans’ narcissistic self recognition. They considered the natives “too degraded and inhuman to be credited with any specific subjectivity”...and “destroyed the indigenous systems without any significant qualms...”<sup>91</sup>. Mangala as the antagonist, rising from the debris of all images, has made the mirror speak this time. She was capable of blinding their narcissism unlike many others, to write her own story.

Mangala’s quackery is very congenital in nature but her efforts to cure and heal the sick villagers can also be decoded as ‘a parody or dramatization of the colonialist desire’<sup>92</sup> for a reformed recognition. She and her followers have not turned to the science and the laws of reason in spite of so much colonial pressure for modern medicines over them. They are still believing in the hocus pocus, natural and supernatural remedies of the Indian *Vaids* discredited long back by the Whites.

Critics have interpreted colonial customs and practices subjecting woman to a double colonization. It affected males and females in similar and dissimilar ways. It caused not only racial inferiorization but also gender subordination. As modernity took over the savage, the male view point superimposed itself over the inhuman and feminine alike. One of the colonial state’s achievements was the creation of ‘woman category’ – which instituted the feeling of alienation for half of one’s own society. This is what

Spivak calls “double silencing” – if the subaltern has no history and cannot speak in the contest of colonial production, “the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow”<sup>93</sup>.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* is an attempt at transferring the locus of thought and practice from the colonial to colonized, from elite to subaltern, from masculine to feminine. Amitav Ghosh is demoting the gendered narrative of science and medicine. History records woman merely as nurses and nourishers, made for babysitting impersonated by Tara - a disillusioned maid/Ayah in US (158). The present novel shatters this stereotype too. Women are capable of everything possible; they have a ‘parallel history’<sup>94</sup> of their own, which Ghosh alluded to in *In an Antique Land*. Only the world has not been curious and courageous enough to know it and give it a space in the general Historiography.

Thus, Mangala and/or Tara caught between the dominations of a native patriarchy and a foreign masculinist, imperialist ideology intervene from the very marginality of their position. She is an exemplum and evidence of woman’s voice inscribed on the fringe position ‘of healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisan and artists’ as Benita Parry expresses hope about their ‘traces and testimony’ in such locations<sup>95</sup>. She turns her very position of ‘difference’ and subalternity to an auspicious advantage. Her coterie does domesticate the alien scientist as Masters but they do not lose their ground of utterance and response to imperialism’s ideological aggression. Surprisingly their choice is beyond the axiom of binary opposite – as followers of Ganesha and Kali Ma (206), as models of ‘anti Christ (88) ‘speaking’ in silence from ante-rooms (125). This is what establishes her power, as being an anti-colonization figure in spite of an over pervading and deep seeping Imperialism. Their status of an illegitimate foil to Europe enables them to challenge the colonial prestige. They fracture the White totalizing notion of epistemic assault.

These traits can be traced in the Renupur station tales too, eternalized by Phulboni’s pen. Urmila aptly interpretes this connected series of Laakhan tales as ‘some kind of elaborate allegory’ (93). They do register finally as ‘dust in our eyes’ (94), as called by Mrs Aratounian – as messages of shared secret. These accounts embody the ‘*delirium*’ portion of the novel’s subtitle. It is enveloped by hallucinatory encounters between living and anti/(non) living, present and characters absent. That’s why

Phulboni, Elijah Farley, D. D. Cunningham, train stokers and engineers come in contact of elusive lanterns (79), print of digitally challenged palm (220), the 'Laakhan calls'(227) and the chilling episode of the station master(233). There are intertwined tales of murders and averted deaths in balance. But the most lilted and lingering incident is that of the homeless Laakhan, despised by the upper caste station master, getting killed by his very own entrapment.

In spite of the unreliable nature of this factual fiction used deliberately by Amitav Ghosh – he transcends the idea of a minor figure in performance of power. The two 'real' deaths of higher class 'Babu' persons - Farley and Lakhan's boss, by trains which could be taken as a remotely located 'state apparatus', is an allegory itself. They symbolize the subalterns' capacity to think and act independently. The colonial machine used/misused 'by switching' the rail points (233) and leading them before the rambling train symbolizes the natives' power exercise and their sovereign nature. This is also reminiscent of Prospero- Caliban conflict.

The Renupur incident is the climax of the mysterious activities under guidance of the high priestess Mangala. The Cambridge linguist J.W.D. Grigson's suspicious eyes on Lutchman's hidden, ramshackled study with its 'lantern' (79) is a significant exemplification. The same technical 'lantern' is used against Grigson, pursuing him to a real mad rush behind Lutchman and chasing him out of the periphery forever. The 'lantern' reappears in the Phulboni anecdote (213) as the colonized, subaltern, ghostly weapon to fight off the outside dominion.

Another instance in the same strain is that of John Hopkins university scientist E.M. Farley's brief stay in Cunningham's Calcutta lab in his absence (117). The lab assistant's minutely observing eyes and 'piercing enquiry' (119) unnerved this esteemed scientist in the very first meeting. His efforts to see the "Laveranite transformation" (127) in the dry slides, Mangala's refusal to take him to the desired point throughout his prolonged stay till evening – all underline a particular aspect of this indigenous resistance. It resembles to the Kalighat elderly image maker's 'denial mode' about the later discerned Mangala Bibi clay figure (193). Both of these stages are followed by amazing findings, offered by most unlikely persons, both subalterns of an extended order.



Farley's killing curiosity is satiated to his consternation by the illiterate (121), touched/fallen, rustic woman. Whereas, Urmila and Murugan's search for the old fashioned microscope-bearing deity figure's whereabouts is guided by a little child, "a six or seven years old girl, sitting by the roadside playing with a doll" (193). She tells them about the special Puja (194) planned that very night. She is another non-standard informant for her age, who unlocks the final mystery. She is very much in line to Mrs. Aratounian's opinion, "I get more news from the sweeper woman than I do from this thing – TV" (102), fitting into *The Calcutta Chromosome* novel.

Antar and Murugan are unconventional story tellers in more than one sense. Both are afflicted with diseases. Antar has fever and shakes which accompanies him with intervening periods since childhood (45). Murugan was syphilitic; he was last seen in the Calcutta asylum - mentally affected. Urmila is no less of a minority for her unmarried-ripening age, moderate caste and family background. Her efforts as a female journalist in the male dominated profession, her exploitation in the family for being a spinster by the sister in law, the pampered brothers and even the over indulgent mother replicate her plight. She is a true example of how modernism brought another level of subjugation for woman, in "a new patriarchy"!<sup>96</sup>.

Thus, Amitav Ghosh defies many notions by giving platform to woman, to a child, to the mad and the sick- all being generally banned from the position of normalcy and narrative of historical space. Amitav Ghosh is an impeccable new historicist through and through, to the core – giving such personas a chance to speak and express one's history and power without any differentiation.

These acts amount to an aspect of the natives' interrogation of the master discourse which appears as mere disobedience on surface. Bhabha interprets such situations as "enunciation of a very different 'politics' played by the colonized, producing an autonomous position for themselves within the confines of the hegemonic discourse"<sup>97</sup>. Here the relations of power and knowledge function in the reverse way if one of these anecdotes is looked into.

When Farley sits with the microscope in Cunningham's lab, he notices that it was not the young assistant but the woman with 'flinty voice and her drill sharp eyes' (53), who reigned over the place. She went over to the stack of drawers. It was she who

selected the slides that were to be presented for examination. Watching carefully, Farley saw her picking the slides out with a speed that indicated she was not only thoroughly familiar with the slides but knew exactly what they contained. Farley could now barely restrain himself. How was it that she, evidently unaware of any of the principles on which such knowledge rested, “had come to exercise such authority over the assistant?” (121). After more and more reflection, he became convinced that she had “judged him unworthy, she was keeping something from him... she had chosen to deny it to him, for some unfathomable reason...” (121). Such an act of concealing is her mode of refusing to satisfy Farley and acquiesce in to his demands.

This could be read as the auto-colonization of the native who responds to the colonialist address with ‘evasions and sly civility’. These are extensive ways of natives’ refusal to satisfy the demand of the colonizers’ narrative. Bhabha and Spivak both expound such ‘addresses’ as “pockets of non-cooperation in the dubious place of the free will...”<sup>98</sup>. Mangala and Lutchman’s demeanour is reflection of how, they in their low position, can capably misappropriate the terms of the dominant ideology. This is representative of their ability to intercede against and resist this mode of construction. This covert rejection to see the flagella transformation in blood samples (127) is finally unveiled by Mangala in dropping the ‘blanket- wrapped’ (125) secret and sending Farley the ‘fresh blood’ of her ‘tested pigeons’ (127). The ‘point man’ says with a wide smile –

“Please examine these now sir, may be you will at last achieve success in your quest” (128).

And Farley does see the ‘amoeboid forms... flurry of movement... and the rods’ appear’ (128), to his utter stupefaction. Mangala’s standing outside the window, “staring at him and smiling to herself, with a row of faces lined up against the glass” (128) with the body of the decapitated bird is a scene of ‘subaltern finally speaking’. This is a similar stance to what the teenage orphan does to all the intruding persons on his Renupur territory with the ‘railway switches’ (233). Both incidents echo the same resistance to the authorizing presence. They use the ‘sly civility’ to enact their ‘other’ minds.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* is thus, a narrative which delivers the colonized from its discursive status as the illegitimate refractory foil to European. What is proven in “the

doubleness of colonial power”<sup>99</sup> is not the blustering of one strong nation writing out another. Rather it considers the circulation of knowledge across the world in differing times as capable of violation. This shows the possibility of an alternative, which subaltern subjects sought to be the real puppet masters. Amitav Ghosh applies a mode of utterance which ambivalently rewrites the history of both colonizer and colonized. He is successful in shedding light upon these two sides in a contest as well as in contributory postures. *The Calcutta Chromosome* merits high for this positivity that it builds up a coherent and sustained counter narrative, which opens up many possibilities.

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*“Each instant represents a little universe, irrevocably forgotten in the next instant.”*

*The Glass Palace* by Amitav Ghosh appropriately conforms to T.S.Eliot’s recommendation to a creative writer to possess a sense of history which involves “the perception not only of the pastness of the past, but also of its presence...”<sup>1</sup>. This historical sense compels Ghosh to write not merely with his own generation ‘in bones’ but with a feeling for all those gone before as his acknowledgement shows. For Ghosh an “attempt to recover traces of the erased life is ... a deeply moving work”<sup>2</sup> (552). Unlike others, Ghosh does not just “bring the past to the bar of judgement, interrogate it remorselessly and finally condemn it...”<sup>3</sup>. But he appears a revisionist, unwilling to repudiate the legacy of the dead generations. He ‘takes the trouble to listen to the echoes’ of the lost lives, making them meaningful for the present by looking over social fragments and changing cultural aspects. He couldn’t make himself serve humanity’s history by any other better means.

*The Glass Palace* title itself sounds to have the two elements simultaneously; Amitav Ghosh writes about a palace which one can imagine to have lost its gloss and glitter. Taking the readers on a trip of the past, of course beginning with the present generation, he doesn’t need digging it. Just a scratch gives way to a wholly new world – the past one experienced by the predecessors. But we are at benefit to have a narrative at hand which is mainly about nations sharing a history of subjection in a complete fictional form. The fragmentation and discontinuity of history has been sealed, stitched and beautifully presented with a feel for the ‘glass palace’. As Emer Nolan finds the distance between the contemporary and the historical to be obvious and thinks “cultivation and imagination necessary to appreciate tradition as a living force”<sup>4</sup>. He also comments on the effects of a violent history to remain palpable in a situation of continuous political change and un. No novel shows it so clearly and cogently as does *The Glass Palace* with all kinds of changes occurring in Asian lives under the effect of the ageing British Empire. It links the pre-war years to chains of relevance going back to the first fight for Indian independence in 1857 and forward to the cessation of colonialism signaled by the world wars. Amitav Ghosh makes it more credible by collecting characters from all walks of life - the royal family, its servants, maids, the

rich immigrants as well as a street urchin and many other minor but significant persons emerging on his canvas.

*The Glass Palace* like almost all of Ghosh's works, also uses history but in a more imposing way. It rather seems a saga of various generations strewn across borders and periods which Amitav Ghosh weaves together in a monumental fiction. It spans centuries in a comprehensive and engrossing manner, ranging people from all ranks of a society but with a distinction maintained in all his writings. The narrative wraps around historical events like Britain's invasion of Burma, Japan's victory over Russia, Europe's jarring decline, dramatic changes wrought by the two world wars and birth of new nations.

Ghosh's subject matter is not always in line with contemporary powers' interest as he goes against the grain instinctively. This time, his work appears to be "the most scathing critique of British colonialism"<sup>5</sup>, which is acknowledged even by the veteran critic Meenakshi Mukherji to be striking. It's the side that he takes which makes all the difference, unlike the complaint of Vincent Smith that in history, "the story has always been chronicled from one side only"<sup>6</sup>. Amitav Ghosh chronicles the story from an untouched, unprecedented side – it is the history of the East narrated by an Eastern in such an authentic manner and voice that it shatters down all the other authoritative writings on the present subject matter. The same spirit was exhibited when Amitav Ghosh withdrew his novel selected as the Eurasia regional winner for the year 2001, and the Commonwealth writers' prize in March 2002, because it would have defeated the very purpose this book stood for.

*The Glass Palace* narrative has more in common with an unofficial, oral history than it does with an institutionalized, canonical history propounded by the colonizers, made obligatory for the school children to recite and mechanically learn. The massive research and extraordinary patience required on part of Ghosh in order to collect information and data, regarding the themes taken in this novel exemplify the dramatization of the question of the physical survival of historical evidence and of the power relations which impeded him. He truly admits that the – "...memories handed (down)...had lost their outlines, surviving often only as patterns... moods, textures ... (being very) elusive..." (549).

They also mime the production of this subversive, unwritten or, rather say forgotten history besides interrogating the authority of the existing historical records, especially the first two parts about Mandalay and Ratnagiri. Even the acclaimed critic Meenakshi Mukherji concedes it with embarrassment that Mandalay was something that she came to know only through Kipling as a child. It is not a singular instance for she, like many others has been a victim of colonized history which got recorded in a particular manner –so frankly put in Stephen Dedalus’ words- “official history is merely the uproar of the victorious”<sup>7</sup>. Ghosh chooses the other part of history as a form of revenge or even as a right. He is listening to and writing about the suffering, painful cries of the colonized masses and their subsequent rise to, if not glory, then freedom from the demonic colonization.

Edward Said could be taken as one of the pioneers who assaulted upon the production of histories from the viewpoint of Europe. He protested against this “one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or ...observed from the vantage point of Europe”<sup>8</sup>. In the same manner, Amitav Ghosh turns the tables down by choosing the subaltern side. He’s in tune with the Subaltern Studies Group which has provided the most provocative and interesting intervention in the present decade by aiming to restore the suppressed histories of non Whites and non Europeans as well as the subordinates of colonial South Asia.

As it is apparent that *The Glass Palace* is comprised of generations and families, it involves various important and recurrent themes emerging with time. The first Burmese era is shown under threat of British colonization which was well established in India at that time as the ruling Empire. In fact the South East Asia can’t be wrong in blaming India for the colonial upheaval coming upon them as Ghosh notes that “India was the wonder land which triggered Europe’s Age of Exploration”<sup>9</sup>.

India was the central colony of the British among the whole Empire and they were luring others from here. Burma happened to be one of them, whose glitter of being the “golden land” (310) enchanted the British. India being blessed with its geographical location, historical development, sophisticated networks and rich trading bloc made her the central colony. Robert J. Blyth records that increasing preoccupation with British territorial conquest in South Asia, political subjugation and civil administration rather than commerce, made the East India Company to be inevitably concerned with India’s broader external relationships<sup>10</sup>. The late 18<sup>th</sup> Century growth in scale and scope of its

activities in the subcontinent changed and developed the overseas connections and made India to assume a pivotal role in the expansion of the second British Empire. With Asian trade exploitation, the company was able to employ, subvert and eventually control the political and diplomatic affairs of the subcontinent to meet the requirements of British Indian possessions and the whole Empire.

By early 1870s European imperialism began a new and more aggressive phase with concurrent improvements in communication like steamer ship, electric telegraph and railways - everything grew up dramatically. The British gradually started taking over large chunks of lower Burma. Because, besides the wealth of timbre wood which finally caused the war (15), Burma also had the “world’s richest gem mines” (43). The Capitalists could not avert their avaricious eyes for long from this side. They subsequently captured the royal capital of Mandalay in 1885 and Burma as a whole was declared part of the British Empire. This siege was the Raj’s Stalingrad making the very first chapter of *The Glass Palace* which shows Ghosh at his best in expressing the compassion, the trauma of the royal family, the confusion of the subject people whose masters had changed hands through surreptitious English methodology of pacification. Ghosh reflects deep as he notes –

“This is how power is eclipsed: in a moment of vivid realism. between the waning of one fantasy of governance and its replacement by the next, in an instant ...” (41).

If Menderly was an exotic symbol of modern European splendor recreated and immortalized by Daphne Dumorier in *Rebecca*, Mandalay’s name will stand for conjuring up irresistible images of the lost Oriental kingdoms and tropical splendor, which Amitav Ghosh tries to capture. Perhaps all of this will be metaphorised by the name ‘Glass Palace’ from now onwards for the future generations! Mandalay with its purely Oriental pagoda architecture, “massive walls and deep moats, gilded pillars and polished floors” (33) presented itself as a stately and imposing structure, symbolic of the unchallenged power and authority of the king on the commoners. As is evident by the awe-struck eleven years old Raj Kumar’s wonder for the palace, when he asks Ma Cho, the shop holder, “Have you ever been inside? The fort, I mean”(87). *The glass palace* was a dazzling emblem of the country’s elegance and self sufficiency.

But towards the end of the novel, when we hear this name again it is just a reminder of lost glory as the topic of a research dissertation (532) and then the name of a poor,

ramshackle photo studio (504). Thus, the title is imbued with retrospection, and images of loss combined with some hope. The loss is heavier of course, as both the soldiers and subjects looted and ransacked the palace (31-33) -

“Every where people were intently at work (inside the palace at the time of desertion), men and women, armed with axes and *das*, ...hacking at gem studded Oak, offering boxes, ...using fish hooks to pry the ivory inlays, meat cleaver to scrape the gilt from the harp...” (33).

This horrifying scene is no different from what befell Delhi after the last *Mughal's* exile to Rangoon. Willium Dalrymple records:

“When the British captured ... the Red Fort in 1857, they pulled down the gorgeous *harem* apartment and in their place erected a line of barracks... Even at that time, the destruction was regarded as an act of wanton philistinism”<sup>11</sup>.

Mandalay's fate was no different. The confrontation between the Burmese old traditions and British imperialism, which escalated through incompatibility and intransigence, culminated in the British conquest and pacification of the last remnant of the kingdom. King Thebaw appears to be the most benighted and unaware of the British proceedings in his own land, living a protected life, almost blinded by the trust he had in his ministers and subordinates. The Royal Proclamation issued under the king's signature is evidence that ‘the king had not left the royal mansion for the last seven years’ (39)-

“His Majesty, who is watchful that the interest of our religion and our state shall not suffer, will himself march forth with his generals, captains, and large forces, ... by land and by water..., will efface these heretics and conquer and annex their country... will bring about good of our religion, our master and of ourselves and will gain for us the important result of placing us on the path to the celestial regions and to *Nirvana*” (16).

It is pathetic that he lost all by getting the last good choice only- *Nirvana*, a worldly *Nirvana* at least in the form of exile to an unknown Indian town. The king's words sound anachronous in comparison to the information spilled around by subaltern characters like Raj Kumar, Matthew and Saya John. They could understand the gravity of the booming English cannon, Raj Kumar the *Kalaa* knew it to the astonishment of the mixed customers of Ma Cho (3). Matthew the seven years old outsider knew that the British siege was lured by the Burmese wood. That it was ‘a war over Wood!’ (15) and that “an English fleet is coming up the Irrawady river”! (15).

The king had lived a safe life in his self assumed paradise- the palace, where as British had been in a flurry of activities with the target of pacifying the native Burmese and the responsible Royal post holders. Mikael Gravers notes that “pacification was an important concept in the language of Colonization”<sup>12</sup>. It was the English magic in competition to all the mythical Indian and Eastern black magic spells. They propounded it as a democratic constitution, luring them with the prospect that they will be made capable of self rule, and quelled all armed resistance.

In 1880s, the British intensified their program in face of tough resistance from the guerilla forces, surprisingly led by monks who abjured their nonviolence for the sake of freedom. British employed the Scorched-earth policy, destroying villages, stocks of rice and by using their ‘Divide and rule policy’ on the Christian minority<sup>13</sup>, roping in the Karens to round up the monks. The forests of India and Burma were regarded as ‘the jewel in the crown’ of administration, especially the teak forests. The British merchants were already deriving the largest share of the annual imperial forest surplus by exploiting the 1881 Act and Legislation<sup>14</sup>. They knew how to tailor the Legislation in order to get the maximum efficient resource extraction. Thus, the English wanted all the wood of Burma too at any cost, the heinous methods applied are proof that a promise of democracy was the trap they had successfully used.

When the Royal family was deposed to an anonymous Indian region and their caravan in English escort left the walled city Mandalay, all the subject people congregated on the main thoroughfare. They were now ‘freed’ under a new set of rulers, and yet followed the crew in a huge number. It reminds one of the Miltonic mourning of the Angel’s banishing from the paradise. King Thebaw couldn’t help but wonder about the immense power that the English wielded, in one of his meditative sittings with his binoculars –

“What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another, emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement – people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile...?” (50).

If asked directly about this enigma, an Englishman must have answered in a euphemism as they have always done – it was for exploration, adventure and to perform their White man’s duty, to civilize and to educate them. But who gave them the right to

play god with so many lives and destinies? They were doing it, of course, to colonize, to satiate their greed for the Eastern wealth and gold, to hoard it. Ghosh refers to the loss of many valuables of the deposed king during their movement to the new destination - Ratnagiri, for which the officers promised a committee of inquiry. Thebaw could see it through that "...for all their haughty ways and grand uniforms, they were not above some common thievery" (50).

George Orwell also could not connive on this mean aspect, thus he makes Flory, the British persona say in *Burmese Days* "we steal from Burma"<sup>15</sup> showing this cocktail of ambivalence, apartheid and unscrupulous use of all avenues of power which have never been portrayed with more precision than in the first novel of Orwell. Who knows Amitav Ghosh will be remembered in the same way for capturing Burma in its turmoil by future generations? Meenakshi Mukherji doesn't mince words in saying that "... *The Glass Palace* will remain for me memorable mainly as the most scathing critique of British colonialism I have ever come across in fiction,"<sup>16</sup>. The coming delineations will show it. But to begin with even Queen Supayalat's observation to the level of a prophecy comes true when she teasingly and sadistically exclaims-

"This is what they have done to us, this is what they will do to all of Burma. They took our kingdom promising roads and railways and ports, but mark my words ... in a few decades, the wealth will be gone - all the gems, the timber and oil - and then they too will leave..." (88).

The novel does come across a full circle as we witness Burma under attack; its glory and pride, happiness all chipping away. But what is it that made even the resolute Queen to bend to the British whose reputation in records went as no less than that of a murderer, for she ordered all forty six male kin of the king to be killed in order to safeguard his kingship (38). What is this power? This could not be something single, straight and visible. It is a very convoluted, complex process which is known by various names today. The most common is colonialism. Tagore made the following observation about this 'hydraulic power' saying that -

"...this has become something too abstract... it is a scientific product made in the political laboratory of the nation, through the dissolution of personal humanity"<sup>17</sup>.

This special power gave the Europeans an authority to murder, divide and exterminate people for their 'own good' as Arundhati Roy analyses about Empires in another context<sup>18</sup>. Amitav Ghosh unravels the 'grisly foundation' of this empire, 'stripping it



down to its brutish iniquitous nakedness'. It is Ghosh speaking through Uma when he shows her explaining this imperious business to Arjun, Dinu and Bela –

“It is simply mistaken to imagine that colonialists sit down and ponder the rights and wrongs of the societies they want to conquer: that is not why empires are built” (295).

One can't help reminiscing the plight of the last Mughal Bahadur Shah Zafar who was captured in 1857 by the British in the same way. He was confined to a little room containing “only one *charpoy*, ...allowed but two *annas* a day for his food, ...treated with great disrespect by the officers and soldiers”<sup>19</sup>.

Zafar's trial dragged on for two months while the court marshal ended at last on 9<sup>th</sup> March, charged as ‘a traitor and a felon’ but was spared life by Hodson's mercy. Zafar was sentenced to be transported for the remainder of his days out of the country. Very much like Thebaw in Burma with a gap of a few years, three hundred and thirty two years after Babur had first conquered the city, the last Mugal Emperor left Delhi on a bullock cart, with two wives, only two remaining children and others; a party of thirty one in all, escorted by a squadron of horse artillery. The journey had been kept secret, even from Zafar himself. Matilda Saunders, wife of the Head of civil administration writes in a letter- “No one crowded to see them go, it was completely still and quiet at that early hour”<sup>20</sup>. It was only 4 am.

F.W. Buckler in an essay, “The political theory of the Indian Mutiny”<sup>21</sup> argues for Zafar's fate. It was never discussed whether the company was legally empowered to try Zafar at all, which was just a tax collector in Bengal by the legal treaty of 1765. Zafar or any of his predecessors had never renounced their sovereignty over the company. From this point of view, Zafar could certainly be tried as a defeated enemy king; but he had never been a subject and so could not possibly be called a rebel, guilty of treason. Instead, from a legal point of view, a good case could be made that it was the East India Company which was the real rebel, guilty of revolt against a feudal superior to whom it had sworn allegiance for nearly a century. Queen Supayalat very well reminds collector Dey that “if British rule by laws, then how come king Thebaw was never taken for trial?” (150). Instead he was just thrown out like a weed in to oblivion!

The Western/European colonization has been one of the most significant phenomena in the world history – Burma and India, being some of the most affected locations. King Thebaw's wonder and Badshah Zafar's cold surprise, both show an allegiance to the

same. Some called it the consequence of 'la mission civilisatrice', the much required British tutelage. Some named it as an appropriation of mind-deadened but mine-awakened third world! It was much later only that people like Gandhi and others could make out their real intentions, as he said:

"The unparalleled extravagance of this rule has demented the Rajas and Maharajas who ... grind their subjects to dust. In order to protect its immoral commerce, this rule regards no means too mean... keeping millions in a state of semi-starvation..."<sup>22</sup>

Modern European imperialism was constitutively and radically different from all earlier forms. It's sustained longevity, unrestrained and uninterrupted as in Africa and India for centuries, oblige to the grand disparity of power, new mercantile pattern, trade with a daunting imperious profile. This power came not only from that of military, economic, political domination but also from 'cultural' one. As Edward W. Said explained that they could exploit the indispensable potency of this so far neutral element of culture quite appropriately - "At the heart of European culture during many decades of imperial expansion...lay an undeterred and unrelenting Eurocentrism"<sup>23</sup>.

This innocuous culture accumulated these experiences, territories, peoples, and histories; and whatever they imagined. They utilized this vital, informing, invigorating cultural process to study the non- Europeans, classify them, verify them, and as Calder puts it bluntly - "It allowed the European men of business the power to ...scheme grandly"<sup>24</sup>.

But above all, it subordinated them by banishing their identities except as a lower order of beings, from the culture and indeed the very idea of White, Christian Europe. Thebaw found this the most painful and outrageous of all treatments when he noticed that the bullock cart to take him away was allotted a canopy of seven tiers only, marked for a nobleman! Ghosh writes -

"So the well spoken English colonels had had their revenge after all, given the knife of victory a final little twist, ...He was to be publicly demoted, like an errant school child" (43).

Amitav Ghosh shows this set pattern of imperialism taking hold of Burma where as India was already a subdued, thoroughly colonized place. In the ruler' terms, India was well into the process of getting the European tutelage. The very first chapter of the novel shows how imperialism was after all an act of geographical violence. Through its means, virtually every vacant space in the world was explored, charted, in modern

terms 'scanned' and finally brought under control. One or other positive attribute of those lands caused them to come under colonial servitude. Burma fell because of its 'golden' timber and 'silvery' oil. Amitav Ghosh comments –

“The Timber-tree had felled dynasties, caused invasions, created fortunes,... brought a new way of life into being” (71).

Earth oil/ Petroleum wells around Mount Popa (122) made a secret wealth of Burma which was of a great value, capable of infuriating greed to any extent and creating war out of thin air. The Middle East has been witnessing this for centuries, the latest being the apocalyptic scene in Iraq! Foreigners from France, England and America started hovering over the Burmese wells, 'buying them and setting up machines' (123) to extract the wells dry.

Europeans could cover this passage of communication to command by a unified discourse based upon an immutably integral and adaptable distinction between the Westerners and the rest - premised upon the subordination and victimization of the natives. The British took this ideology of cultural superiority as an unassailable aspect of their uncontested culture and empire in comparison to the colonized place to be a polemically blank space. The Westerners were fed upon a diet of fixed disparity handed down by people like Renan, Rev. Muller, Rev. Barde and others who believed that “the regeneration of the inferior or degenerate races by the superior races is part of the providential order of things for humanity”<sup>25</sup>. They of course, propagated such ideas laced with their well-formulated benevolent, redemptive theory of tutoring the non-West. About the sinful aspect of this so-called noble and virtuous job, the capitalist Rev. Muller had to say nothing less than this –

“Humanity must not, cannot allow the incompetence, negligence and laziness of the uncivilized peoples to leave idle indefinitely the wealth which God has confided to them, charging them to make it serve the good of all”<sup>26</sup>.

Thus, the Whites were able to prove the 'barbarity' of the Indian and Burmese kings, and required to heal the wounds by the 'humanity of the Angrez' (150). Ghosh analyzes this British 'rule of law' in his correspondence to Dipesh Chakravarty as “actually the rule of law and race combined - legal procedures differed significantly when applied to Indians and the British”<sup>27</sup>. Neel Rattan Haldar's namesake trial scene is another glaring

example in line, taken by Ghosh in the *Sea of Poppies*. Queen Supayalat once again is made the voice of a raising rebel when she challengingly said –

“We were tyrants...enemies of freedom...The English alone understand liberty...they rule through laws? If that is so, why has the king never been brought to trial?” (150).

The British enjoyed a strong base in the neighbouring India with its huge military power, extorted from the same land and using them to fight a non-enemy nation, a friend of old days, like Burma. Saya John, the half Chinese-Malay businessman wonders about the same authority of British as king Thebaw had done –

“For a few coins they’d (Indian soldiers) allow their masters to use them as they wished,... to fight other people’s wars with so little profit for themselves ... fighting an enemy who fights from neither enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without conscience?” (29-30).

Saya John’s musing and Raj Kumar’s amazement regarding the Indian soldiers’ state being no different from that of marionettes holds a strong thread of a long and un-escapable history of colonialism and imperialism. The colonial authority thrived on the long practiced notion of West that the third world was an atrocious nuisance, a culturally and politically inferior place. It was a ‘dark area’, steeped in ‘dark ages’ in various senses, which could be illuminated only by colonizers. None can miss being reminded of *Heart of Darkness* here by Joseph Conrad.

Almost all colonial schemes began with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, equal and fit. This was an ideological vision implemented and sustained not only by direct domination and physical force. But it was much more effective over a long time by the process of hegemony, its’ magically persuasive means, which yielded the desirable behavior from the colonized surprisingly well. The soldiers willing subjugation can be explained by the following statement of Frantz Fanon too, where he says –

“Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it”<sup>28</sup>.

The confidence of the native is erased out in how and what he is. The colonial mother protects her child from ‘itself’ and from its ‘ego’. The subject is given a sedative, strong enough to hypnotise him immutably, enough to forget his own identity for decades. It

'thingifies' him, as puts Aime' Ce'saire, the French founder of Negritude movement. By using the tools of force, cruelty, sadism and through cultural conflict, forced crops and a parody of education- they manufactured hastily "a few thousand subordinate functionaries, 'boys', office clerks and interpreters necessary for the smooth operation of business"<sup>29</sup>. So Arjun Roy as a soldier in the British army boasted openly that only when every Indian is like us, the country will truly become "modern" (280). That's why even an educated lady like Mrs. Dutt could not help giving up to the English charm and believing that the British had granted 'freedom to women' (188).

The soldiers depicted in *The Glass palace* are such 'boys' whose essence and the sense of original identity had been drained out by their British masters. They were made to feel that whatever they were, it was the masters' gift and benevolence only. Their own culture, custom and social norms were useless, meaningless and inferior to the West. Whatever the rulers said was the truth, the logical and acceptable. Every effort was made to bring the colonized people to admit the mediocre and wretched quality of their civilization which had been "transformed into instinctive patterns of behavior, to recognize the unreality of his nation and in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure"<sup>30</sup>. In a way, they were kept blinded to the "murky shadows" below the "surface of army rules", "the manuals, regulations and procedures" (284), as Hardayal Singh, colleague of Arjun expressed. Alison Matthew was another free spirited character who mocked Arjun to his bafflement, saying –"You are not in charge of what you do; you're a toy, a manufactured thing; a weapon in someone else' hands..." (376).

These 'twenty years old boys' (29) had joined army lured by money, leaving their farms, plantations and family profession. They were seen by Saya John and Raj Kumar as "tools", working as objects, alluding very much to ideas presented by W.H. Auden in his celebrated poem *The Shield of Achilles* - "An unintelligible multitude/ A million eyes, a million boots in line/ Without expression, waiting for a sign. /...Column by column in a cloud of dust/ They marched away..."<sup>31</sup>.

The same aspect of colonized people in the form of British recruits has been explored in some other characters as well by Amitav Ghosh, like Mr Beni Prasad Dey, Arjun Roy, Royal Minister Tingda Mingyi, Saya John to some extent and plantation labourers. But all of them show transformations of varying degrees. Most of them realize their misplaced trust and peace of life, by toiling under the foreign rule and feeling proud,

contented. They go through the important stages of first being colonized and then the time taking process of waking out of their slumber, to fight back- be it the accidental death of Collector Dey in rage and despair (176) or self claimed end of Arjun (527)! Hardayal Singh is the first of all prominent characters to show the signs of stirring out of this oblivion which is no less than cuckoldry and treachery to his employers like Lieutenant Colonel Buckland. He warned them, admonishing like a martinet teacher –

“You can justify what you are doing in a thousand different ways, but you should make no mistake about the truth... You are a traitor. You are a disgrace to the regiment and to your country... You’ll be hunted down ...and hang(ed)...” (450).

Buckland sounds very much like Colonel Chillingworth aboard *Ibis* in the *Sea of Poppies*, when he roared about the English rule’s power enshrined in “laws and ... the whip!”<sup>32</sup>. Hardayal is significant as a person of conscience who realized quite early that they were powerless stooges (437), used as mercenaries (347) and doomed for the worst under their ‘good masters’, because – “In a way, the better the master, the worse the condition of the slave,...it makes him forget what he is...” (438).

Mr. Beni Prasad Dey joined Ratnagiri as the District collector. after qualifying the much coveted ICS competition at par with the British officials. He fits perfectly well in the type of a native intellectual as out lined by Fanon in the evolution of national culture. He, along with all the Indian *jawaans* like Arjun, Hardy, Kishan Singh and others gives proof that they have assimilated the culture of the occupying power. They seem to be in a period of unqualified assimilation of the Western ways. Beni Prasad Dey could not maintain a natural, cordial relationship with his wife Uma for the same reason because he expected too much scholarly and sophisticated mannerism from her. He was transformed to the English masters’ ways so intensely that he seized to be a normal companion. Uma Roy Dey, as wife tried hard to conform to his demands, yet that compliance didn’t please him. The incidents of disappointments between them are too frequent to sustain them together. The train journey about Schubert’s *Trout* (159), the party at Residency in honour of Mr. Raha with some British officials (145), Uma’s decision to go to her parents, permitting him to have another wife (172) - all evidently point to their cold and unexciting matrimonial years. Uma could realize their differences much later only as she reflected in her marital solitude -

“Cambridge had taught him to demand more...to bargain for a woman’s soul with the coin of kindness and patience...This was subjection beyond decency, beyond her imagining. Anything would be better, than to submit” (153).

The way Beni Dey defended British law and empire in all his verbal confrontations with Queen Supayalat shows him as a great loyalist, speaking the British language with their intent and meaning. In his first meeting with the Burmese king as his caretaker, he tried to brush away the king’s arguments in praise of Japanese defeating the Russians, as not being “of some significance” (105). He rather boasted of the Empire being- “...stronger than it has ever been... already more than a century old, a challenge-proof power... to remain so into a foreseeable future” (107).

Mr. Dey spoke like a colonizer to Uma about the way British brought the “rule of law instead of monarchy in Burma”, which was good and deserving of the people, benefitting commoners like Rajkumar Raha (136). The Collector throughout remained tied to the British regimen, without ever trying to break out of it even for the sake of his self-respect as if he was bound to them all mind and heart. This is what Thoreau, the great political philosopher tried to convey in saying - “That government is best which governs the least!”<sup>33</sup>. This aspect is specially apparent when Mr. Dey was insultingly berated by Queen Supayalat as a “public servant”(151) –“Sawant being less a servant than he is ...” (150).

Supayalat called him living under delusions about his place in the world, following the British dictions blindly and taking the English to be ‘humane’ (150). Dey’s dynamism which catapulted him to be a British officer was replaced fairly quickly by a substantification of the attitudes of the colonizing power. His position was very much like what Arjun had felt himself to be, “a lump of clay, formed, shaped... and becoming a thing unto itself on the potters’ wheel ...” (430).

Dey remained a British ‘representative’ in an obedient disciple’s manner by his thoughts and actions, to his ‘*amader gurujan*’. He was inside out as he explained the British philosophy to the Queen and Uma. He believed that the liberty for India and Burma was to be wished for so long as it was the kind of independence British approved of. Through Dey, Ghosh is referring to Dipesh Chakravarty’s locution, “not yet” interpreted as “never” capable of self rule here<sup>34</sup>. In such talks, racial superiority of the West was a silenced term in the equation, which Said expressed candidly as –

“Anything else is unacceptable and worse, unthinkable!”<sup>35</sup>. Ghosh’s deep study about this aspect is clearly apprehensible when he said in an interview –

“No matter how hard Indians tried to be like them, they were never admitted into the elite club of White Colonialists beyond a point... This left Indians with an immense sense of hurt... We don’t realize what it was like to live in a colonial society. The rulers controlled all access to knowledge... Indians couldn’t prosper despite all the talent...”<sup>36</sup>.

Dey could never be comfortable, at ease with his White colleagues, and the native inferiority weighed heavy on him. This could be traced as the cause of his untimely demise also, as he tried to accept a challenge left behind by Mr Cubb, ‘the rowing legend’ in the form of that ‘double-oared racing scull’ (173). This slim and fragile craft could not sustain the heavy hearted Collector on the massive monsoon waves of the sea! He did not fight back like Arjun but his envy of the White power and control over all - be it land or water, enchanted him to counter it. The native “child” drowned himself and the master kept prospering. The struggle had to go a long way ahead before it got the reins of independence.

First *Jat* Light Infantry cadet Arjun Roy was a proud Indian to be selected for the post, after a fallow period for Bengali youngsters. The Pandeys in 1857 battle had earned a bad name for Bengal as mutineers and rabble rousers amongst the English rulers. Vivien Ashima Kaul has written that “the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 virtually left the Bengal army dismembered with 62 regiments turning disloyal to the British”<sup>37</sup>. But Peel Commission did recognize the importance of reorganizing the BNA without delay “if the British were to hold Hindustan”<sup>38</sup>! After a prolonged debate during 1918-39, the Indian Military Academy was inaugurated in 1932. Arjun was one of the beneficiaries of this softened attitude in Indian British Empire. He wrote in one of his letters to sister Manju -

“...what makes me prouder still is the thought that Hardy and I are going to be the first Indian officers in the I/I Jats: it seems like such a huge responsibility- as though we are representing the whole of the country!” (262).

Though it is ironic that later on, Arjun wonders about the country he represented, stood and fought for; when he apprehends the real position of Indians in the British army as just weapon bearing puppets and ‘biggest stooges’ (437). These Indian soldiers were purified of their parochial loyalties and native bonds during their training which



amounted to the level of Anglicizing them. The national anthem of the Great Britain made a part of their daily military rituals, singing, praising and praying for the power - "God save the king./ Send him Victorious / Happy and glorious,/ Long to reign over us, / God save the king!"

No doubt, *Swarajists* like Tulsi Charan Goswami found it worth objection, he commented- "the atmosphere of the college will denationalise its alumni... turn them to be imitation British boys..."<sup>39</sup>. They did become imitation boys, puffed out with pride and self aggrandizement, as Arjun said boastfully, "we are the first Indians who are not weighed down by the past" (279). He writes –

"Sometimes when I wake up in the morning, I still find it hard to believe that I really belong with these men. It makes one so proud but also humble, to think that one has all this to live up to" (262).

This is the real situation an innately colonized being feels, "proud" of being with Whites whom he revered for their power, victory and a history. British tutelage made him feel "humble" at the same time about his own history which was presented to him as nameless, in distorted form, much inferior and backward. Thus, Arjun plays an important role in the novel as the face of the Indian army, whom Ghosh later uses to tear apart the British mask of pretence. He is made to understand, inhale, digest and register this theory advocated by the masters that they being advanced communities in their cultural and economic categories, integrated themselves with the backward communities and cultures with an interest in their 'progress'. He's made blind enough not to see the kernel of colonization and imperialism lying in these theories – "...justifying Eurocentrism and in specific instances, aligned to racist ideologies as a justification for conquest and domination"<sup>40</sup>.

This is an imperial motif woven in the very British education system propounded by Macaulay and Bentick. Modern critics and sociologists like Foucault, Gauri Vishwanathan, Homi K Bhabha and others have tried to decode it. Foucault could trace a very well planned Discourse, where as Vishwanathan found this system to be permeated with ideas about unequal races and cultures, transmitted cleverly in the Eastern classrooms for a century and more.

Dinu/ Dinanath Raha explained his observation to Arjun, a relative. He found out that "soldiers' training was much more than just rigorous physical discipline" – it required

more of mental, psychological cultivation (277). Arjun confidently reiterates, “We know how the minds of Westerners work. Only when every Indian is like us, the country will become truly modern” (280). Arjun is a man who sees everything but doesn’t condemn the wrong things as they are, in the name of duty, believing that he in British army is not in an ‘army of slaves’ (288) but a ‘defender of his fellow natives’ (287). He’s in the bliss of an unruffled state, unheeding to the appropriation and exploitation he’s subjected to, unlike his colleague, Hardy Singh. He takes things easy resigning to, thus reasons out that – “Every institution has its own logic... there was to be a separation between Indians and British, a straight forward system...” (283).

Hardy Singh does agree that on the surface everything in the army appears to be “ruled by regulations”, but actually, underneath there are all “these murky shadows that one can never quite see: prejudice, distrust and suspicion” (285), on the English side supported by trust and credulity of the natives to keep it going. This credibility could be regarding something as simple as eating of *chapatti* like savages (415), the use of umbrella to be an effeminate characteristic, ‘we are not women’(285) or something as large as “we are here to defend you” (287); the most protective but in truth, devious feature of British imperialism. That’s why even when the Empire was at the end of the tether, Bucky could tell Roy that, “we are ruling over you out of obligation...!” (417). As if Indians were incapable of taking care of themselves, their deception was so impeccable!

Arjun like all the other multitude in British servitude is made to believe and delight in the idea of what Marlow does in *Heart of Darkness*. He contrasts Roman colonizers with their modern counterpart in an oddly perceptive way illuminating the special mix of power, ideological energy and practical attitude characterizing British imperialism. Marlow believed that the ancient Romans were “no colonists, their administration was merely a squeeze and nothing more..., what saves us is efficiency- the devotion to efficiency” along with the redemptive British benevolence!<sup>41</sup>. But we cannot ignore or forget the truth that the only aim of British was expansion, hoarding and ‘extorting’ the East, as Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher put it – “The British would expand by trade and influence if they could, but by imperial rule if they must!”<sup>42</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh has taken this fact again in his latest novel, *Sea of Poppies*, dealing with the Europeans’ atrocious avarice in a most illustrative way. We can’t depreciate the fact that the Indian army was used, none slighter than mercenaries, in all of her

neighbouring lands like in China, Afghanistan, Persia, Ethiopia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Burma, Sudan, Uganda and Egypt beside others. Their 'divide and rule policy' not only engendered the Partition of Indo-Pak, it also but affected Indian relationship with all its surrounding countries and cultures. Amitav Ghosh depicts the same places enjoying a warm coterie in his other creations like *In an Antique Land* and *The Imam and the Indian* before the onset of colonialism.

But the most consoling part is that Arjun does revolt after a long span of dormancy, though much later than Hardy and others. He does get entangled in the strong wave of nationalism, hitting the Indian civilians as well as army around the World War II, like nothing before. He proves that a sudden change is always possible! Cesaire observed for such occasions only when he wrote - "...my only consolation is periods of colonization pass, that nationalism sleep only for a time and that peoples remain..."<sup>43</sup>.

Indian Independence League had charged every Indian residing in Singapore and Malaya with the national fever. Arjun and others also had to confront this when posted there. Indian Plantation labourers' wretched poverty (346), the open practice of racism in "No Asiatics allowed" boards on doors of White Clubs, Swimming Pools (345), the town men calling them 'mercenaries', '*Klangs*' (346) can be taken as some small but significant instances which brought them closer to their inner selves! The author notes how this made them "cringe in shame. It was as though they were examining their own circumstances for the first time" (346).

Hardy bites Arjun hard when he says, "mercenary hands obey someone else's head (347) ... dancing to someone else tune, taking money"(348). Even Alison Matthew brushes him the wrong side by comparing him to handicap Dinu and yet finding him stronger than the soldier Arjun - "...you are not in charge of what you do... your mind does not inhabit your body" (376). Hardy's true statements finally do make home in his heart and mind when he points out that no victory was ever credited to Indian soldiers. They analyze to their utter surprise, how "all the brave young soldiers were always Australian or Canadian or British..., none ever says the Indians won this war" (406). The 'mist of regulations' cleared and they fumed over how "the chaps trained in England get paid a lot more than we do" (284). The slavish Indian lives in plantations of Malaya made them realize that they were no different from them. They were jolted out of their chimera like state, of being elites, not "being a part of that poverty". It

came as a revelation, as if a “grimy curtain of snobbery had prevented them from seeing what was plainly before their eyes” (348).

All these experiences were highly peculiar, unexpected and provocative; giving them a sense that a kind of “charade had come to an end” (406). They felt like dwarfs and ‘worms’ (348). At this juncture, Arjun rises up like a traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century novel’s hero with the realization that his life’s project has been a mere fancy, an illusion. Amitav Ghosh writes –

“It was as though he were a child who’d taken umbrage at the discovery that he had spoken prose all his life” (348).

Arjun is bitterly awakened from a fancy dream of accomplishment, action and glory, “of being privileged, the elite” (348). He’s forced instead to come to terms with a reduced status, betrayed emotion (in case of Alison), a hideously laid out British Discourse, crass and philistine! He being no better than a negro, a ‘*klang*’ ‘a coolie’ (353), a bloody Indian, a *buddhu*, (345), a mercenary! He felt as if being the ‘first generation of educated Indian soldiers, he and his peers had been singled out to pay the price of a monumental inwardness’ (349). He is puzzled and worried about becoming human again, “How do I connect what I do with what I want, in my heart?” (407), “... how was he to find himself now?” (341).

After recuperation in the storm drain with Kishan Singh during their refuge in the jungles of Sungei Pattani, Arjun gets more time to ponder over his state, and his next move. Finally, he does decide to join Hardayal, Mohun Singh and Amreek Singh’s group as a ‘mutineer’ in the eyes of the British. It is a moment of regeneration, a moment of ‘conversion’ for him, couldn’t resist wondering that “this was when one recognized the stranger that one had always been to oneself, that all one’s loyalties and beliefs had been misplaced?” (440). Finally he comes out a hero, a real brave Indian he could look at himself eye to eye in the mirror and retaliate to colonel Buckland on his threat of court marshalling, “hanging him” if times change. He could respond with the confidence of knowing his mind -

“There’s one thing you can be sure of sir, on that day if it comes, you’ll have done your duty, and I’ll have done mine. We’ll look at each other as honest men- for the first time. For that alone this will have been worthwhile” (450).

Arjun Roy rises to his complete self by shedding his servitude and by discovering his essential self. He died fighting in one of the INA's (Indian National Army) last engagements fought in central Burma in the final days of war. In Edward Saidian ideology, he becomes the positive Caliban, "becoming aware of one's self as belonging to a subject people, with the founding insight of anti imperialist nationalism"<sup>44</sup>.

Thus, when Dinu meets Arjun in June of 1945 at Huay Zedi teak Camp, he is a much changed man. He seemed to be frantic with the realization of the deception he had been a part of. Dinu is shaken by Arjun's disaffection for the British and his radical dedication to the new cause. He was at the verge of extremism- the do or die situation. Dinu thought-

"This is the greatest danger... this point at which Arjun has arrived - where, in resisting the powers that form us, we allow them to gain control of all meaning, this is their moment of victory ... inflict their final and more terrible defeat" (518).

But this is the only way out for a true soldier who could not take the route of desertion or capitulation. Because they have to rise up to the stature which they had always carried within them, the only thing unfitting is that earlier it was a misplaced trust and confidence. Arjun's desperation is revealing when he says:

"Dinu... you think I joined 'them'. I didn't. I joined an Indian army that was fighting for an Indian cause. The war may be over for the Japanese - it is not for us" (518).

Buckland threatened Arjun by calling him "a traitor" (450), but Arjun knew that this was the time when he 'regained' his essence, his truth; like those 'half of the fifty five thousand' Indian troops in Singapore who had joined the INA (520). Their efforts to come out of the web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology which they felt to be a uniquely punishing destiny- did pay off, though not in their own living days. But they are remembered, celebrated and paid tribute to, forever by their kins and fellows loftily. As Amitav Ghosh writes-

"Three times each year, Bela and Jaya would perform a small ceremony at their shrine. They'd garland the photographs and light incense - Arjun, Neil, Manju... Kishan Singh; he too was among their dead" (486).

If Captain Arjun is a character representative of the Colonized Indian soldier, we can't disregard the character of Kishan Singh, the batman of Arjun in the same context. Unlike Arjun, Singh was in army because of his family rather village or region's

tradition. He was an uneducated landless villager who did not opt for this particular profession out of his own choice but was supposed to be in it from childhood. As if this was a predetermined fate, even before his birth! This was a region which had witnessed the aftermath of British revenge upon Indian soldiers, 'the mutineers' of 1857 at a close quarter. Those horrendous events made childhood stories for them. The British fear was instilled in them as if through the very umbilical cord, in their very blood! Kishan Singh narrates the same to Arjun while taking resort in Sungei Pattani forests. It's no different from real historical accounts available- The Bibigarh massacre had outraged the British extremely; Col. A.R.D Mackenzie's words reflect it –

"Since they had butchered our defense-less women and children, we would have been more than human, we would have been less than men, if we had not exterminated them as men kill snakes wherever they meet them"<sup>45</sup>.

Thus, the assault on the city started exactly as planned with brutes like Nicholson, J.M. Wade, Gen. Neill, Hervy Greathead, Richard Barter, Kendal Coghill and others as commanders of an apocalyptic destruction. Gallows were erected throughout the city of Delhi and the hangings began. Chandni Chowk came out as a favourite spot for English officers' entertainment gatherings much like the Paris executions during the Revolution, well captured by Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*. George Wagentrieber cheerfully wrote in *Delhi Gazette Extra*, "Hanging is, I am happy to say, the order of the day here"<sup>46</sup>.

The historical records refer to the atmosphere of the city becoming 'unimaginably disgusting'. Dead bodies were strewn about in all directions in every attitude, in every stage of decomposition. Ghosh writes in a mystified tone:

"...an army of giants had turned out...on approaching closer, they saw that they were...but men - rebel soldiers whose bodies had been impaled on sharpened stakes...in straight lines...led all the way to the city" (429).

One may find such expressions to be sentimental, with a dash of emotion, inapt for historiography. But it is impossible to narrate history without being humane too. In this one particular instance, Amitav Ghosh does remind us of the savagery hidden in the White man. He shows it to be multiplied by scores in comparison to what the Indian independence seekers had done. He gives just a flash of the long and horrifying

incident, but well fitting a technique to weave real bites in the story. Aime Cesaire was one of the few commentators who observed on this aspect of European colonization -

“... we must study how colonization works to ‘de-civilize’ the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instinct to covetousness, violence, race hatred and moral relativism... the European continent proceeds towards savagery...”<sup>47</sup>.

One can't deny the fact that such events point towards British to be responsible before the human community for the highest heap of corpses in history, in their effort to ‘distribute’ civilization and a better rule! But history repeats itself. We can see that the present super powers have overtaken the same noble cause to bring democracy and cheers by grafting modern abuse on to ancient inequality, injustice and racism! Only the means have been chiseled to a more sophisticated form. *The Glass Palace* is a timely reminder of the bleak future for the world, and especially some of its regions.

Kishan Singh in spite of being much lower to Arjun status-wise plays foil to him. This is what makes Kishan important as a character- he's a reminding bell to Arjun about all those facts towards which he has been kept in dark for a long time. He is rather a ghost from the past, an apparition of the forgotten cruelties. Kishan brings him out of his delusions, the life he has been living in the bliss of illusion. In a metaphorical way, Arjun finds him formless, unformed and a malleable mud which was his defense “against the potter and his shaping touch” (431). In contrast, he himself is a perfectly ‘shaped and formed’ (430) object in the potter's clutches, unaware and unconscious of the impending force, just ‘whirling’.

This divergence may seem insignificant in fact, of all the other apparent differences. But this comes as the most eloquent one as evidence that Kishan has not lost hold upon himself. He remembers what he is. Past happenings of the bygone days will be always readily available to him from the depths of his memory. In this way he is one step ahead of Arjun and all the higher officers of Indian origin, in comparison. Because, as an “unformed” persona, he will take less time in ‘converting’ (440) to decolonization or nationalization. This happens almost predictive in Kishan's case, as he meets his end ‘at Arjun's hand’ only after an informal court martial, ‘surrounded’ by Indian planters of Malay (526). Nothing could be more ironical than this with the kind of trust that was shared between them, a ‘desperate loyalty’ (332) of Kishan for Arjun throughout.

The above mentioned characters are some of the representatives of colonized influence over the natives. Tingda Mingyi, Burmese Royal minister is also a link in this chain. He is one of the covert collaborators of colonists who changed their loyalty easily in expectation of a better reward. It can't be denied that without any high power wielding support, imperialism could not establish itself so easily and for so long. Ronald Robinson writes in the same context –

“Any new theory must recognize that imperialism was as much a function of its victims’ collaboration or non-collaboration of their indigenous politics, as it was of European expansion”<sup>48</sup>.

In all the Asian colonies, some native authorities can be found out concurring in permitting European penetration. The British could easily occupy the country militarily afterwards with the dramatic overshadowing of that sector. Be it Nawab Mir Jafar of Bengal in India, the Pasha and Khedive of Egypt, or Karens and the Christian Burman *Kalla*'s holding posts in King Bagyidaw's tenure. They helped the British in “the colonial wars of conquest in 1824, 1852 and 1885”<sup>49</sup>; which proved to be the last nail in the coffin. Karens verified themselves as traitors by working for British intrigues, showing more allegiance towards religion than the reign/ crown. Unfortunately this segregation created by the British, as among Hindu- Muslim in India still seeps deep down the independent nation. Amitav Ghosh shows the unwanted effect of this on Burmese history in the form of confrontation between Burmese and Karen National Union in his other book *Dancing in Cambodia, At large in Burma* (1998).

Perhaps such revolting groups could not gauge out that changing one master for another is no solution, as ‘we are not pigs or dogs...’ (428), to follow US or Japan, King Thebaw or the British? But this is how colonialism established itself – by promising people “to set free of bad kings and evil customs!”(224).

Amitav Ghosh's reference to these historical facts in the story line of *The Glass Palace* can be taken as a waking call. What began as ‘a dispute of Burma with a British timber company’, a technical trade matter, reached very soon the Royal courtyard. The British-Burma communication metamorphosed in humiliating “ultimatums” (22) and battle threats. The king's senior most minister, the Kinwun Mingyi suggested him “to accept the terms” (21), otherwise Royal Family will not be “allowed to remain in the Mandalay palace”(22) as they had done in India. The king and the Queen knew it well,



what the British meant by acceptance of terms - it would be nothing less than forfeiting their whole authority and sovereignty, or finally meeting their Waterloo! Ghosh compares this kind of living to “farmyard pigs... tricked out with a few little bits of money” (22), at their disposal.

The queen Supayalat of course, set her foot down against accepting any proposal for ‘surrender’ (22). Taingda Mingyi follows the Kinwin in accepting the British condition at their levels, seeing deliverance and advancement in such political changes. Because they knew “the British would be grateful to whoever handed over the royal couple; there would be rich rewards” (25).

Taingda kept producing one telegram after “another about victories, even though the British had been inching forward” (22) with all vigour and confidence. The ministers kept the Royal Family in dark about it for a substantial time with deception. It is apparent that without voluntary or enforced cooperation of the governing elites, without indigenous collaboration, the British could not conquer and assemble a whole empire. As the boat owner informs young Raj Kumar- “What we hear on the water front is quite different from what’s said in the city” (17).

No wonder, Saya John and other outsiders, ‘subalterns’, find the Royal Proclamations filled with high sounding promise and ‘brave words’(16) with little semblance in words and action. The war lasted just fourteen days, and the Burmese army surrendered without informing King Thebaw (26). Here, one can call characters like Raj Kumar and John to be ‘subalterns’, pausing just for a moment, as they show “possession of a sovereign consciousness, a defining reason; with freedom of perception”<sup>50</sup>. But they are mere subjects, at the periphery of the Burmese multicultural society, so are unheard and unheeded. They had authentic information but to reach it to the King, getting access to his attention after scaling all the high and imposing gates of Mandalay palace was an uphill, Herculean task. The chattering Raj Kumar as eleven years old worker of Ma Cho is shirked aside by the natives, as he had been insulted by his employer (18) – “He was grinning a little sheepishly, as though embarrassed to parade his precocious knowingness” (03).

Here comes the other significant aspect of Ghosh’s writing- he’s writing not only against the West, but also against the East in a way, by not succumbing to the history of the records, of the well placed, of the Royal Family only. He comes down to the grass

root level when he makes, Rajkumar, the protagonist of the novel, a source of linking all the historical events and themes he touches upon. Ghosh celebrates the common folk who make the very fabric, the backbone of any society, any nation and its history but they remain forgotten, unacknowledged. As Rukmini Bhaya Nair observes, by dwelling on small details and bestowing on ordinary lives an attention that the historian's stricter annals cannot afford, 'a writer creates an interior history'<sup>51</sup>. Besides this, one can add that this novel tries to focus on an 'exterior history' which never got an entry into the annals.

So, Raj Kumar, an orphan in not one sense only, with a high sounding name shines forth throughout the novel, as the main protagonist, alighting upon the rest of the characters' lives. His name meant 'the Prince' and Ghosh is quick in adding – "He was anything but princely in appearance" (04) or in fortune. The juvenile Raj Kumar lost all his family members to the Cholera fever in Akyab, the coast between Burma and Bengal. This area 'collided in a whirlpool of unease' (13) but lent the positive qualities to this rare epidemic survivor. He had few assets of a normal boy, singled out for his unusual destiny. Though his parents and family were not there to assure him a smooth passage, he seemed most comfortable with changing times. His adventures help us presume that he was a person "greedy for life" (471), for all its pleasures and blessings.

Raj Kumar, under the apprenticeship of Saya John, with his personal qualities of determination, diligence and confidence, graduated from one brilliant success to another. From a wandering street urchin to a labourer- contractor (125) heading to India with Saya John's loan (128), to bidding for a timber contract with the big English company (130) and winning – it was an astoundingly swift journey to unprecedented success for an uneducated *kaala* in Burma! He believed in taking chance, trying luck and good links without fear of losing anything. His confidence glowed vividly as he used to say, "...If I'm ever going to make this business grow, I'll have to take a few risks" (130). Saya John, in spite of all doubts and trepidation regarding the big deal with the British company, could sense in Raj Kumar that the boy had already lived a lifetime, and "...from the look of him now it was clear that he was embarking on several more" (132).

Like the archetypal hero of the novel form itself, Raj Kumar is restless and ever eager to move forward. But this unease is not to restore some lost world of his imagination. It is rather to chase a dream, which to some may sound unrealizable. Raj Kumar cashes

the 'money tree' well (as Amitav Ghosh names the third part of *The Glass Palace*), happens to be fortuitous enough to find out Dolly- his childhood love. In juxtaposition to the Burmese princesses of his age, he really lives life king size, getting beyond every paralyzing, dispiriting impasse. He is a remarkably optimistic character, all his actions show quick fruits - perhaps these are especial attributes of an anti-imperial fiction. It seems bent upon revising the long held negative notions of Orientals. By his rapidly growing business, he may be called a neo-colonialist as later Uma Dey accuses him. But the present fact is that he is a compelling character, happy and enterprising; and the world is full of possibilities for him.

Amitav Ghosh in sculpting Raj Kumar, armed with all the cherished characteristics of the White with only one exception of colour and race - sets him free to explore the big world. He gives him "a mind... curious and predatory" (58). He wished to know of the hidden wealth secreted within the forest, over which the British were willing to go for a war! He appreciates and utilizes Saya John's attributes who in turn is inspired by none other than the Europeans. As he explains to Raj Kumar- "It was they who invented everything we see around us... this entire way of life is their creation... these methods ... these ways... this system...." (74).

Both of them admire the innovation and dexterousness of the English. They belong to the cult which responded to the hurried modernity enforced by the colonizers in a positive manner. They find it exciting, the way the English "bend the work of nature to their will; to make the trees of the earth useful to human beings" (75). This is something even Tagore the great philosopher artist commented upon - "Europe is making the earth yield more fruit than seems possible, coaxing and compelling the great force of nature into man's service..."<sup>52</sup>

Raj Kumar also dreams of owning a timber yard, in order to keep going but achievement of this goal passes through some pitfalls. He joins the clan of Ramsaran, illustrated in the *Sea of Poppies*, who combed out backwater villages for indenture labourers. They allured the poor Tamils with the "shining mountain" (522) of money and food, uprooting them altogether. Raj sold them as bonded labourers to Yenangyaung contractors and oil men (124) for high profits. For this Uma found him sinful, because he was party to the mammonish mercenaries, the slave traders who did not flinch in treating humans as goats and sheep. But like his praiseworthy White masters, he was also untouched, unruffled by any morality or 'redemptive' ideas.

Sumit K. Mandal appreciates Raj Kumar for riding the crest of the ensuing economic expansion to achieve the heights of success through fortitude and street smartness<sup>53</sup>, his only mission being expansion of his 'Robinson Crusoe farm' and the hoard of money. Meanwhile, he also indulges in philandery despite of a loving and trusting family. Illongo, again a 'discovery' of Uma (236) is an unremitting proof of that; a boy fathered by Kumar anonymously. It is left to the readers to decide whether these aspects of Raj Kumar are reflective of his colonial allegiance as he seems to have been modeled upon or just the essential part of every 'rags to riches' story.

Raj Kumar is the central figure in one sense that he binds the rest of the Dickensian proliferation of people and events like a patriarch. He is the stem of the narrative, everything else branches out from him, all across the several nations and borders. He is also representative of colonially influenced masses ever on move. In today's language, he makes part of the Indian diaspora. As Rakhee Moral notes –

*"The Glass Palace* is an attempt to locate in the history of time and nations such a people, a beleaguered group of races, inhabiting British occupied territories in South East Asia"<sup>54</sup>.

The accounts of lives like Dolly, Raj Kumar, John and their sprawling family is scattered throughout post-imperialist dislocations in the Asian continent's different parts. Ghosh tries to trace the repercussions of such bewildering experiences like exile, loss and search for a homeland in these figures' narratives. Their fate is unlike those who have the luck to end their lives where they began them. If Arjun and Hardy wondered about which country they fight for? (330), Dolly thought India/ Ratnagiri to be her 'home' (112), Raj Kumar kept pining about the loss of the 'golden land (310). Jaya is on a march across borders to collect pieces of information about her lineage, whereas the Tamil peasants in Malaya kept revering India as the abode without ever setting eyes on it! (521). All the narratives regarding these postcolonial subjects are marked with poignancy. This pain and nostalgia, spiced with little hope amidst historical conflicts and cultural crisscrossing is evident in Raj Kumar's usual comments – "Ah, Burma!", "Now Burma was a golden land!" (494), and his cherished memory of the *Nakhuda* - the boatman who assured him that "...nobody ever starved there" (310).

Reading *The Glass Palace* makes one impressed by the vast spectrum of Ghosh's writing. Historical facts in records were like a guiding force but the enormity of the story compelled Ghosh to create "a parallel, wholly fictional world" (549). Regarding

the immense project of the present novel, Ghosh could not resist saying, "...in writing *The Glass Palace*, I felt that I have been entrusted with the story, a story that was beyond me and greater than me"<sup>55</sup>. After all, the postcolonial novel is also under the onus of 'reviewing facts', given to the world by a colonial history, by bringing them into the ambit of diction.

All of these incidents refer back to one common aspect of history and that is colonialism as an event in the East. It was a phenomenon which caused massive movement of all sorts on all fronts. We are helpless, but to correspond to King Thebaw's amazement at the same when he thinks aloud – "What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another... why? Why this furious movement ...?" (50).

The people inhabiting this colonized part of the world witness all kinds of stirrings-troops on the march, families and loners on their way, drastic administrative changes, commodities and services transferred on large scale with re-mapping and re-arrangement of borders in between. Rukmini Bhaya Nair appropriately calls *The Glass Palace* as a postcolonial novel having a built-in "exit-ential anxiety"<sup>56</sup>. It could be also related to K.R. Minogue's observation that –

"If we ask what electricity it is that moves so many different men in so many different places, the simplest answer, the one that allows us to stop thinking most comfortably is: nationalism"<sup>57</sup>.

No doubt, *The Glass palace* is as much about the nation as it is about the Western hegemony. Thus, a postcolonial writer and his companion characters don't only travel from one place to another, but also travel across the line dividing the colonial and post-colonial areas. In the process, the past is brought to the 'bar of judgement' and is interrogated, to separate the chaff from the grains. Amitav Ghosh understands it well and performs the duty of the postcolonial writer with all sincerity. He recounts in the *Author's notes*, that because of his obsessive urge to render the characters' backgrounds as closely as possible –

"...I read hundreds of books, memoirs, travelogues, gazettes, articles and note books published and unpublished. I travelled thousands of miles ... sought about scores of people in India, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand... amassing vast arrears in debts of gratitude" (549).

After all, the research and scrutiny concerned is not for condemning the history but gauging the numerous hidden facts, buried and submerged histories. *The Glass Palace*

stands upright in this test, by utilizing the survival strategy and re-inscription of non European realities in to the dominant European system. Thus, the present history of nations, particularly in respect of the postcolonial space that the Orient inhabits, creates a new and complex awareness of postcolonial identity. It necessarily accommodates the cultures of intersecting nations and their intertwined histories.

Now, if one tries to gauge out what is the relevance of this particularly essential 'nation' in human life, in many ways, it is again a gift of colonialism. The West claimed to have nations unlike the East from the beginning. But in the postmodern world, people have eased out on this aspect and most of them agree that 'nation is an imagined political community. It is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'<sup>58</sup>. This definition fits well with Raj Kumar and Dolly in their inverted positions, accepting a land which was not their birth place as their nations. They also seem to create alliance with Earnest Gellner's idea that 'nations are invented where they do not exist'<sup>59</sup>. But both of them had to return to their original mother lands, under circumstances with mixed feelings, had to re-imagine their nations. It is a repercussion of colonialism and changing times.

Interestingly Arjun and Hardy were made to believe and imagine that a Queen Victoria ruled India was their nation and come to realize that it exists somewhere else altogether! Uma by going abroad only came to know the value of her own nation and what it means to serve it.

The plantation labourers kept them associated with India in spite of never being there, touching her soil or smelling her wind. But they had imagined her as the nation and did not hesitate fighting for it! But if nations are presented as limited and fortified – the borders tell another story being porous and indistinct. By its courtesy, one can find myriad of nationalities and cultures flowing together in every country. *The Glass Palace* itself shows Burma populated by an assortment of people like Europeans, Greek, American, Chinese, Bengali, Mezorami, Manipuri, Gujrati, Corromandalese (16), all inhabiting the land as home. Kemenka Minogue is frank about admitting the ambivalence and 'Janus-faced-ness' of nation. He speaks about the problem 'tormenting' anyone writing about nationalism, that while "expressions as 'nationalism', the principle of nationality' and 'modern nationalism' may stand for different things; there's a good deal of fuzziness at the margins"<sup>60</sup>. Ghosh also confirms through his works that no culture is isolated; no nation is uniform and homogeneous.

Coming back to colonialism – if the feeling of nationhood was bestowed by it, it can't be taken as an unmixed blessing. Hawley believes in fact that in good many cases, it was not a blessing at all<sup>61</sup>. Colonialism made more people homeless than national. What of those Indian labourers living in a mechanical drudgery, the hawkers and sweepers (466), running the whole hygiene system in Burma who never rose from their poverty neither could return home? The indentured labourers who could never adopt Malaysia as home, neither were they ever taken more than *Kallahs*.

King Thebaw and his family is another obvious case, not to forget our own Zafar Shah - who suffered and suffered variously. They ended up anonymously, "...like an old umbrella lost in a dusty cupboard" (136), under burden of a tormenting golden past!

Raj Kumar died moaning of Ganges not being like Irrawady (544)! These criss-crossed fates mar the grand and luminous colonial promises badly. So to counterfeit Imperialism- Eastern countries adopted nationalism as a weapon which turned against them. Europe could colonize these areas because they were not demarcated as nations with thorny walls to defend one. On realization, we started developing national 'instincts', we grew up with it and threw it back on them to be free. Their tutelage and mission served us well but at their own cost.

There is a clear resurgence of scholarly interest in the figure of the nation, characterized by a sustained critical interrogation of it. Contrary to its self image, and the generally accepted one, the nation is not a primordial category, something fixed and unchanging. But it is rather a product of a specific historical moment. In India, nationalism evolved in the form of anti-colonialism. About this Amitav Ghosh says in an interview – "For me the most important lessons of the anti-colonial struggle are those that emphasize responsibility... I think we Indians owe a great deal of gratitude to our leaders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for their emphasis was as much on building a society as it was on expelling the colonists"<sup>62</sup>.

Thus, *The Glass Palace* can also be read as a tribute to the fighters for India's freedom by Amitav Ghosh as he takes the early nationalist movement of India and 1857 revolution as one of the themes. It was the very genesis of our struggle for Independence, for which Ghosh attaches a special value to this. But we have hardly ever tried to pay heed to this almost forgotten history, under the influence of the

Western historiography. Ghosh writes expressing his consternation about this attitude in his correspondence to historian Dipesh Chakrabarty –

“There’s an absolute silence on the one moment which brings all these issues to crisis – 1857...This was the single most important anti-colonial uprising in modern history, by the same token it was also the most important event in the all of modern history”<sup>63</sup>.

Ghosh once again shows that he doesn’t fall trap to the modern history writers for whom the epic national movement was concentrated and crystallized around only to protagonists like the Congress and the Raj. He keeps the readers in constant touch of the 1857 Indian Army’s revolution through the various army men’s changing attitude towards the Imperial power. The *Ghadar* movement is another historical part of India that Amitav Ghosh picturises in the present novel efficiently. In both the cases, Ghosh values and acknowledges the importance of the real subalterns’ role who fought bravely as civilians and army.

Benedict Anderson has noted that the colonial states were transformed to national states, facilitated by three factors: the increase in physical mobility, increasing bureaucratization and the spread of modern style education<sup>64</sup>. The *Ghadar* movement seems to be a result of the same which catapulted to action during the First World War. The opportunity provided by Britain’s difficulty was seized in different ways by the *Ghadar* revolutionaries based in North America with people like L.M Tilak, Annie Besant and their *Home Rule League* in India. Uma Dey, the widow of the British officer Beni Prasad Dey becomes the nationalist mouth piece for Ghosh who gives us glimpses of the early activities taking place in New York and Columbia. It was during her Europe tour, ventured in a spirit of forgetting the sad and dismal past. This jaunt takes her straight to the heart of the national movement brewing amidst the Western educated elites and surprisingly the retired Indian soldiers.

Uma Dey becomes an important source of unravelling the social causes which made an essential part of the national movement. She provides Ghosh with a chance to look at the unknown “parallel history of women”<sup>65</sup> about which he had complained in the previous book, *In An Antique Land*. Uma as a representative character helps us understand the role of gender in nation building, which has been overwhelmingly seen in masculine light always. Women were not allowed entry in these matters openly, were perceived incapable of being rational and determined about serious matters, to the level



of stereotypes. But Uma, Madam Cama and Dolly prove such notions wrong by the way they stride with changing times in *The Glass Palace*. Uma appears as the most politically conscious person in the narrative.

Papers like *Yugantar*, circular *Free Hindostan* became vox populi of their mission. Disregarding the American racial contempt and hostility, they aimed at using the freedom available in the US to fight the British. As Uma comments that America was not hospitable but “it was merely oblivious, uninterested. Indifference too provided shelter of a certain kind” (221). Uma and her coterie understood that they’ll never be treated as equals by the Americans until they were free in their own land. Bipin Chandra and other historians have endorsed that, Lala Hardyal a political exile around 1911, found immediate acceptance among people with his proposal of fighting the British rule with armed revolt instead of Petitions. He took this message to the Indian soldiers’ mass in British army<sup>66</sup>. Uma and others under his leadership dreamt of India “entering the new epoch not as cripples or burden upon the world” (222), but with the much required new education and an army which didn’t blindly follow the foreign orders. Ghadar Pamphlets reached far and wide among British Indian soldiers camps settled in the Phillipines, Hong Kong , China, the Malay states, Singapore, Trinidad, the Handura and of course, India. Thus even in the deep jungles of Singapore, we see Gyani Amreek Singh’s pamphlets reaching Arjun and Kishan Singh with the message of awakening their conscience, “Brothers, ask yourself what you’re fighting and why you are here...”(391).

In a brief time, this group succeeded in changing the self image of the Punjabi immigrants. They were transformed from a loyal battalion of the British Raj to that of a rebel whose only aim was to destroy the British hold on their mother land. These were the soldiers who had understood the colonists’ evil intentions quite well, beginning with their advocated idea of freedom and civilization. They had come to know that it was nothing more than a deception, “...in their eyes freedom exists wherever they rule” (224), and “equality was ...always kept out of reach” (284). M.K. Gandhi launched his Civil Disobedience movement in 1939 with the same message as he said-

“Why should India, in the name of freedom, come to the defense of this Satanic Empire which is itself the greatest menace to liberty that the world has ever known?”(292).

This incident has been referred to in the novel when Neel and Manju are getting married and Uma had to cancel joining the Anti-war march on the same day. Arjun and Dinu had their own differing thoughts about the opposing people and called them 'idiots'. Uma proved them myopic and tried to explain the reality as a mature nationalist. She made them see that imperialism was not "an enterprise of reform" (294). Through her, Ghosh makes it clear that the brutality and inequality practiced by the foreign regime is the first and most obvious argument against colonialism. He confronts the question of England's 'good godly' rule and its legitimacy in spite of the reforms, courts, railways and modernization. He makes it clear that all of these developments and benefits were meant for their own comfort and access to Indian resources first. Their main intention was to 'squeeze out' and exploit India for commerce.

The *Ghadar* party could not free India with its end but it was the greatest success as a resumption of the anti-colonial movement after 1857. Its huge efforts motivated and educated an entire generation the importance of self respect and maintenance of secularism. Hardy, Kumar, Masood and many others joined Amreek Singh and Mohan Singh under the '*tiranga*' (435) and conceptualized the Indian National Army. Later the reins of this party were taken by the fire brand leader Subhash Chandra Bose posing great threat to the Empire (478). Arjun died fighting for this party (480) where as Hardy became an eminent Indian official after Independence.

It is prime time that we recognize the significance of Indian National Army organized by the core efforts of Subhash Chandra Bose. Peter Ward Fry calls this an unfortunately "forgotten army", about which we know nothing or 'next to nothing'. It was an organization with a considerable force, but 'censored out of the news when alive and painted like Trotsky out of the picture when dead'! These men nevertheless, existed and this fact sets at defiance "our normal, comfortable view of how India became free by turning the other cheek!"<sup>67</sup>. *The Glass Palace*, in its instinctive search for hidden histories, shows to the readers that the INA undertook something which was more than just 'a sort of war'. When Indian lands refused to support this group, they withdrew to the waters of Irrawady, which made them to be pursued by the British in great numbers. It was only later that Indian public came to know about its role and importance in fighting out the enemies. Ghosh has tried to bring back that memory alive through the character of Arjun.

With such flitting glimpses of the national movement, Amitav Ghosh reminds readers of that epochal long struggle of sacrifice and hardships, the fruits of which we are enjoying today. As the *Time* magazine of August 2007 comments, 'India is living her dream time today'. Amitav Ghosh critically deals with these events leading to the final independence of India and Burma. Like most of the politically conscious people, Ghosh also thinks of Gandhi as a much hyped person. As Dolly asks Uma why she had never heard of the League where as "the papers are always full of M. K Gandhi..." (223). Uma skeptically answers that "like many other Indians he's chosen to deal with the Empire's velvet glove instead of striking at its iron fist..."(223). But after some time, Uma like all other Indians does realize the Gandhian play behind his moderate moves unlike the other Extremist groups.

As Anshuman A. Mondal writes, "of all the ideological intervention into nationalist politics during the struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi's was unquestionably the most decisive in terms of the movement's development from the spectacular ineffectiveness and an elitist constitutional politics into a broadly based mass movement capable of mobilizing, during periods of maximal resistance, diverse and often contradictory constituencies"<sup>68</sup>. Gandhi emerged as the pivotal figure with his particular ideology of a composite nation which became the most durable trope, binding the elite with the peasantry, the various religions and sects of India, westernized intelligentsia with the traditional social patterns, conservatives with the progressives. The Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-32 has been described by Judith Brown as the 'most serious country wide agitational challenge in the name of nationalism which the British faced in their Indian empire'<sup>69</sup>.

Though, it will be again a hollow generalization to rely upon any one name like that of Gandhi or one ideology like the 'composite nation'. The interest of this 'composite' concept of Indian nationhood lies in its role as a signifier of deeper ideological conflicts within the nationalist movement. These are the conflicts that have had profound effects upon the trajectory of Indian nationalism in the twentieth century. But none can deny the way this concept policed the rigorous separation of essentially different cultures and developed the idea of 'unity in diversity' which worked miraculously for those particular tumultuous times.

A significant thing about *The Glass Palace* is that it does not celebrate Gandhi for an *avatar* or an apotheosis, changing his politics to a religious saga like some other Indian

novels have done. For example, Raja Rao's *Kanthpura* presents Gandhi as a "mass fantasy"<sup>70</sup>, haloed with some mythicised power, a ritualized political and a mystical romanticism.

Amitav Ghosh does not take any side, that's why he does not spare the Congress Party as well. He reminds us how it had to bait upon issues like the 'Red Fort Three' in order to maintain its momentum and mobilizing force among the masses. "This trial provided just such a cause" (479). The new historicist Ghosh questions the leading part of the Congress which was for most of the time bourgeois minded. It appropriated and diverted the subordinate resistance movements.

The incident regarding Shah Nawaz Khan, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon and Prem Sehgal is a not so celebrated a part of Indian history which Amitav Ghosh has brought to the fore. Strikes, curfews and protest marches thronged the streets throughout the country under regional leaders, without mass mobilizing of any great mainstream heroic figure. One of them is Bhula Bhai Desai (479), the chief defence lawyer who helped the victims win the case. He appears like a subaltern figure, brought to the centre by Amitav Ghosh. Otherwise how many of us know him?

Ghosh fleetingly touches upon certain important aspects of Indian independence fight – 'ahimsa/nonviolence' advocated by Gandhi is one of these. People like Uma had refuted it as a sycophantic and unfeasible policy. But with progress of time and the struggle's changing facets, she joined Gandhi (255) as a follower and believer, renouncing the hardcore Extremist ideology. This revelation dawned upon her that a ruthless and skilful empire like the British one could be combated with something ingenious and honest only. So, Gandhian movement against colonialism was "an uprising of unarmed Indians against those who bore arms- both Indians and British. Its chosen instruments were the weapons of the weaponless, it's very weakness its source of strength" (254).

"I've nothing new to teach the world. Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills"<sup>71</sup>, that's what Gandhi had to say about 'non violence'. He used it as a mantra achieving and recuperating a 'system', a lost freedom with an intention of interrogating the newly inscribed anti- system of colonization. It required an extra ordinary level of courage to oppose such a full-fledged system, questioning an authority of such stature with a denied and outlawed self. Critics like Helen Tiffin call it a post-colonial "movement"<sup>72</sup>.

Thus, *The Glass Palace* is a piece of the post colonial literature which uses strategies of 'new world' authors. It is to take up the very 'Otherness' as Ghosh shows Gandhi and his followers taking up their very 'weakness' (254), and create a system around it. They used it as "a sign of a systematic opposition to the metropolises and an affirmation of an independent identity,"<sup>73</sup> as analyzed by Renata Wasserman. This could also be taken as the 'counter-culture' strategy that post colonial writers adopt like Wole Soyinka, George Lamming and others. What could be more intrepid and countering than standing defenceless, deliberately amid 'booming' (03) bombs and tanks!

Amitav Ghosh exhibits an abiding concern for the Subalterns in all of his works who do not have a voice in society and who are overlooked by history. Hawley says, these are people "who get swallowed up by the powerful and by time"<sup>74</sup>. In *The Glass Palace* too, he takes the case of the Malay Plantation labourers whose origin being Indian, has become a 'lost fact' and they live a life of alienation, with a rootless anxiety in foreign lands. Very few writers like V.S. Naipaul have taken this group as subject matter in works like *The Middle Passage*, *The Loss of El Dorado*, *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *A Turn in the South*.

Amitav Ghosh shows how contractors like Babu Rao and Raj Kumar hunted out the most battered villages, drew contracts that were usually not honoured. They promised for money, gold, rubies and all of their undreamt luxuries –

"And all of these can be yours too. Not in your next life, not next year. Now! They could be yours now. All you need is an able bodied man...to put his thumbprint on this sheet of paper..." (126).

Ramya Sivraj writes about this phenomenon of willing exile that from "1829 to 1929-roughly five lacs of impecunious people from India's exhausted hinter lands had migrated to places like Mauritius, Caribbean Islands, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Burma"<sup>75</sup>. The bulk came from Tamil, Telugu, Madrasi and Bihari sects, willing to give up their deeply held religious belief and part with their loved ones in hope of a better life. This period saw India in the throes of famine and too many people with little or no work to do. So they made good 'coolies' for the colonials in their colonies. Saya John compares them with Chinese and comments – "... For a few coins they would allow their masters to use them as they wished; to destroy every trace of resistance to the power to the English..." (29).

The word 'Coolie' was a convenient epithet; though quite a fitting stand in for slave like drudgery they went through, as the Africans did before their liberation. Coolies were the pillars on which the modern economics were built. That's why Matthew John tells Uma about the success of his Morningside Rubber Estate, "Every rubber tree in Malaya was paid for with an Indian life"(233). Arthur Martial (1899-1951), a Mauritian author had to say the same, "The Indian is the soul of the estate- nay! – he is the soul of the sugar industry itself"<sup>76</sup>. In places like Burma, for example the *Mughal* street witnessed their influx as completely altering the social fabric. At one point they virtually outnumbered their White masters or even natives. Amitav Ghosh records the very Burmese civil management collapsing down with "a stench of nightsoil" (466), on evacuation of Indian labourers under threat of Japanese attack. All of such instances replicate the fact regarding 'agreement based labourers', their trade to foreign lands and the existence of a society consisted of them.

But these labourers did not remain 'puppets' forever as neo-colonialist Saya John believed them to be. We see a transformation in their mental state through the character of Rajan and others who joined the rebellious Indian National Army. They worked with people like Amreek, Hardayal, Arjun Roy and Kishan Singh. Arjun informs, how their unit was – "...evenly split between professional soldiers and volunteers... were recruits from the Indian population in Malaya and most of them were Tamil plantation workers" (520).

These South Indian people proved the old myths of race and regions wrong, created and practised by the English masters regarding their non-recruitment in army. They testified them false as an ill conceived idea and a conceited decision by demonstrating their natural bravery and sacrificial spirit for an unseen native land. Trained officers like Roy felt like nihilistic mercenaries in comparison to their selfless worshipping of nationalism for India, which "they had never seen; a country that had extruded their parents and cut them off" (522). They work intrepidly like the *Kanthapura* villagers as soldiers, and despite destruction, look forward to a better future.

Plantation work was "a metaphor of slavery" for them, which they wished to fight against. Though, technically they enjoyed much more freedom than in India, shackled by the rigid caste, class differences. Their demand was for a decent, human life. They fought for a day which was not run like 'clock-work from sunup to sundown'. As Rajan says, "It was being made into a machine: having your mind taken away and replaced by

a ...mechanism..." (522). For them, it was worse than being animals because even they have the autonomy of their instincts. One is reminded of the Black rebel slave Nat Turner's clarion call against White American masters in Virginia around 1830's –

"Remember that we do not go forth for the sake of blood carnage... that ours is not a war for robbery and to satisfy our passions; it is a struggle for freedom ... our race is to be delivered from slavery" 77.

Rajan and his fellows had no intention of returning to their long deserted nation, they wished to continue taking India as "a sacrament of redemption – a metaphor for freedom" (522) while being in their 'necessary exiles'. Their furore was against the Whites anywhere, which infuriated even Uma against Matthew and Raj Kumar who were *the mimic men*, as Naipaul has entitled one of his novels. They were the *mimic* colonizers who employed and exploited their own native fellows in places like Muster estates. They used this proletarian group 'greedily', with a 'determination to take everything', like 'slavers' (233). Uma argued against it vociferously and strained her long lasting relationship with Raj Kumar for some time.

The plantation labourers were victims of a domination which was exercised over them without any overt conflict. Rather it was done through modes of hegemonic appropriation and legitimation. As Matthew believed that the tappers working in his estate were "...well fed and well looked after ... a lot better off than they would be if they were back where they came from" (234). Whereas Uma Dey, a freedom fighter shuddered over the scene as if she had witnessed something straight from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* American civil war! It was a kind of "subjection beyond human decency" (153), an obscene use of power which always perturbed Uma. The neo-masters had inherited all the characteristics of the older system.

The 'coolie history' taken by Ghosh in *The Glass Palace* is real subaltern concern which goes beyond certain adumbrated memories. He seems to assert them against the elite historiography's pretension of being universal and complete. Ghosh proves that human history is – "...an unknown quantity, an area of darkness which the dominant modes of historical discourse have failed to penetrate..." 78.

Ghosh tries to prove that he is interested not only in the saga of lost kingdoms and displaced crowns but also in recovering the practices, cultures and groups which have been lost or hidden by the action of elite historiography. Such progression of ideas

represents an enormously powerful challenge to the majority-concerned political and sociological discourses of the twentieth century, and its normative values of universalizing and nationalist historiography. He makes such cases a part of the leitmotif of his discourse, gaining the masses - significance, an identity and a history.

Illongo Alagappan is a consciously created character who comes from the neglected periphery to hold the centre stage. He is an illicit child of Raj Kumar from one of his woman labourers. Illongo was a declared 'idiot' on farms as Allison informed Dinu and Uma. But later on, perhaps as a revenge upon the other normal, well placed characters, he rises up to be the titular figure *Dato* as owner of the legendary Morningside Estate cooperative (500), an important trade unionist (497) with a well settled family. He had daughters in Civil service, medicine and had become a flourishing business tycoon (500). His family is a case of subalterns changing their fate, using the characteristics of a mainstream individual. Amitav Ghosh does not make the life histories of these migrant indentures freeze into perpetual victimhood. He in fact, recognizes that the colonial labour diaspora is also a story of remarkable human endeavour. In fact all the major figures of the *The Glass Palace* – Raj Kumar, Dolly, Saya John and their prosperous descendents have transformed their suffering lot from victimized selves into stories of successful adaptation, community development and upward mobility.

Even Uma Dey for that matter is a subaltern woman, a widow in a patricidal society of a colonized nation. She is a doubly subaltern person - to be a woman known for a good cause and having a hold upon her destiny. Remembering their pasts, Raj Kumar in a 'lungyi and dirty vest' at Ma Cho's stall, Dolly as a maid attendant of Queen Supayalat - they all seem to have used their 'Otherness' as the sign of a systematic opposition to the metro poles. They utilized it for the affirmation of a soulful, independent identity.

The Japanese Imperial army's swift conquest of British Malaya, its hastening steps towards Burma are conjured up through the disarrayed lives of characters in Rangoon, Calcutta and Sungei Pattani. The war sunders the Empire into parts, shattering communication of sea, road and rail transportation. Raj Kumar is significant from the point of history in this novel, as a direct witness of the 'Forgotten Long March' from Rangoon to India.

In December 1941, Indians of all ranks came under the haze of an unknown fear as they felt "the ripple in the ground, a rhythmic tremor..." (27), caused by the bombs



hovering. Ghosh illustrates this incident in his nonfiction *Countdown* too. It came as a horrifying rupture in the armour of their self assumed confidence that “the war could never intrude upon them...or come to their doorstep...”<sup>79</sup> in this manner! Even well established business men like Raj Kumar Raha, Sahebzada Badruddin Khan and others had to abandon the idea of *staying on*. These tenacious (469) and entrenched, rooted figures were also brought on the road by the dread of Japanese occupation. But unfortunately, this event has gone unrecorded and unmarked in history so far, as Ghosh informs in an interview –

“It’s not been written about at all... its strange there were over half a million people on the long March, over 400,000 of them Indians, and there’s such a silence about it... There was no need for the Indians in Burma to flee when the Japanese approached – many Indians did stay back. It makes you realize the degree to which Indians felt themselves to be the sheep of the British; the delusions that governed their lives”<sup>80</sup>.

Thus Amitav Ghosh takes it as a responsibility to trace this important moment in fiction at least, to bring it back to Indian memory. So that it is taken out of ‘the volcano of silence’ and the consequent forgetfulness of it. Here the symbiotic relationship between history and fiction can be marked, which this thesis sets out to establish. Hayden White refers to the same facet when she says that viewed simply as verbal artefacts, “histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another”<sup>81</sup>. Only the specific preconceptions about the kinds of truths that each deals with, can be taken out as formal ground of difference. But this also means to imply that narrative prejudice can alternate between the convincingly objective historical and the seemingly fantastic fictional writings. Thus, the supposed walls between literature and history fall down here once again as Amitav Ghosh has been showing throughout.

The evacuation stage under Japanese threat is a little talked of historical event, taken up by Ghosh in this novel. Everybody knows of the Second World War fear clouding over the Indian peninsula as it was one of the proud possessions of the British Empire. But Japan was well aware that British Empire was decentralized within her army patches posted around all neighbouring states. Thus Indians in army as well as civilian, all were treated alike as enemy camp by them.

The departure incident spans across two important events in *The Glass Palace*. First is when Alison, Dinu and Saya John with the help of Illongo try to leave the Morningside Estate. They try to reach Gunung Jerai after the oil tanks at Butterworth are bombed out

(399) and from there to Singapore (421) through a special evacuation train run for the occasion. One must remember that this sudden abandoning of families rooted at one place to that of a search for another in all uncertainty is a gift of colonization and imperialism again as seen before. Pinning all hopes on this train to Singapore for safety, they rush to the Butterworth station with all kinds of dangers looming large over them. But the surprise of their lives waited there as they were stopped by the guards at the gate for nothing but being Asians. They were hit hard by the information that “this train’s only for Europeans!”(424)

This incident representative of other coercive practices too, speaks loudly of the British prejudice with all its cruelty and inhumanity amidst that war of all times! Isn’t it the worst of all racist ideologies which justifies life and security of the Whites where as the colonized are left as useless, meaningless creatures! Their civilizational calculus was clearly subordinated to the racial. Angus Calder writes of the same in his book *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English speaking Empires from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 1780’s* about the modern European Imperialism, subordinating the colonized by “banishing their identities, except as a lower order of being, from the culture and indeed the very idea of White Christian Europe”<sup>82</sup>. This division between white and nonwhite was absolute for them. To question this difference was like ‘arguing with the Himalayas’ as Dinu is made to understand when he tells the station master that it’s not just Europeans who are in danger. Pat came the reply, with a shrugging dismissal, ‘I do not see what’s so wrong with it (the only white train). After all it is common sense. They are the rulers....’ (425). Dinu was thrashed down when he called the guard an enemy of Indians, a collaborator of the imperialists.

This British order can also be interpreted in the light of Imperialist polemics in which the native was a delinquent in comparison to the white man being a stern and moral teacher/judge. As if the natives’ right to live was also something that he had to ask for! Dolly, Manju and Raj Kumar also faced this racialism when they join the Indians on exodus from Burma. A stupefying number of 30,000 refugees were out on their *passage to India* by Chindwin river, surrounded by deep jungles and killing marshes. They had to juggle their way out on the officially marked out black route in spite of the White route being less heavily used (468).

As a result, thousands died out of starvation, congestion and despair. It sounds so ironical that so many lives perished in the far East for a war in Europe! Manju, Raj

Kumar's daughter-in-law being one of them - mother of a newborn! But British could not share their passage, they stuck absolutely and resolutely to the principles of race in this precarious time too. What could be more inhuman than this? A beastly supremacy of the distinction with its "denial of coevalness"<sup>83</sup>, a radical discontinuity in terms of human space, sounds true as says Johannes Fabian about Imperialism. One can repeat here that colonization worked to 'decivilize and dehumanize' the very colonizers. It shows how Europeans themselves had become the most savage citizens in civilizing the rest of the world! *The Glass Palace* gives a most authentic and credible picture of this colonial paradox. Edward W. Said also reflected upon this matter in these words –

"Why that should be so, why sacred obligation on one front should not be binding on another, why rights accepted in one may be denied in another. These are questions...of a culture well grounded in moral, economic and even metaphysical norms designed to approve a satisfying local, ...European order and to permit the abrogation of the right to a similar order abroad"<sup>84</sup>.

This very cruel fact is discernible out of this preposterous incident presented above by Ghosh. The British Empire comes out as an extremely "belligerent civilization ... (which) implied its superiority as the conquering race and... did not shrink from the open uncompromising assertion of it"<sup>85</sup>.

The author is very much of a new historicist here as he does not blame or criticize the colonizers only. He tries to present the picture in a three dimensional way with all the shades and nuances involved here. Raj Kumar's deliberation and preparations also reveal one hard fact about Indian immigrants in Burma. We come to know him as an ally of colonizers, soon he goes beyond this also; and appears to be a war profiteering agent.

Raj Kumar does not care about anything as much, as about the way he would have liked to leave Burma with everything settled down, with concerns of a father towards his sons and a businessman. He seems to be too dismissive of political changes, and wars always happening in distant places for him. His flippant attitude towards morals, social and cultural issues bring him on the platform of Burnham brothers from *Sea of Poppies*. He responds to Sahibzada Badruddin Khan's proposal for a Refugee Evacuation Committee – "... You must do what you think best. But as for myself I think this is a great opportunity..." (393).

Raj Kumar waits as a hawk and bets for the best contract of his life. It is another matter that he runs out of luck, loses not only money but also his elder son Neel in the deal. But he is representative of the bourgeoisie group, for whom no morality matters but only profit and money. He is a bad citizen and neighbour in the sense that he plays complicity in the hands of colonizers, in their colonising mission. As Meenakshi Mukherji writes, "...the author does not gloss over the fact that Indians were willing collaborators in the British enterprise of depredation"<sup>86</sup>.

The last portion of *The Glass Palace* which is a discovery of Raj Kumar's granddaughter Jaya, followed by her son's epilogue; is a fictional trope of Ghosh to stretch the story to late 1990's. It adds contemporaneity to the narrative. As a postcolonial fiction, the author gives a glimpse of various nations, mostly settled with their freedom and self rule. While India is a changed place, flourishing with democracy in practice, colonial exploitation and adversity left back. She is also presented as joining the global village where people like Jaya are successfully exploring the world on "net" (497). Jaya's sojourn to Ratnagiri in search of her ancestors' impressions, the collector's house; can be taken as trope for that –

"... the old bungalow was gone, with its Grecian portico and its sloping lawn and terraced gardens. The grounds had been split up to accommodate several smaller houses,"(491) where as "*Thiba Raja* was omnipresent..."(491).

Malaysia is also on the way to prosperity, as represented by Illongo - all the under dogs are enjoying their day! But Burma was running on a strikingly different track- she was living through the George Orwellian nightmare. One might conclude about Myanmar that she was experiencing *Darkness at Noon* (by Arthur Koestler), set in a totalitarian state. As Emma Larkin analyses the Burmese turmoil –

"The most staggering thing about Burma is that the oppression of an entire nation of some fifty million people can be completely hidden from view... A vast network of Military Intelligence spies and their informers ensure that no one can do or say anything that might threaten the regime"<sup>87</sup>.

One might wonder about this 'regime' even after being decolonized so long ago. This is emergence of neo-colonization under the native rulers like Ne Win (535), who extinguished the democratic hope General Aung San and his associates and enraged insurgencies across Burma on ethnic basis (528). Ne Win's dictatorship turned the

much celebrated 'golden land' to destitution, freezing it in time with the cannibal censorship. As Amitav Ghosh writes –

“Their lives became very quiet and stunted: They were like plants whose roots had been trimmed to contain them inside tiny pots...” (537).

This punishment was an after effect of imperialism in which individuals lived a life of entrapment within their environment. The new power system believed that – “Burma had to be shut off from the world; the country had to be defended against neo-colonialism and foreign aggression” (537).

If one traces the roots of this ultimate oppressive situation, it had begun with the arrival of the British. It was intensified further by fierce battles between Allied Forces and Japan's soldiers during the Second World War. It destroyed large swathes of the country, and what was not later consumed by fires had been demolished to make way for an influx of Chinese merchants, after a forced deportation of Indians, both civil and soldiers. Ne Win's regime came as worse than a “continuation of the traditional autocracy ...with their brutality of medieval ilk” (509). Burma has been in throes of social, political, cultural and economic disturbances and destructions- turning her to 'a country of fifty million hostages'! He initiated a more than fifty years military regime, which is one of the most tenacious dictatorships in the world. Whole generations have grown up knowing nothing but authoritarian rule and a life of fear, and despair only. Things really transformed beyond recognition as currency changed, names of places, the very country's name changed to Myanmar, Rangoon to Yangon as a move to discard the colonial tags. But in fact there was a deeper- rooted motive behind these things.

Foucault and others have given a discourse about such activities which covertly aim at rewriting history. With renaming - the old names are erased, they disappear not only from maps but eventually from human memory also. So, memory of the past is also tried to be corroded and eroded. So the Burmese generals in their efforts to forget the mis-prints of colonialism, are using the same methodology and practices. Frantz Fanon writes about it in *The Wretched of The Earth*, as 'disfiguring and distorting' the past<sup>88</sup>.

This rephrasing and repackaging of the past was triggered by a crucial event on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1988, which Dinu also witnessed with his wife. Both of them were arrested for knowing Raymond – the leader of an insurgency (538). This day saw a country wide

demonstration against almost three decades of poverty and oppression under military rule, “shouting ‘Dee – mo- Ka – ra – see!’”<sup>89</sup>. But the government response was brutal, unleashing an unrestrained genocide. As if Hitler’s fanatical persecution of Jews was repeating itself in Burma - the peace loving Buddhist Land!

In a similar manner, the generals have also been trying to edit Aung San Sue Kyi out of present day politics, by putting her in house arrest for more than 20 years. But her popularity remains undiminished as Dinu said that “she’s a hope against all adversity...she has torn the masks from the generals’ faces... she haunts them unceasingly...” (542). All these prove that she has already succeeded, and in her success wins the Burmese people, their good hopes and expectations for a better life! At present the situation may look strange like Dinu’s car- a metaphor for Burma “... this is a car that has been put together entirely from bits ... The bonnet is from an old Japanese Ohta... one of the doors is from a Volga...It’s a miracle that it runs at all ...” (540).

The Draconian military rule has muted all voices but still life goes on. We get to know in glimpses of Dinu’s life through Jaya the shark like Censorship, how the registration system dictates that “all members of every household must register with the local authorities” (511). Another is Ma Thin Thin Aye’s virtual assassination as a writer by the Scrutiny board. She wrote in an innovative and experimental way, showing characteristics of a post modern writing. She stressed on multiple possibility, “using Burmese language in new ways, marrying classicism with folk usage” (532). She “resisted closure”<sup>91</sup> as counts Helen Tiffin, very much like postmodern writing which shows “...astonishing wealth of allusion, puns, archaisms...” (536). But of course, these much sought after qualities did not endear her to the Board because of the passionate way her pen took for justice and humanity.

In the Newspeak of *Nineteen Eighty Four*, the ‘Big Brother’ found Thin Thin Aye out, called her to ‘Room 101’, to ‘stunt’ her even more. Her manuscripts were crisscrossed harshly with red ink correction of a barely literate censor person who instructed her – “I have wasted a lot of time correcting things. It’s not my job to teach you people how to write... learn to write proper Burmese” (536).

Eventually Thin Aye stopped writing, as “the thought of another such encounter made those hours at the desk seem unendurable” (537). Most of the writers were ‘blacklisted

and jailed' in Burma, as there's a limit to expression and presentation of non-existing things. After all, what does one write if not about what one sees and observes. It was taboo to talk and publish the truth! The true- speakers were not only blacklisted but 'vaporized', annihilated and abolished as Winston Smith does in the Records Department of *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

But does it mean that the past is really erased, cleaned out completely? Even if they are terminated from actual sites or official records, they are fresh and unforgotten in people's minds. They keep circulating and travelling between trusted friends, 'beneath false covers from hidden libraries' all over the country and form a parallel universe of alternative truths and secret histories. Dinu tells Jaya how he picked up Knick Knacks, books mostly forbidden, from "rag pickers and the people who sort through refuse" (508). They could still talk of revolutions and constructive plans through metaphors of "Weston...Trotsky...aesthetic matters and art" (510). This could be the strongest oppositional politics of imagination combined with human feelings enshrined in arts that the suppressed citizens, Aung San and Dinu stand for. This is an 'uneasy' answer to the repressive politics of the native regime in continuation of the Imperial one. Yet it seems to be a very "gripping"<sup>91</sup> response in its very frailty, by not succumbing to the power of hate spreading politics. They keep believing in love, bonds of relations and beauty of God's creations.

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“Now with the rising of the sun, I have understood what it is: I am afraid because I know that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten. No one knows than I how skillful the tide country is in silting over its past” (69).

*The Hungry Tide* comes cleanly in line of all the other novels of Ghosh with a perspective on relocating the forgotten histories. Otherwise this novel is different in the *In an Antique Land* way, with many of factual details utilized to create a wonderfully engrossing tale. A Ghosh contemporary will feel going back a few years in the 1971 war years and its aftermath. One may also remember the traumatic aspect of the Bangladesh Independence. But this novel is significant in bringing out the lesser known facet of this incident related to a particular region, the Sunderbans islands where “life was lived on the margins of greater events” (77). This is known for being the most enchanting, mysterious and an exemplary exotic place. He recounts the island’s history with an unsentimental melancholy. *The Hungry Tide* is the true story of 1979 siege of Morichjhanpi, narrated through Nirmal Bose – a die-hard Marxist of the Bengali version. He narrates how the destitute squatters were brutally evicted by the Indian government in order to preserve a wildlife sanctuary. Thus Ghosh chooses to pour on the ‘other histories’, aside from the mainstream narratives once again.

Literature has very often relied upon landscape for the special role it can play. It appears as metaphor of human conditions in various writings of all genres – Shakespeare’s imaginary Garden of Arden, Wordsworth’s nature in changing moods, Hardy’s indifferent but domineering nature, Hemingway’s snow-clad cities as representative of human heart, and many more. Ghosh’s tides and forests weave a narrative about both human and nonhuman fate, inscribing their presence upon the abundance of human memory’s game. This innovative theme is perfectly conceived, solidly researched and clearly penned by Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide* ends with important conclusions and richer possibilities, in his “distinctively polished and profound manner”<sup>1</sup>.

This time Amitav Ghosh’s experiment with various fields of study brought into the gamut of fiction is predominantly marked with the overwhelming presence of the

environment. Sundarban is “a universe unto itself” (7). The very place acts like an important character, as the author himself expressed once, “location is intrinsic to a novel...it must have its setting...playing a part...”<sup>2</sup>. Thus the Sundarban’s lush background and rippling water bodies remind the readers of its enigmatic past. The novel is intrinsically steeped in the Indian subcontinent’s colonial and post colonial periods; opening a forgotten and little known chapter of history. *The Hungry Tide* significantly postulates the idea that every incident in human life has an immense effect upon its future. They number in thousands like the Sundarban islands –

“Some are immense and some no larger than...; some have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into being just a year or two ago...” (06).

Ghosh finds each event to be “wrapped in many layers of beguilement”, a “river” in its own right, like the “trailing channels”, with the “forests” of interpretation dwindling into a “distant rumour” (07).

The Indian Independence and creation of the border in 1947 caused a fairly unobtrusive movement of settlers out of Bengal, “suddenly making them international migrants”<sup>3</sup>. New states came into being claiming the right to decide who was a citizen or an alien, to grant or withhold authorization to cross the border. People, lives and property were greatly affected as the new boundaries led to what was then conveniently described as the ‘exchange of populations’<sup>4</sup>. It was basically a selective uprooting, a forced migration of over eighteen million peoples amidst unprecedented violence and disorder. They made part of that unfortunately unique generation which suffered the worst excesses of Partition. Gyanesh Kudaisya believes that the narrative of that violent moment passes on and “to seek it now is to wrestle with shadows”<sup>5</sup>.

Like all the other works, *The Hungry Tide* too takes upon itself the responsibility of re-assessing its troubled antecedents. Christopher Rollason says, “Amitav Ghosh uses history to let us make sense of our troubling present”<sup>6</sup>. Supriya Chaudhury also finds the story of Morichjhanpi as “the last significant expression of the trauma of Bengal’s Partition”<sup>7</sup>, which occupies a central place in the novel.

The Partition had been done on a religious basis, chaperoned with massacre and migration. A number of Bengalis, especially Hindus experienced the trauma of being out of place. As if they had been “vomitted out”<sup>8</sup> of their mother earth, like step-

children as Ghosh describes their position in another novel. They became refugee squatters within a few days when they crossed the newly hatched borderline and came back to India. They had become strangers in their own land which constituted part of the Muslim nation- Pakistan now. This led to vulnerability of a unique kind. Nilanjana Chatterji's study shows that 'threat to their life, honour and wealth' was a recurrent part of this community's assault<sup>9</sup>. They were forced to leave East Bengal and rebuild their lives in West Bengal- India which was nominally a nation for them now. But their homelessness deprived them of all other necessities and pleasures of life, living somehow in the face of "utter hostility" (8).

Thus, the much celebrated Independence brought them degradation to begging state as they were pushed out of both the sides across the border. The 1947 Partition left more than one third of undivided Bengal's Hindu population in East Bengal – causing an influx of repatriates in India for decades. The East Bengal refugees, having faced persecution and intolerance in their places, believed that it was their legitimate and rightful claim to seek rehabilitation within West Bengal. They regarded it as their natural habitat, under a Hindu government. This caused an unheeded 'long march' similar to the one evoked by Ghosh in *The Glass Palace* at the onset of the Second World War. Kusum is the narrator of this unknown history, she recounts:

"...one night I heard tell of a great march to the east. They passed us next day – like ghosts, covered in dust, strung out in a line...They had children on their shoulders, bundles on their backs..." (164).

The data show quarter to one million minority communities on both sides, almost completely forced to seek refuge elsewhere. Calcutta and its surroundings became densely populated all of sudden. They ended up to a rats' life, living in hovels and becoming objects of pity, anger and even hatred as *The Shadow Lines* refers to. Thamma in this novel, representing the middle class sneered at the sight of their makeshift houses and found them "filthy as a Babui's nest"<sup>10</sup>. This "flood" of infiltrators marred the beauty of a city famous for its garden houses, invoked by Ghosh once more in the *Sea of Poppies*. The Garden-reach lane<sup>11</sup> jostled with Burnham mansion and other grand architectural models are described when Raju goes looking for Paulette Lambert in this metropolis.

The Morichjhanpi massacre can easily be interpreted in regard to the repercussion of the modern states' construction. Most of the Ghosh's most of the novels take upon the various reasons and kinds of migrants under effect of the two partitions suffered by the Indian subcontinent. Besides *The Shadow Lines* and *The Circle of Reason*, the present novel views the same historical trauma from an untouched perspective, by piercing the density of anonymity symbolized by the novel's setting.

The legacy of colonial rule had its effects on a prolonged expanse of time. The divide and rule policy went a long way - reaching Sundarbans from the centre. Ghosh wonders about it saying: "...no place was so remote as to escape the flood of history" (77). *The Hungry Tide* is very much about the ambiguities and contradictions in colonial government's practice. It basically discloses the causes and consequences of the uneven impact of forest conservancy in Bengal accompanying their divisive policy. This novel traces the beginning of a severely restricted regime of State forest control and management during various phases of the nineteenth century. These laws were made to curb the local forest use, which was inimical to the conservationist codes. Breaking which gained the name of "environmental banditry"<sup>12</sup> in the recent times. The Morichjhanpi dwellers were also punished for the same unintended 'crime', as labelled by the newly independent national rules.

It is a common belief that while the startling development of violence and bloodshed in Punjab tended to monopolize attention, developments elsewhere, most notably in Bengal, have been given relatively little scholarly attention. It was cruel on the grounds that Bengal had ever been a distinctive cultural landscape. Oskar Spate describes that the whole of Bengal had "a common structural history and a very similar way of life based on rice ... possessing a linguistic and cultural unit focussed on Calcutta"<sup>13</sup>. The official discourse blamed the inordinately parochial character of Bengalis and "their unwillingness to be rehabilitated outside Bengal"<sup>14</sup> as the sole reason of the mismanagement and their fatal suffering. Among the concerned lot, the official attempts of sending the refugees outside West Bengal were denounced as 'banishment'. They took it as an expulsion from their normal society, a kind of 'ban-vas', "causing a large number of physical and spiritual deaths"<sup>15</sup>. This had harmful effects on the Bengali culture and language.



Researches show that the division of Bengal was always interpreted as fearful. Haimanti Roy says, it led to “a rhetoric of cultural and religious strangulation”<sup>16</sup>. The theme of ‘culture and religion in danger’ was closely linked with this incident. People analysed it as throwing the Hindu Bengalis in jeopardy, “reducing them to the position of Jews”<sup>17</sup>. As a result, after Partition, Bengal became the most overcrowded state of India. With a high degree of urban concentration on Hooghly side, it was soon to be “swollen”<sup>18</sup> by the tide of incoming refugees. The governing lines of demarcation seemed to “burst out” under this stampede.

The government had no planning for this influx; its response was conditioned by the class character of the refugees. The Hindu and upper and middle classes typically had contacts in Calcutta. Through educational and kinship links they could rent, buy and settle down in and around Calcutta, in various jobs. During 1940’s, they caused no disturbance to the incompetent government. But 1950’s onwards, the lower middle class and country side refugees’ continuous flow to India aggravated the situation to a crisis proportion. Government camp accommodations proved too meager for this huge rush. Dole queues extended and the sight of refugee families living on Calcutta’s pavements became common place, with a smoky “downtrodden fatigue” (17) hanging over them. No doubt, the social and economic conditions of these displaced groups decided their fate - the disparity marked their misfortune from that of others.

Naturally this homeless and landless community started encroaching upon the forest lands too as colonies. *The Hungry Tide* uniquely takes this aspect of Colonisation and new nation state theory that human beings are mere tools or a herd of sheep for them to be used according to their whims. This pits *The Hungry Tide* characters literally between the wild nature of earth and the wilder policies of civilization. Ghosh has crafted a balance of the classes without the means to support their claims to the natural world while dismantling some of the large myths enveloping the conservation movement.

*The Hungry Tide* is an attempt to recuperate suppressed subaltern histories with a mission to bring social justice. This novel is a testimony to the historically unresolved sufferings of the rural poor. When Kusum and others from Eastern Pakistan straddled the border, they thought of being embraced by the haven of protection, warmth and homogeneity on the alterior side. But that flight took them to the never-imagined

places like Morichjhanpi, the swamps of Sundarbans. Their misfortune denied them a life amidst normal humanity - it was rather a permanent situation of getting hanged between the proverbial 'devil and the deep sea'!

Sundarban had been a tiger habitat, a forest of cunning resourcefulness. The open "determination to destroy or expel" (8) any human presence was evident in the frightening forms of 'tigers, snakes and crocodiles' (8) all the time. For them physical obliteration was a glaring threat. They can be taken as an epitome of subalternity whose life became "less than dirt" (261). They had to leave their country because of their cultural difference. Only rich and powerful could sustain their place in the new nation, like Ukil Babu in *The Shadow Lines* did. But this was with a compromise few could accept. His lonely presence amongst the lowly setting of the rickshaw pullers' family is several degrees' changed and degraded. His situation reminds one of Neel Halder in *Sea of Poppies* who lost his zamindari through the British shrewdness. He is beset with jittery transformations that his daily routine undergoes:

"Although he was allowed to remain in his former apartment at Lalbazar, the change in his circumstances was made evident to him in dozens of different ways"<sup>19</sup>.

With no meaningful plan in sight, large number of refugees started organizing various co-operative activities, aiming at establishing refugee colonies on vacant public land. The decade of 1950's saw building of squatter colonies in "shacks and shanties" (9), public spaces for shelter "who worked at night with amazing speed"<sup>20</sup>. But the worst condition was that of the agricultural refugees, the *Namasudras*, a backward caste group with no money and skills besides paddy cultivation, boating, fishing and carpentry. They could not settle in squatter colonies in suburbs for long. They were shuffled from one place to another as 'economic migrants'<sup>21</sup> instead of being regarded as oppressed minority. They were intended to be 'used' for exploring the unused and fallow lying lands of jungle areas like Kalahandi and Dandakarnya. Nirmal gives expression to their enigmatic situation in Rilke's words; they were the "disinherited ones to whom neither the past nor the future belong" (165). For the old Communist Nirmal Bose, "this act of State violence was a betrayal of everything Left wing politics in the post-Partition era had stood for"<sup>22</sup>.

The refugees were an irksome encumbrance for the governments of the concerned countries, India and Pakistan. They finally came out with the idea of sharing them among different states. It was no less than a Black Water confinement for these fugitives who were strewn in places of alien culture and language. It was simply an addition to their plight and deprivation. *The Hungry Tide's* central theme revolves around a rebellion to such a government policy. Rituparna Roy informs about the Rehabilitation Ministers' Conference in 1965 which decided about relief camps for these émigrés "in Koraput, Kalahandi, Dadakarnya and Bastar districts"<sup>23</sup>.

The refugee revolt took them far away, in the tiny islands off the Indian coasts where life was conditioned by the unforgiving tides and the constant threat of attacks by man eaters and crocodiles. But in spite of all, they tried "to scratch out a living"<sup>24</sup>, on those impossibly swamp areas. That's why Ranjan Chakrabarty opined that the Sundarbans had proved a "cushion for political commotion, sheltering people"<sup>25</sup> from various places time and again. It is so ironical that the wilderness became a haven of respite for the dispossessed and the disinherited, chased away by the civilized ones! This is apparent in the way the proper living spaces have been described by the author. These people had turned 'elemental' in their nature, depending upon the open nature mother for everything. Their shanties and shack forms of habitation merged with the place whereas the central house built by lords seemed to be "kept at a distance...with an attitude of deference" (38). Their places were just the opposite of grimy bureaucratic "honeycombs" (30) which Piyali had to bear the 'pain' of entering and haggling for 'permits' to work as an 'independent' researcher! That's why she preferred the dilapidated little boat of the poor fisherman abandoning the "guarded" (57), official launch.

*The Hungry Tide* takes in concern this other side of the story through Nirmal's diary – a school master who chose Lusibari as destination voluntarily. It was rather a romantic flight under the metropolitan pressure of politically normal behaviour that such metaphorically panopticon prisons expect out of its civilized population. He was only fractionally aware of the real dangers ahead in this new patch of inhabited place. Another significant character Kusum's tale is a foil to Thamma's complaint in *The Shadow Lines* who made part of a privileged sect of migrants from East Pakistan. Very much like many of the riots, these displaced people became victims of state sponsored

violence in 1979, over the “ruins of temples and mosques” (50). Kusum narrates to Nirmal that when the war broke out;

“Our village was burned to ash; we crossed the border, there was nowhere else to go. We were met by the police and taken away; in buses...to a settlement camp” (165).

*The Hungry Tide* shows its people going beyond the agonizing threshold of fancying a comfortable life. They had accepted the Partition with the hope of finding another homeland in the big world of God’s creation. But persons in power, running the governments of the earthly empires had no concern for their needs. They were simply migrants overnight, which was a voluntary choice for some in the beginning. Like Thamma’s family in *The Shadow Lines*, Balram and Shombhu Debnath’s in *Circle of Reason* who left places like Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet to settle around Calcutta. But for the majority of such stranded refugees, it was a forced and coercive situation. They had no choice but to leave their familiar precincts for safety and peace. The village folk, peasants and poor minority members made up the bulk of migrants after 1964, as informs Nilanjana Chatterji<sup>26</sup>. Thus, Sealdah station became the most active part between the borderlands, to which even *The Calcutta Chromosome* makes a reference. The land less people were always in move for little occupation and security around such ‘transit’ locations. They were all destitutes, as Nilima explains: “Most of them were Dalits, as we say now; Harijans as we used to say then” (118).

Thus, a time came when the government did have to pay heed towards this huge number of refugees hovering over the neighbouring routes between India and Bangladesh. In the novel, Ghosh mentions the fatigued and bleak platform of Canning looking ‘pounded into the earth by the sheer weight of the traffic that passed over it’ (17). Thus, all those places which looked empty on surface like the Sundarbans, became crowded and crammed like “any Kolkatta bazaar” (17). The refugees started occupying any piece of land even in the wilderness, to call it their own. Humanitarian assistance and state’s rehabilitation intervention fell short of relief and long term care. These policies were inadequate for such a mass of uprooted peoples.

Thus, large numbers of frustrated, embittered and anguished refugees took matters into their own hand. The unoccupied and abandoned marshlands were squatted upon by these people in a hurry. The Sunderbans’ mangroves and mud lands were such

locations only which allured and invited these driven out people to become food for their misfortune impersonated in tigers and crocodiles. Nilima voices their minds in the following words:

“They called it ‘resettlement’, but people say it was more like a concentration camp or a prison. They were surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave. Those who tried to get away, were hunted down” (118).

This description so well fits the one about animals in modern zoos, as if for a unique example the fates of human and nonhuman beings were exchanged. The Morichjhanpi island was the rightful property of the Royal Bengal tigers; and men, women were trespassers - the extra terrestrial beings!

By 1965, under the Dandakarnya Development Authority, over 108,000 hectares of forest had been cleared and over 7,500 refugee families had been taken, “stuffed on buses and trucks” by persuasion (26). The Bengali farmers were deeply ground to the unique ecological setting of their deltaic homeland. They showed little desire as Communist cadres encouraged them to stay in West Bengal only for their vested interest. The Dandakarnya lands were not suitable for paddy crops with its low rainfall. This was quite distressful to these uprooted people. This led to desertion of the camps which was a breach of rule. It brought more restriction on movement by government, frightening these villagers even more. This man made settlement site at the heart of the tribal areas was a wrong choice basically. It was read as a lack of regard and foresight on the part of the policy makers. The clearing of the forest for this futile exercise was an ecological loss also.

The incompetence and inadequacy of the State government to deal with this deluge from the East was evident. Their subsequent plans to rehabilitate the refugees elsewhere in the country, comes as a monumental failure of the nation state theories and their claims. It has been a farce, culminating in forlorn hope.

Now if one tries to find out what makes a habitable place, worth dwelling, one has to locate the crux of this human behavior. People look for “a sense of place”, which may be embedded in the cultural history, in legends and the language. But this impression of the locale may be disrupted very easily, in several ways. Ghosh has fondly taken this idea in various of his works. If colonialism caused Thamma’s “coming and going”

between Calcutta and Dhaka to be messy in *The Shadow Lines*; *Circle of Reason* and *The Glass Palace* show this dislocation in a mixed manner. It was exile for King Thebaw but a golden opportunity for Rajkumar, Dolly and Zindi's clan! *Sea of Poppies* shows the Iris travellers exultingly discovering new aspects of existence. *The Hungry Tide* exhibits how formation of a new nation could lead to physical alienation of large populations of colonized peoples through forced migration. Bill Ashcroft et al characterise place as-

"...a complex interaction of language, history and environment in post-colonial societies which is always linked with a sense of displacement"<sup>27</sup>.

Place had a different concept for the Sundarban settlers, theirs is overshadowed by dislocation from an historical homeland. They were the fringe dwellers, for whom place had become a concept of contention and struggle especially being faced with social inequality and unrest. This is again a result of the modern states living in the aftermath of colonialism. The changed scenario today is much different from the traditional cultures which provided a highly flexible set of ways of encoding a nexus of rights and obligations towards the land.

The present novel shows how vulnerable this bond with a region can be in which a "person's emotional, legal, aesthetic and existential investment (is required) in a given physical location"<sup>28</sup>. Placeness is thus a historical presence, both personal and communal; it often entails a sense of ownership by belonging to it. The refugees in concern took place to be "a tangible location of one's own dreaming, an extension of one's own being"<sup>29</sup>. They did not have the idea of owning the land but in some sense 'being owned by it' (180).

The determination to take up abodes is very much visible even in the characters of refugees like Kusum and Rajen in coal-lands of Dhanbad (164) and Dandakarnya camps (118). Amitav Ghosh notes their 'remembering', talking and dreaming of home by night' (164), away amidst the alien lands. They remembered their previous homes like the Lalpukur people where the "green was greener, the rice whiter and the fish bigger than the boats..."<sup>30</sup>. They could not adjust to the "dry emptiness ... blood-stained red earth" (165) and smoke-filled air (162). They were water-bound people, "rivers ran in their heads, the tides were in their blood" (165). Yi Fu Tuan rightly

interprets that “familiarity is a characteristic of the past, because day to day personal experience has a temporal meaning”<sup>31</sup>. An unknown place is a space which is changed by familiarizing, by knowing it into a place. Therefore, the Sundarban islands beckoned them like voluptuous illusions!

Within days, Morichjhanpi Island was adopted as abode by 30,000 people who arrayed it properly with diligence and industry as a village (172). This looked like a “calculated and balanced community location” (172), far better than what Sir Daniel Hamilton had dreamt of his Utopia (52). Morichjhanpi exemplified initiative and enterprise of any other self-rehabilitation squatter colony, with reconstruction of all aspects of their lives on a co-operative basis. Because people’s self will was involved here. Thus, the “Refugees gave the look of an entire civilization which had sprouted suddenly in the mud” (191).

Their way of seeing the world was very different from the materiality and commodification of a colonizing power. They were not the Robinson Crusoes or Shakespearean Prosperoes, trying to enlighten the barren islands, grading people according to their civilized status.

Daniel Hamilton’s experiment of buying and populating the Sundarban islands was based on this new system only, which Donna Haraway has entitled the ‘Simian orientalism’<sup>32</sup>. In spite of all the theories of equality that Hamilton and his kins proposed to practice, the superior ambition of playing god is evident there. As if the Europeans were the only human sects capable of carrying out the civilizing design. This modern view revolved around civilization to be based ‘on property and agriculture’ (181). Conservation project is part of this new social code which wrests man’s foremost position to use ‘Fruits and Beasts of the earth’<sup>33</sup> as per his need. In many ways, *The Hungry Tide* too reads the effect of Capitalism and Imperialism like Ghosh’s other writings. Charles Darwin wrote in *The Voyage of the Beagle* that:

“The varieties of man seem to act on each other in the same way as different species of animals – the stronger always extirpating the weaker. It was melancholic in New Zealand to hear the fine, energetic natives saying that they knew the land was doomed to pass from their children”<sup>34</sup>.

The New Zealanders might have been clairvoyant, but “the Sundarbans’ inhabitants did not let the Darwinian theory to become the norm”<sup>35</sup>. Rather they learnt through experience the wise principle of adjustment and accommodation. This “widow country” (80), which “lost a man every other day” (240) as routine, sustained a high faith for the supernatural creator. They created a fold, a religion of their own which makes one of the best local cultures of syncretism, giving space to both Islam and Hinduism together. They had definitely learnt their lessons well out of the continuous massacre accompanying religions. So they had shrines accommodating Dakshin Ray, Ghazi Peer, Bon Bibi, and Shah Jongoli together as Kanai and Piyali are enlightened with the folk myths. To an outsider like Piya, they seemed to have “taken leave of the shore and tethered themselves midstream” (83), in the eye of the storm raging around.

They seem to have a code of “moral ecology”<sup>36</sup> – a common rights ideology made for both sides; the human and the nonhuman. By this, the resident community was obliged to live a life in communion with nature, without indulging in any harmful act towards other species. That’s why we find these islanders praying to the same animals which might have been their predators. They have a peculiar indigenous philosophy like Horen and Fokir’s belief that “it’s the fear that protects you, it’s what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles” (244). Thus, we never see them out with arms to go for an ‘ethnic cleansing’, for they don’t feel threatened by the man eaters. It is only when the tiger does enter the premises, causing threat that they turn ‘inhuman’! They have justification for this as well, being exposed to the fatal assaults so closely and so routinely. Fokir disappoints Piya but reassures Kanai when he reasons out the assassination as the tiger’s desire to die “when it comes into a human settlement” (295). It is a simple coexistence rule because the same applies to the human side also! The rural folks are never found abusing nature, rather they seem to have fashioned a variety of arrangements designed to safeguard the ecological base of their life.

Here we could also consult a historian dedicated to the Bengal history and its religions, Richard M. Eaton who declared Sunderbans forests in Southern region as an economic and political frontier for communities of wet rice farmers<sup>37</sup>. The transforming process of the forests into paddy fields had started in the thirteenth century with new techniques. This led to evolution of new land tenures and state formation. The Chinese merchants found their victory over these forests commendable for their “unremitting



toil in tilling and planting”<sup>38</sup>. It means that the human settlement in Morichjhanpi was not real environmental banditry or threat. Rather, they could always come out with some solution of protecting themselves from the fatal attacks. Thus, Amitav Ghosh unearths the hidden history of the global conservation policies, reminding us that battles to save nature were also battles to colonise and enslave places and people.

It is scathingly ironic that the Sunderbans peoples’ efforts and endeavour to transform the wilderness of that empty uninhabited space to a place familiar was undermined in a devastating manner. This time it was not nature which destroyed them but humans themselves used violent means to degrade their place to a strange space. The very people who lived on the slogans of “liberty, equality and fraternity”, forgot to follow these golden words while evicting these low-strata groups out. Karl Jacoby has termed this act as “State Simplification, when conservation agencies assumed that they were acting upon a pure, self regulating nature, existing apart from human institutions”<sup>39</sup>. In their view, resident people’s impact on those lands was always negative and baneful. This matches with the idea explored magnificently by George P. Marsh that human being is innately and uniquely destructive<sup>40</sup>. The conservationists seem to be inspired by Jack R. Harlan also, who has something similar to say, when he writes in *Crops and Man*:

“If we confine the concept of weeds to species adapted to human disturbance, then man is by definition the first and primary weed under whose influence all other weeds have evolved!”<sup>41</sup>.

At least, this is what *The Hungry Tide* stands for; the people inhabiting the Morichjhanpi island were literally rooted out. When the Left Front Party came to power in West Bengal, their refugee supporters started returning from the estranged and disaffectionate settlements. Because, life there was ‘horrid’ (19) to them. The term ‘rehabilitation centre’ was euphemistic for concentration camps or prisons (118). They were surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave. Those who tried to get away were ‘hunted down’ (118), as Nilima informs Kanai. The local people also ‘attacked’ them with bows and arrows, perceiving them as ‘intruders’ (118). So, the comrades who had consoled these refugees in their time of desperation and had promised a solution (119), became rulers. It was hailed as a new day! They were sure of becoming legal citizens of their old country. But these very settlers were evicted brutally for tress-passing the reserved forests of tigers. Nothing ever sounded so

ironical and cruel that tigers were the real citizens of the Morichjhanpi islands and so they could resort to be 'tiger-foods' position only! There was an unequal distribution of resources between human beings and animals. The crusaders for nature protection happened to be strong and honest this time, whose green views of earth were blinded towards the red bloodshed of humans.

The Morichjhanpi case was inimitable in one particular aspect. It was intimately linked up with an environmental issue. The animal lovers had surpassed the general and normal philosophy of life in propounding for an "ecological patriotism"<sup>42</sup>. For the misfortune of these infiltrators, the conservationists went beyond paying mere lip service and talk sanctimoniously of balancing the biomass, unlike the arm chair theorists. M. Krishnan believed the identity of a country to be dependent not so much on "its mutable human culture, as on its geo-morphology, its flora and fauna, its natural basis"<sup>43</sup>. Arjan Singh also agrees that the conservation of the Ecosystem should be incorporated into the Constitution. "Otherwise, all is lost. Time is of the essence, for once the symbolic tiger is gone, the rest will follow in short order"<sup>44</sup>. He was a staunch supporter of Sundarbans conservation. he moaned for the extirpation of swamp deer and the jungle buffalo, which caused the tigers to be branded as inveterate man-eaters. Jim Corbett, the legendary hunting sportsperson also came to a point after killing the 'seemingly dangerous big cats' when he urged people to "rally" for their protection:

"If tiger is exterminated – as exterminated he will be unless public opinion...support. India will be the poorer by having lost the finest of her fauna"<sup>45</sup>.

In some ways, Conservation policies had been strange at the turn of the twentieth century. They were made by the powerful people always. First they went on a rampage to make sure that no danger lurked in their vicinity by "cleansing" the place with hunters like Corbett in greed of searching for hidden wealth of the jungles. British rulers found Sunderbans quite bountiful not only for natural resources and wood but also for its huge revenue value. When tigers and big cats made land reclamation difficult, the English government adopted a policy of rewards to slaughter and destroy the tigers. Ranjan Chakarbartty records that Calcutta Gazette, dated 16 November 1883 authorised the rangers and foresters to reward fifty rupees for a tiger kill. He also informs that "more than 2,400 tigers were killed between the period of 1881 – 1912"<sup>46</sup>.

That's why Horen's uncle Bolai was "a hero of the island" for years as he had "killed a tiger" and S'Daniel had rewarded him with "two *bighas* of land" in Lusibari (52).

Then after some time, the people in power declared that the animals were on the verge of extinction, so it did not matter killing some human population for their safety! When the number of these endangered beasts dwindled drastically, they came out with the idea of Forest Preservation in 1878 and Tiger Project in 1973 as counter move.

The Indian jungles, their animals and flora- fauna were used with timely manipulation. They were exploited with force like in the plantation of indigo, poppy and sugarcane. But very few scholars have paid heed to this most unhealthy practice and unbalanced power use, initiated and headed by the Europeans as colonizers and then inhuman superpowers. Ramachandra Guha also sheds light on this matter as he complains about the alienation of human from nature, by eroding the social bonds between man and animals:

"The relationship between Colonialism and ecological decline is neglected by historians of modern India, who have been rather more aware of the social and political consequences of British rule"<sup>47</sup>.

Ghosh once again shows himself going beyond the restricted configuration of mainstream history, by choosing to write about the particular case in concern here. As in his other novels, here too Amitav Ghosh traverses efficiently between fiction and non-fiction, establishing his stories with a historical support. In *The Hungry Tide*, he has taken help of geographic and scientific research to unfold his magical narrative style. This is also a revelation of the unknown aquatic history of Bengal geography, which is presented as to be rich beyond imagination. It reflects upon the fact that we hardly know our own surroundings! Piyali becomes a source of knowledge for the readers about the Orcaella, Gangetic dolphins and the Botanical gardens (228). We are taken aback like Kanai by Piyali's history telling that 'Calcutta was once a big place for Cetacean Zoology...' with some of the 'earliest specimens of dolphins and whales found' there (227). John Anderson, Roxburg, Edward Blyth, J.E Gray and other scientists' discoveries and contributions along with some misadventures are also deliberated upon in the novel. Terri Tomsy finds the novel dramatizing the impact of environmental conservation projects upon communities of subaltern humans. Sundarbans had been an inconsequential region in the political economic calculus of

the nation state until the advent of its environmental significance<sup>48</sup>. Amitav Ghosh describes this unknown vast area in a state of reverie, poetically through Nirmal Roy's diary read by Kanai Dutt. who represents the readers of the present age, who underestimate the indigenous geologic culture. Ghosh writes about it as a wonder of Godly creation, a mystery of the exotic East, but in an informed and post-Orientalist manner:

“Until you behold it for yourself, it is almost impossible to believe that here, interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal, lies an immense archipelago, stretching for almost three hundred kilometers...” (06).

Ghosh also edifies here that there are borders to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. “...Currents... reshape the islands almost daily. A mangrove forest is a universe unto itself, utterly unlike other woodlands or jungles...” (07). Being the largest mangrove tiger-land in the whole world, this jungle turned into an important theatre for the exhibition of the colonial power. It caused an interaction of the Euro-American “selves” and the Indian “others”, interprets Ranjan Chakrabarty<sup>49</sup>. It became a haven of explorations for the naturalists and botanists. referred in lucid detail by Ghosh in the *Sea of Poppies* through the Lambert family. Colonial forest management was, in many ways, “an ambitious experiment in direct administration that went beyond anything attempted in the agrarian sector”<sup>50</sup>. Raymond L. Bryant also opined that the Forest rules were a mechanism to transform the State's nominal ownership into “an actively exercised proprietorial rights”<sup>51</sup>.

*The Hungry Tide* is also a submission to the fact that State formation and governance have always used spatial differentiation and geographical variations in a special way. The British imperialists did a commendable job at reorganizing nature to get an extravagant profit. That's why people of no significance like Deeti and Kabutari get affected by the powerful colonizers' decision to bleed their soil to Poppy seeds only and nothing else! Their lives take an unprecedented turn under the conditions applied by the rulers in this particular novel about British capitalism by Ghosh.

Nature has often been read in the lines of an autonomous thing in history. But the fact is just the opposite. We cannot forget how jungles of India and Burma were usurped by the Europeans as precious jewels, for revenue, wood, and other benefits! King Thebaw of Burma lost his Crown and throne for the woods basically, as he refused to

follow the newly hatched Forest Laws of the British in 1880s. David Demeritt believes that geological particularity and ecological process make “nature a lively, if socially constructed actor in human history”<sup>52</sup>. This can be related to the significance of Cartography as an authoritative mode of corresponding to the denotation of territory as a pivotal factor in state control.

The Sundarban islands’ story shows how nature has also been used as a means of history by those in authority. That’s why Neil Smith cautions that the “rediscovery and rewriting of the imperial past ... should be done in explicit connection with a sense of the lived geographies of empire”<sup>53</sup>. *The Hungry Tide* and previous history of Colonialism show that natural resource control was territorialized according to the ecological diversity of sites. The novel’s central social plot reveals that a regime of stipulating the forest use made the most fanciful mode of controlling the masses even for the post-colonial governments. It could not take issues of rural welfare and order in equilibrium usually, causing a specific reason of tussle between the people dependent on such areas for livelihood. Such political codes usually fragmented the rulers and the ruled in antagonistic relations, which Lynn Hunt pronounced as establishing of “new fields of political struggle”<sup>54</sup>. The Singur episode of west Bengal in recent times (2006-09) is a reminder of the same tussle between people and the government.

Amitav Ghosh traces this aspect of human history which allows humble social actors like a shepherd or a simple peasant to leave their impress on political discourse through the very structure of bureaucracy and its internal contradictions. All the significant characters fit a subaltern history frame, taken by Ghosh to re-evaluate the unknown facts regarding this “ragged fringe” (6) of Indian subcontinent. While Fokir is a poor boatman with “the look of utter destitution” (46), Horen “did jungle”(28) as profession and ferried passengers across the water channels. Kusum, Bolai, Tutul- all lived a starved life. The leading couple from Calcutta had adopted Lusibari as home with the petty income of a charity school teacher and the Badabon Trust for welfare of people run solely on Mashima’s tenacity (19). They lived on the philosophy that “labour conquers everything” (49), even though they could not be ranked even as “worker class” (81) of the lowest rank by modern Marxian norms. While Kanai Dutt as the rich entrepreneur, encashing his language skills as “livelihood” (4) is an outsider, Piyali Roy has “foreignness stamped in her posture” (3) working with a

“shoestring budget” (34). The power personnel are never visible, represented only by uniformed policemen or security guards appointed for Piya.

Sunderbans society had a shock in store for all city dwellers - be it Nirmal and Nilima Bose's socialism, Kanai's Utopia views or Piyali Roy's discovery of native intelligence among the fishermen. The Bose couple gets a 'horrifying' (78) experience of this place where “life was lived on the margins of greater events” (77). It is a reference to the subaltern and second rate citizenship for those people. It did not exist in the mainstream of social events. They took it to be a jungle only, “empty of people” (17). They were so close to the colonial India's heart; Calcutta, yet so few of Calcutta people knew about it. Nilima voices that the tide country was stranger beyond reckoning: “How was it possible that these islands were a mere 97 Km from home and yet so little was known about them?” (79).<sup>5</sup>

The everyday problems of these people could not be solved even with Marxist and Leninist theories, which had proved an alleviative in many cases. Hunger and catastrophe were a way of life in Sundarbans (79). Destitution was “devastating like the terrible Bengal famine of 1942” (79). The lands could not be cultivated, hunting and fishing brought “disastrous results” (79). No doubt, the social and economic conditions of these displaced groups decided their fate - the disparity marked their misfortune from others.

*The Hungry Tide* is an attempt to recuperate suppressed subaltern histories with an aim to bring social justice to the displaced people. No doubt the social and economic condition of this sect decided their fate – the disparity marked their misfortune from others. Thus, the author has tried to make the novel a testimony to the obvious fact related to the unanswered agony of the indigents up country.

Annu Jalais observes that government gave primacy to ecology and used force in Morichjhanpi, causing hundreds of refugees to die. The Sunderbans islanders took this not as a betrayal of refugees only but also of the poor and marginalized in general. Because they were Bengali lesser-mortals, of a 'nimno-borno identity/ low birth people<sup>55</sup>. They did not matter for their low and subaltern status in comparison to the Royal Bengal tigers. These untouchable refugees were the rootless remnants of Indian Partition. They were an impoverished burden in comparison to the *bhadralok*, the

urban elites who carried and used the 'insignia of upper middle class upbringing like laser guided weaponry' (34). They were also lesser in many ways, for the Bengal tiger was the national animal of both India and Bangladesh whose health and life mattered much more. So, in order to make room for wild life conservation projects (59), the government took measure to wipe off all signs of human life by forcibly depopulating the areas. All their hard work, their longing vision for a secure tomorrow slipped off their hands like sands. As if a slippery, silvery fish vanished into the deep waters in a flash! No doubt, "the powerful currents of this tide country reshape the islands almost daily" (7), as wrote Amitav Ghosh.

Kusum narrates to Nirmal that their lives were lesser than 'dirt or dust for police', for those elites who 'love animals so much that they are willing to kill us' (261). This hostility came as blow to the settlers in addition to the government siege procedure. Ross Mallick estimates that "about 4128 families perished"<sup>56</sup> of cholera, starvation, exhaustion, and in transit while sent back to their camps, by drowning their boats. A big number of settlers were shot to death in neighbouring Kumirmari and Kashipur about which there is "no record" (240) besides the routine 'tiger-food' deaths (300). By the end of 1979, within a brief period, Morichjhanpi was reclaimed as a forest territory without any human defilement. It was clean enough to be re-inscribed with a new story, a new empire and so another history.

But it is so ironic that the very conservationists who slogan for a balance, for safety of life and nature, violated the Doctrine of Anthropomorphosis<sup>57</sup>. They separated the human from the beasts, true. But they did not make it sure to protect the general population in their zest for being the 'other worldly'! Didn't they see the bestial side of this preservation act? This is what Ghosh seems to investigate in this novel. These proceedings sound so strange in juxtaposition to the long forgotten facts regarding the Sunderbans under the British Empire.

*The Hungry Tide* can be read as an allegory of the colonial authority and its inherited kins in post independence India. The atmospheric richness helps in making it a work of extraordinary suggestive power. Literature has not been short of meaningful animal tales – the Aesop's animal fables, children's literature in *Panchtantra*, *Thousand and One Nights*, Kafka and Fitzgerald can be named as few. But we cannot piece them all as one, in a reductive and ahistorical manner.

Ghosh's novel in concern can be compared with the very pivotal *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Both the works covertly refer to the human society and politics games, though Orwell does it quite explicitly. Ghosh's terms are symbolic in layers. The endangered tiger can be taken as an inverted metaphor for the dying, malnourished poor population. Their Morichjhanpi eviction symbolises the way, resource-less people feel unwanted and deprived of the right to life. This manner finds a semblance in Neel Ahuja's view that "Species Studies offers new tools for re-evaluating minority discourses and enriches histories of imperial encounters"<sup>58</sup>. Ghosh thus, brings out the transnational circuits of power and identity to the fore by use of animal figures in a closely related tale. Thus the novel has not pitted the human and non-human against each other, rather it is the way how some groups are "more equal than others". Or, how some human beings are more human, than many others, by loving animals more than their own race.

Marrienne Dekoven feels that the very term "non-human" itself is ideologically loaded: only from the point of view of the humans are the other animals non-human!<sup>59</sup>. So it refers not only to non-homo sapiens, it also stands for non-Whites, non-Europeans and non-Westerners. Indeed many theorists of Animal Studies are persuaded by obvious parallels between animals and subjugated humans. But this aspect could be seen in two ways. If Nirmal and Kanai's perspective points towards the denial of a free life to impoverished masses, Piya's stand reinforces a greater human equality. Her view is closer to Hamilton's Utopia. The objectification of violence against animals can be compared to the violence against anybody weak, the "provincialized"—the poor, the illiterate, the women, the Blacks, the low castes and *nimno vernes* and *Dalits*. Frantz Fanon has also remarked that the colonial vocabulary has always been suffused with zoological terms. The Whites have found the other side as "explosive (population growth), hysterical masses, blank faces, shapeless bodies ... tailless cohort and a vegetating existence"<sup>60</sup>.

Like the Sunderbans, the Morichjhanpi massacre was little known to the educated people, it had not gone beyond the suffering descendants' knowledge. The author's own description of East Pakistan in another description fits appropriately here, "it was a place destined to fall out of the world's atlas like a page ripped in the press..."<sup>61</sup>. Its



history was also destined to slip out of memory. Amitav Ghosh informs us of another failure of the neo-colonial system working at state level.

*The Hungry Tide* presents a critique of historical knowledge and its manifold displacements. Very much like *The Shadow Lines*, the central event could be found only in a footnote of the daily, national newspapers where as Morichjhanpi depended on a “lost-find and lost kind of notebook” (270 & 278) for its survival. Amitav Ghosh uses these forgotten events to underline the failure of institutional academia to account for such atrocities. They also mean to be a model for ethical action in the failure of local, metropolitan and international organization. Like the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, Nirmal is the only person who worries about Morichjhanpi history. He does not want this atrocious part of *Shonar-Bangla* to be hidden and silenced. He wants to save it of getting ‘washed out’ under the all hegemonic apparatuses like the national media, the police and the political leaders. The difference between the perpetrators, the witness and the suffering lot was too wide to gain any sympathy or record. They were all complicit elites as Piyali and Nirmal reflect upon human classification based on economy and development.

The scale of tigers’ killing of villages is no less than ‘genocide’ and yet here it goes almost “unremarked” (300). These killings are “never reported, never written about in the papers and the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter” (300). Nirmal noted in his diary that “the channels of the tide country were crowded with the graves of old ships” (224). If there are no changes in policy, the same will be written of the human populace of the region! It is horrible that an animal’s suffering matters much more than the human beings.

Piya emphasizes that the nature, the earth and the planet have intended the ecosystem to be dominated by particular species in different places. So disturbing this, is unnatural because ‘human kind is not the only species that matters’ (301). We would be alone enough in the universe without other lives. Dipesh Chakrabarty also expressed in another context that “humans are not the only meaningful agents”<sup>62</sup>.

‘Once we decide we can kill other species, it will be people next....’ (301). This is what happened in the 1979 massacre. Nilima is another character besides Piya who tried to keep the island protected from any further disturbance. When Nirmal called

her 'heartless' for not helping the Morichjhanpi's suffering lot, Nilima retorts back not only because it was illegal but also because it would be unnatural. Her participation would mean letting more and more islands to be encroached by humans, chasing out non-humans from there. This could only create a disparity and imbalance in the natural system, which she didn't want to encourage. Piyali's research also emphasizes the same point.

'Save our Tigers Campaign 2010' announces the countdown that there are only 1,411 tigers left in the whole country!<sup>63</sup> This is too little than miniscule in comparison to the billions of human population spilling over the earth. We haven't spared even two percent of our whole planet to the non-human lives which do need space to breathe and survive! Prachi Agarwal notes that the anthropogenic factors, the loss of natural habitat, the encroachment of forestlands and arrival of large development projects have "exposed the solitary tiger to human savagery"<sup>64</sup>. Mahasweta Devi also peruses this theme in her short story entitled "*Pterodactyle, Puran Sahay and Pritha: Imaginary Maps*"<sup>65</sup> as she examines a famine stricken village ravaged by green revolution pesticides. This story critiques the post-independence devastation of India's multispecies landscapes.

J. M. Mackenzie has observed significantly that 'the animals have usually been the losers in every fight that man has won!'<sup>66</sup>. We tend to forget or ignore the glaring fact that human civilization has always been the existential and vital link between the wild and the tame. Today the tiger needs protection for its own as well as our future's existence. The relation of man and animals is a hybrid one, marked with an indeterminate set of interlocking points. It is in constant flux. So there is a possibility that we can choose for a post-human era in which we abjure the cumbersome solipsistic position of the centre. As Piya voices that if "we crossed the imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves... we will be alone enough... (in an unnatural world)" (301). We can save the earth and the planet by giving up our reign over the planet and take our original place among animals! But this also sounds like Utopia, which has always been transient. At the same time, as we live in a high-tech world, solution for this imbalance is not out of reach.

But if we continue the Nimrod's attitude of false pride in being the survivor by destroying other beings, we ourselves will in turn transform to animals. We would not think of any morals in being disrespectful of the multispecies' ecologies necessary to human survival. The Morichjhanpi episode is an open exemplum of the same. The controlling persons surpassed the unbridled power and blood thirst metaphorised by the tigers. Tom Hicks feels the Bengal tigers' violence to be "exceeded by the cruelty meted out by the caste system and competing national governments"<sup>67</sup>.

*The Hungry Tide* is no doubt, suffused with the class and caste differences practiced in our society. Ghosh raises questions about the motives of those who plan and procedure Acts and laws without consulting the concerned communities. Piyali is representative of this lingering situation. In the tiger killing scene, nobody is moved for the loss. But Piya is distraught, agitated and shocked for the open exhibition of inhuman brutality – "This is an animal. You can't take revenge on an animal" (294). Piya's 'green' view overlooks the violence of animals which is inherent in this particular predator which "has killed two men and any number of cows and goats" (294). This aspect perpetuates the sensationalists' approach to animal violence which she ignores. She like other conservationists seems to support the narrow Darwinian epithet, and interprets it literally. Arjan Singh, a tiger lover, famous for bringing up one as pet whom he had named –Tara, writes about her hunting of a buffalo, quite poetically: "There's no trauma. It is the dance of life, where one life dies; so that the other lives..."<sup>68</sup>.

If reading through Piya's version, the novel seems to switch gears towards popular animal representation. It focusses on rescuing endangered species showing them to be beautiful, intelligent, loving and even spiritually powerful in the case of Fokir.

Piya asserts that all living creatures are "full of being, living as a body-soul... an embodied soul..."<sup>69</sup>, as Coetzee concluded in his 'touchstone' creation, *Disgrace* - an animal fiction. Both Coetzee and Ghosh, in writing about dogs, fish and tigers - have avoided sentimental treatment. Yet their presentation is profound and revelatory. This reverence and love for the animals, makes this novel 'elemental' unlike Ghosh's other epic rank works. Nell Freudenberger thinks "the novel does not preserve the human position in the world unlike the readers' anticipation"<sup>70</sup>. It does not privilege the intelligence and power of any one class.

Amitav Ghosh also voices questions regarding the humanist vision of progress through Nirmal and breaks down Kanai's romantic views of peasant ecologies. *The Hungry Tide* is very much an addition to the growing literature concerned with how the making of preserved forests, natural parks has resulted in the dispossession of resident people. The story is very closely rooted in class conflict. In some ways, the novel presents the view that the conservation movement was at bottom an economic program for re-allocating resources that urban based social elites imposed on provincial under classes.

*The Hungry Tide* explores Partition also in a novel manner which women in particular suffered by paying a unique price in the violence. Ghosh presents this aspect through Kusum; her mother's death replicates this enigmatic pain evocatively. Ghosh brings forth her experience of personal violation and death as more than a contract of silence. It goes beyond an oblique reference to metaphoric abstraction; rather she is brought alive in Nirmal's writings and Kanai's conversations. She comes out as the hero in many senses.

At the same time, seeing through Piya – Ghosh disdains from male heroic narratives. She is making the tale less polarized by vouching for a dialogic relation with all varieties of life and death; rather than fighting for the lonely, top rank. She was a female and the only voice crying for the burning tiger's help.

To Ghosh readers, Piyali reminds of May Price from *The Shadow Lines*. May could kill the pup in mercy but took the sentimental decision of rescuing Khalil in the riot hit Dhaka, amidst a mad mob as solitary woman, which became the bane of her life! Both of these females show the other side of the gendered response to situations, where as Kanai sticks to his male, traditionally brave and brute form. It is no wonder then that Carol J. Adams' research estimated 70% of conservationists to be women<sup>71</sup>. Kanai is similar to David Lurie in *Disgrace*, an arrogant, traditional, humanist and predator by habit. He took a long time in appreciating Piya's efforts to study the "the ridiculous porcine little things" - Orcaella mammals – "with no sex appeal at all" (304). He was highly disappointed by the first sight of smelly fish, very much like John Berger's famously pointed question of Zoo visitors, framed in – "Why are these animals less than I believed?"<sup>72</sup>. This is so because the animals do not have the pretensions and biases of humans! Piya's simplicity, her unaccustomed delineation of stance, the

composed androgyny of her appearance (03) make her a real animal lover, furthermore giving her the look of being an “exotic”! (3).

*The Hungry Tide* is significant for its insistence upon preservation of facts. The diary composer Nirmal Bose shows urgency, a sense of fear in recording the Morichjhanpi developments. He tried hard so that the Sunderbans people’s history shouldn’t be lost without a “trace”. Nirmal knows by the virtue of his living in Lusibari that the world memory is no less than a mangrove by the spate of events it has to sustain. It does not merely “recolonise” (lands/minds), it also “erases” time. As “every generation creates its own population of ghosts” (50) – myths, rumours and beliefs. Stories of Kusum and Fokir are marginal and subaltern. But they shouldn’t let to forget or lose. They make the backbone of a culture and community to retain their identity. The human history is a palimpsest, very much like the Sunderbans lands which are regularly obliterated by the flood of tides and waves dredged up by cyclones. Ghosh makes us aware of the sedimentation of human history, the layers of past knowledge, experience and memory that constitute our human sense of place.

Amitav Ghosh explores a vast field of human communication like language, religion, social classes, castes, between human beings and nature: between traditional and cosmopolitan Indias, between urban and rural, India and the West. There are barriers on every step and yet there are possibilities of relation between all these axiomatic collectives. Ghosh seems to be probing these aspects of communication quite closely. The fascinating folk tales and mythologies seem to subvert the official, religious and national versions of history. The Bon Bibi tales, the scientist Piyali’s mental synchronization with the poor fisherman Fokir – illiterate but a natural genius, an elite class Nilima’s cooperation to the rustics – all refer to the conciliatory form of popular social and religious syncreticism.

Kim Hicks also reads dolphins’ presence helpful in ‘making the bond between Piya and Fokir’, which blossomed into an unnamed personal connection. He thinks their “common pursuit serving as a model for future research projects that can be rooted in and respectful of local knowledge and its customs”<sup>73</sup>. Christopher Rollason finds the novel’s picturisation of the Sunderbans ecosystem as “a fresh Utopian dynamic”<sup>74</sup> for its emphasis on a conciliatory form of popular religious syncretism. This impulse is very evident in the way Ghosh remarks about the roots of the Bon Bibi tales – all

trailing to Medina. The rituals are performed in a hybrid manner, sticking to no single and homogenous group. For dealing with such a theme, Amitav Ghosh's dialectic required a type of understanding that focuses on discontinuities and the counter part of maps, grammars and histories. It prefers the "existence and persistence of speech over grammars, of memories over histories, of territorial orderings over maps"<sup>75</sup>.

The Sunderbans community for its parochial and soil-tied culture chooses the oral traditions. Ghosh evokes their conceptions of time, space and species which differ from those of modern secular representation in the form of writing, computing and recording. That is why they could conceive and practice the idea of coexistence even with their predators and the 'man eaters'. They are real natural beings whose living is closely moored to death, so Fokir could see his mother everywhere even after years of her death. Most of them had an "utterly unformed" quality of "unshaped clay" (319), which resisted change and any extra learning.

Fokir reminds us of Kishan Singh from *The Glass Palace* who could retain his 'raw' nature in spite of the shaping – forming, heavily trained life of English army. They are the uncolonized minds, conserved in their innocence and impeccability. Thus, Moyna – Fokir's wife was never happy with him for his nonchalance and unstudied life style, she herself being an ambitious woman. Moyna sounds very much like Thamma of *The Shadow Lines*, for her insistence on traditional values of life – only strength, money and position make a man!

Thus, *The Hungry Tide* is very much about overcoming differences which can cause catastrophe of any extent as the Partition history tells. But at the same time, the Lusibari way of life is restoring faith in unity and synthesis without caring for any kind of difference. This is hinted by the very technique adopted by the author. *The Hungry Tide* continuously shifts between Nirmal and Kanai Dutt's narratives, making past and present run parallel. Both time frames are also in a symbiotic encounter, strengthening each other. But as Robi Roy wondered in *The Shadow Lines*, "how can you divide memory?"<sup>76</sup>. Morichjhanpi memories may be hushed down officially. But they are still alive with the descendents of those few settlers who survived their fight between devil and the deep sea. Piya also believes in the strength of this human gift when she shrugs Kanai's warning of breaking "borderline" (229) rules by saying: "How long could they keep me... when they let me out, the material will still be in my head" (300). It is

allegorized in the incident when Kanai loses Nirmal's diary in the cyclone on Horen's launch (375) - proving all the fears of Nirmal true. But it is Amitav Ghosh impersonated in Kanai in the end who 'restructured' his company office to take some time off' (399) so that he could write Nirmal's story again. It is this gesture that binds together all the characters that had been individuals apart pursuing different goals. Kusum's history is finally going to be a known fact. Moyna, Tutul and Fokir are not going to be lost people without any "shred" (137) or share of history to hold upon.

Because claim upon a piece of history is a long process which stretches across generations and it is shaped by all the hands it goes into. Therefore, Nilima reminds Kanai of her presence too in the diary story. She tells him, "...after you have put together his notebook ...will you put my side of it together too?" (387). It is reminiscent of the way Murugan had pleaded Urmila to take him "in"<sup>77</sup> as she was also a link in the reclaimed history chain. This is what Ghosh wondered about in *In an Antique Land* in concern to Busaina also - that there are always some aspects of facts which are either left behind or suppressed by the incessant march of time. Thus retelling the past is the key to keep it "alive" (278) for the coming generations. To let them know that they have "sprung up" (278) from a root which has gone deep and wide. History keeps them connected in spite of the distances lent by time and space.

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“...the idea of escape lodged in Neel's mind- but only to vanish, as he recalled the map that hung in his daftar, and the red stain of Empire that had spread so quickly across it...Raskhali can't fight the battalions of the East India Company...” (173).

*Sea of Poppies* deals at large with the ‘high imperialism’ period of British over India, the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It had succeeded in establishing its superpower, as the dominantly ‘red’ map showed. The English gunboats had played a favourable gimmick by demolishing the state in the cause of British trade. They were far beyond in “excluding their fellow subjects from the commerce of half the globe, claiming to administer an annual territorial revenue of seven millions sterling, commanding an army of sixty thousand men ...” for which Governor of Bengal, Lord W. Hastings was impeached in 1783<sub>1</sub>. But this conventional interpretation of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century ‘formal empire’ is rather like judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts visible above the water line. Amitav Ghosh goes beyond this obvious history to show how India was subjected to intensive development as an economic colony along the best mercantilist lines. The British were abandoning all moral, social and political laws, tarnishing them to continue with the economic expansion. *Sea of Poppies* accrues perfectly to the interpretation of exploitation given by Alatas. He observed that –

“The fabric of colonial ideology is woven with gambling, opium, inhuman labour conditions, one sided legislation, acquisition of tenancy, forced labour...All were given an aura of respectability”<sub>2</sub>.

Commercial supremacy was the Western masters’ sole mission for which they changed their policy of exploitation to a sugar-coated paternalism with time. They paid the least attention to Parliament which was little informed of these merchants’ progressive activities: even the preparation of opium wars. As Benjamin Burnham tells intrepidly at Raja Neel Haldar’s dinner table – “Be assured, that if such matters were left to Parliament, there would be no Empire.” (118)

Raskhali *zamindari*'s end and its Raja's eviction from his home-state is one little instance in comparison to the British war-mongering, deadly policies. As Justice

Kendalbushe says gravely in a Burnham house gathering – “... a war is necessary if China is to be opened up to God’s word;... It is best to get it over and done with” (260).

This Justice-maker believes that war is a ‘timely dose of chastisement’ (113) which they would inflict upon anybody who did not agree to them and their business rules. So “Maha Chin’s” objection to British monopoly over opium trade was a challenge to their ‘God given right’ (115) on Free Trade and subsequent sovereignty. Mr. Burnham informed a shocked Neel Rattan that the war will not be for opium, rather – “It will be for a principle: for freedom - for the freedom of trade and for the freedom of the Chinese people...” (115).

Burnham, the serious tradesman also conveyed that ‘opium’ was the greatest blessing’, the source of wealth’ for the ‘impoverished’ lands of India. Without it British rule in India could not be sustained and it was their “God given duty to confer these benefits upon others” (115), like the reluctant China. They could go to any extent to increase the orbit of railway building as *The Glass Palace* shows, or medical research as *The Calcutta Chromosome* depicts. They held a base in South African provinces primarily to safeguard the sea routes to East by preventing foreign powers from acquiring bases on the flank - *In an Antique Land* refers to the same in great detail. They could even experiment upon human living, cheaply available in Indian subcontinent amidst areas infested with man-eaters of Sunderbans for taking the British flag to far off ends of the earth as *The Hungry Tide* shows. Their mode could be a simple trade deal to the missionary zeal for Utopist world. But underlying all these enterprises was their creation of a commercial hegemony supported with beliefs like “Jesus Christ is Free Trade and Free Trade is Jesus Christ!” (116). This is very much in tune with the Empire’s policies which changed from ‘trade, not rule’ to “trade with informal control if possible; trade with rule when necessary”<sup>3</sup>. They used every possible means to safeguard and extend the British interests, resorting not only to house breaking but also ensuring that the doors never shut again on the new lands they kept exploring.

Burnham and his kindred souls could speak under the mantle of two indivisible foundations of imperial authority – knowledge and the subsequent power. This business of knowing the other people had been “the most formidable ally of economic

and political control”<sup>4</sup> as Bill Ashcroft et al inform. The Europeans had understood this concept well ahead and in turn, were ready to utilize it too. So they emphasized on expanding their own knowledge along with extending it to all others in particular ways. But this was pivoted to the idea of ‘authorship’ which lends authority over others naturally. It began with their mission of spreading their own English culture among the natives by exporting European language, literature and learning.

The young *zamindar* Neel Rattan’s bookish learning imparted by the English masters, learned by rote, sounds no less than ignorance in front of the *Ibis* master and workers. It provides an apt illustration of how the teaching was intended to make the young minds more and more servile. While this unfortunate heir of a grand estate was an admirer of the “writings by Mr. Hume, Mr. Locke and Mr. Hobbes” (118) for upholding the rights of citizens. The English merchants had declared their ideals obsolete and impractical. Those views could be applied to their own people only. The English had rather surpassed the previous idealists in their mission, overturning the whole civilization of humanity and virtue to a profitable venture.

While Balram in *The Circle of Reason* and Neel had acquired a “received” scholarship, from a distance; the colonialists had direct approach to India’s indigenous wealth of wisdom. They either suppressed the native cultures and knowledge, or declared them as heathen, magical or unworldly. *The Calcutta Chromosome* shows this phenomenon. They also did not hesitate in ravaging the native heritage or adopting it for benefit, as *In an Antique Land* depicts.

*Sea of Poppies* takes the third aspect where the English are hybridized, under influence of Indian culture and language. Indigenous information heavily colours the language of high profile merchants, army men like colonial Chillingworth, Crowle and others, high society women like Lady Burnham and pampered heirs like Ben’s daughter Isabelle and the French botanist’s daughter Paulette.

Amitav Ghosh propounded the idea of hybridity in *The Circle of Reason* also through Dr. Verma and Dr. Sharma – their tussles and reconciliation on various ways of life in Al Oued. He shows it growing and blooming forth in fresher form in *Sea of Poppies*. In this novel, there’s no character whose English language use can be called to be chaste and Queen-like. Only Neel Rattan and Nab Kissin alias Nav Kishan speak

proper English but even that is a very formal and bookish variation. Mr. Doughty and Burnham are shown licking upon Hindustani delicacies like *Dumpoke*, *karibat*, *Sherry shrub* and *Pollock Saug* (120). This means mongrel effect could route itself even to the White lives within high fortification of power, wealth and race! Mrs. Burnham and her daughter's language had also lost its immaculacy and so called purity. Such fusions and assortments occur throughout this latest novel, emphasizing that we all are oddly hybrid with blended historical and cultural experiences. We keep defying the police dogma in receiving many contradictory experiences across national boundaries. That's why Edward Said opined, – "Cultures actually assume more 'foreign' elements, alterities, differences than (they) consciously exclude"<sup>5</sup>. *Sea of Poppies* is a direct and cogent picture of the same.

Ghosh corresponds to this idea of mixing fervently in reference to his anthropological presentation of places like Malabar in *In an Antique Land*, Lalpukur in *The Circle of Reason*, and now the *Ibis* people. Besides such social elements, *Sea of Poppies* is significant for depicting the Empire's policies and their effect on ordinary village folks like Deeti, Kabutari and Heero; changing their whole lives. The novel's strength is sapped from the poppy-bleeding rustics who were compelled to provide the opium to be used as "an instrument" of Christian and civilization teachings (116). These commoners and grass root cultivators made the opium merchants 'demigods' and built up the European tower of opulence, a superior nation. As Frantz Fanon rightly comments-

"Europe is literally the creation of the third world", with the "smothering wealth stolen and extracted from India's 'under- developed' peoples"<sup>6</sup>.

The fertile Gangetic plains provided the Colonizers with indigo, cotton, tea, salt and opium to hail the British imperialism. Ghosh depicts the monopoly stage of Capitalism, as framed in this novel. V.I. Lenin rightly interpreted this transition in "creating large scale industry and eliminating small industry, replacing large scale industry by still larger scale industry, finally leading to a concentration of production and capital..."<sup>7</sup> to result in an unchallenged monopoly.

The Sudder Opium Factory of Ghazipur is a picture of this powerful British arm. Amitav Ghosh writes that unlike the abandoned forts of Chunar and Buxar (90), the



Factory was indisputably large and well guarded. But surprisingly, there was nothing about its exterior marked with the miasma of lethargy to suggest to an onlooker that it was among the ‘most precious jewels in Queen Victoria’s Crown’ (91). Ghosh gives us the inner and essential details of this Crown jewel sprawling to 45 acres (90) through an uncharacteristic narrator, Deeti. Her rustic gaze absorbs the whole scene, as a means of new historical chronicling. We can rely to her as Amitav Ghosh does; for an unofficial, un-manipulated record. The whole description is a metaphor for the British control over Indian people. It dehumanized them in such a way that they were more of ‘ghouls’ (95) – “legless... circling torsos” (94) without a will of their own. Poppy became “the planet that rules their destiny” (452). For many like Deeti, it became the *Shani*/ Saturn – at once bountiful, all devouring and destructive. It finally sent them away from home. This is an indication of the oncoming future of the indenture labourers and ‘chained’ kings deported to alien lands. In fact East India Company and its base Calcutta seemed to be the orbit around which a whole Indian multitude ‘circled’ in a daze. The forced cultivation of poppy, and resultant onrush of people from all class and caste towards the *Ibis* shows -

“Every one’s land was in hock to the agents of the opium factory... farmers... had no option... with the harvest over and little grain at home, they’d have to plunge still deeper into debt to feed their families... It was as if the poppy had become the carrier of the *karamnasa*’s malign taint” (193).

Through Deeti and Hukam Singh’s household, Amitav Ghosh shows how the useful crops like wheat, pulses and vegetables were steadily shrinking in acreage, giving way to cash crops. It was so because “the factory’s appetite for opium seemed never to be sated” (29). The English Sahibs would allow little else to be planted; “their agents would go from home to home, forcing cash advances on the farmers, making *asami* contracts...” (30).

The merchant capital’s penetration in the village economy caused a strange disorder, badly disrupting the old, balanced way of living. They were coerced for opium-cultivation though it did not even afford a “newly-thatched roof” (30) for them, besides the meager hand to mouth condition. Deeti is shown wistfully thinking of her old and time-ravaged hut. The self sufficient, self clothing village had become a thing of the past. This kind of choice-less life only made them poorer, weaker and indebted

to “money lenders” (154). The village continued to decay and the *Dalals*, *Paikars* and *Mahajans* operating in the sprawling hinterlands sucked away its blood. The other consequence was the impoverished debt-laden peasants and proletarians without lands, to immigrate to primate cities like Calcutta, Patna and Bombay. Deeti is suggested in a mincing, citified language - “Do what others are doing... go to money lenders. Sell your sons... sell your land...” (155).

Ghosh presents Calcutta as a colonial city for being a seat of political power lords, an arbiter of rural destiny- political, social and economic. “Rural population swarmed to such metropolitans for job and livelihood. It gradually became a spring board for rural exploitation also...”<sup>8</sup>, Palit analyses. Calcutta was the foremost city to be endowed with European ‘millocracy’, railway lines and various industries. But Sunil Kumar Sen informs, these technical developments could not absorb the up-country immigrants. They had to scrape “a living on miscellaneous employments as porters, carters, cooks, *durwans*, peons, washermen, milkmen, cobblers and so”<sup>9</sup>. All those entering the state of Indian coolie on *Ibis* further show the effect of British colonialism.

Tarashankar Banerjee is right in saying that “the growth of the internal market of Bengal corresponded to the crumbling of the village economy”<sup>10</sup>. English commerce exerted an unsettling influence on village communities tearing apart the self-subsistent entities. That’s why the ‘Holi and springtime profusion of colour’ (3) escape Hukam Singh’s household and Deeti had to coerce her daughter Kabutri to join her uncle Chandan Singh’s festive celebration. The melancholy of opium symbolized in “the glacier... blanketing.... thick drifts of white-petalled poppy flowers...” (03) did not melt for land-bound country families like Singh’s, even with changing seasons. British imperialism had flowed deep within their small, uncounted lives! Opium had caused a condition of scarcity for the debt-ridden villagers, paying the White merchants in abundance of profits. It affected the Indian social-economic structure in a highly powerful way, causing the chasm between peasants and landlords to deepen and widen. It made the village *Thakurs* more inhuman as their mistreatment regarding Kalua as a toy-thing for pleasure “games” (57) depicts.

Opium supported the debilitating *zamindars* like Raskhali Rajbari but even they became puppets in British hands. Through clever manoeuvres, Burnham could extort

everything from Rajbari, leaving its residents and dependents stranded to beg. This is what Adam Smith criticised about colonialism which was presided over and directed by 'folly and injustice'. He writes, "The natives received them with 'every mark of kindness and hospitality' but the English practised 'injustice' and dehumanising shrewdness to covet their possessions"<sup>11</sup>. So, what was a luring 'gift' first turned to a venomous "debt" (86) for Raja Halдар's family with passage of time, whose payment mounted to an extraordinary large sum with the amassing profits! The reluctant Halдар investment in opium after "pleading and cajoling" (85) by Burnham, brought 'handsome' returns but only to ruin them. "This new stream of wealth was to prove more a curse than a blessing" (85), Amitav Ghosh writes.

Poppy enveloped the North India in an overwhelmingly gloomy manner, encroaching upon the very fabric of social relations. Deeti's exploitation as a new bride in Singh's house and later Deeti's own use of opium on her mother-in-law as a tool of control shows it. She realized its real 'potency' and human beings' frailty very soon as she started "ministering" this drug - "... a little bit of this gum could give her such power over life. character. the very soul... it (could) seize kingdoms and control multitudes" (38).

That's what the British colonialists had found out about opium long before. They had steered the very nerve of this Asian part expertly and were trying hard to ensnare the Chinese authorities by this efficacious drug. They could evade the Chinese laws 'skillfully' (85) for years for the "manufactured opium in exchange of silk, tea and porcelain"<sup>12</sup>. But it was putting the British chimera project of mining gold and silver from the East in jeopardy as China was not ready to buy anything from outside. British by now had become a nation of 'shopkeepers' and her great empire was 'raising up a people of customers'<sup>13</sup> around the world. China's rejection to comply came as the first blow to these colonialists addicted to free trade and monopoly. This is what led to opium wars of 1838-42 and 1852-60 which further hit the Indian agriculture bound masses hard.

*Sea of Poppies* is the backdrop of this stage when villages were losing hope on their lands' capacity to sustain them. British claimed to end feudalism of India but this did not serve any better purpose to the people at large. One can associate these circumstances to the English, being in "the maelstrom of an unending process of

expansion...”<sup>14</sup> as Hannah Arendt described totalitarianism. In fact it brought upon them a disguised “subjection... open(ing) a cage by pushing it inside a bigger cage”<sup>15</sup> as Ghosh himself commented about such a situation in another novel.

This transformation from feudal to so-called democratic social setup under colonialism proved flimsy. Very much like the poor lots’ namesake transition from slavery to indenture. The magnificently large ship *Ibis* gives a proper allegory to the human situation in Indian societies. In the perfectly detailed description of the majestic *Ibis*, Amitav Ghosh mentions that she had been built to serve as “blackbirder for transporting slaves” (11). But with changing tides and tastes of owners, this schooner was quickly put in use as a trade ship for export of opium under the new master Benjamin Brightwell Burnham. This ambitious merchant presumes himself to be generous in saying –

“A hold that was designed to carry slaves will serve just as well to carry coolies and convicts... the darkies needn’t always be fouling themselves...” (80).

Soon, this immense ship became home to a number of lascars coming from far apart places ‘around the Indian Ocean: East Africans, Arabs, Malays, Bengalis, Goans, Tamils, Arakanese and Chinese’ (13). They presented a completely different culture to the ship members like Zachary Reid and the mates.

The *Ibis* journey marks the departure of first indenture labourers’ consignment to Mauritius. Here every person has a tale to oneself, adjoined to the big spectrum of Imperialism. Every one of them has been a victim of circumstances, in one or the other way. Their boarding upon *Ibis* underlines their wish for a good change - to go away from the economic devastation, social exploitation and political impotence. The majority of the men folk made the unemployed bulk of the country for being landless, unskilled and left out by the machine-driven, changing works nature.

There was a large number of people ‘evicted’ from their squatted colonies reminding us of “refugees” (71) and *The Hungry Tide* tales. Some of them like Kalua, were victimized for being low castes and showing a disobedience to Deeti’s high caste family rituals. While other women were facing punishment for having a different luck either as a barren or a poor, sexually harassed or a lonely, widowed person. A traditional society had no space for such peculiar cases, so abandoning it seemed the

only option in an impossibly restricted situation. They consented to join a contract based life as 'Girtmitya labourers' (71), to get away from the doomed geography of hunger and to nourish their shrunken bellies. "It was a new human dereliction in the pattern of what had gone before..."<sup>16</sup> V.S Naipaul informs in *The Loss of El Dorado* about the same subject. We can also say that it was keeping in line of the age old practice of 'primitive accumulation', about which Robin Blackburn opens up a vast new field of research and knowledge, when he notes:

"...this was not an episode or a moment, not a fateful biting of the apple ... but a continuing and relentless process whereby capitalist accumulation battens on pre-capitalist modes of exploitation, greatly extending their scope, until it has exhausted or transformed them"<sup>17</sup>.

They were the indenture labourers, a disguised form of slaves once the 'slavery abolition laws' were passed in European countries after heated debates. This abolitionism was not only because of a new spirit of sensitivity to evils long taken for granted. But it was also because of social conflicts within the metropolitan countries and the rivalries among the European powers. Legality of the sea borne slave trade was questioned and attacked by all concerned with social welfare. Duignan and Gann inform while Denmark made an honourable start in 1792, British could prohibit slave traffic to their subjects only after a long struggle<sup>18</sup>. That's why *Sea of Poppies* is largely concerned with this new dawn of 1830's when slavery was eliminated from all British possessions. Ghosh informs readers –

"... in the years since the formal abolition..., British and American naval vessels had taken to patrolling the West African coast in growing numbers, and the *Ibis* was not swift enough to be confident of out running them"(11).

Though the Negroes were the worst sufferers in slave-trade, the Indian population had their own unheeded history. After 'Niggers', the Indian 'Coolies' supplied them with best services. They became victims of Capital's thirst for surplus value, joining the repetitious regime of extended primitive accumulation. Their forced and sweated labour was driven to match the pace of European machine industry. Amitav Ghosh writes that "Indian prisoners were shipped to the British Empire's network of island prisons - Penang, Bencoolen, Port Blair and Mauritius" (76). They were dispersed around the Indian Ocean, in the various islands to be incarcerated. "Thugs and Drugs were the best gifts of Calcutta to the British" as Burnham wisely believed (76).

The slavery annulment caused various changes, 1830s saw Britain in a hysterical race for free trade. As the “European sugar beets competed ever more successfully with the colonial products made from West Indian Cane, the planters suffered from a serious manpower problem”<sup>19</sup>. The decline of the slave numbers deprived the sugar growers of imported labour, Zachary Reid in the novel, is told by the farm owner and planter in Mauritius –

“My canes are rotting in the field, Mr. Reid... I need men. Now that we may no longer have slaves in Mauritius, I must have Coolies, or I am doomed” (21).

This is what put Burnham in a flurry of action ordering Nob Kissin (160) and all *Dafadars* like Ramsaranji (203) every where to find ‘agreement’ based cheap labour. It began as preying upon simple minded rustics (197) till Mareech became a dream land for all those paupers and disowned children of a land in a colonial whirlpool. Nob Kissin guesses positively “They would speak of it to their children and their children’s children, who would return to it over generations, to remember and recall their ancestors” (197).

Salil Tripathi says, “Amitav Ghosh is skeptical of flat surfaces. He scratches the surface hard ...digs deep into quirky foot-notes of history...,”<sup>20</sup> only to unravel some unknown facts. One of the imperialism aspects is the powerful lobby of the missionary societies whose middle and lower class supporters provided funds for mission stations. They avidly read Evangelical publications. They dreamed of opening Africa and Asia to the Gospel and to Christian Commercial enterprise. Burnham and Kendalbushe appear as two very fervent supporters in the novel; they make the apt examples of money-backed philanthropy. Benjamin Burnham’s association goes back to the way he “acquired his faith and education” (74) in unlikeliest of all places, under the prison Chaplain of Port Blair. He reminisces -

“Oh, those preachers have hard hands, my boy; they will put the Lord’s word in your mouth even if they have to knock out your teeth to do it” (74).

As a nineteen years old young man, this hard-earned faith kept him sane in the intoxicated air of Canton. Most of his leisure time was spent with missionaries, “Churchy like Yankees” (75). His Church connections put him in the opium trade, very much like Rajkumar in Burma was helped by temple *Purohits* to get in the

European Railway contract for timber<sup>21</sup>. But the choice of products is a reflection of the characters' inner being. Burnham's practice of religion provided him with the East India Company aegis as "a free merchant" (76) pushing him to Raskhalli in Calcutta as a lord in 1817. His business sprawled in all sides earning him a brigadier's daughter as wife (77). His most profitable venture was export of 'Coolies' (76) rather than opium. For he did not demur in confessing that there are many like him "who'll stop at nothing to halt the march of human freedom" (79). Of all the people, Ben could express such ideas intrepidly to Zachary Reid, a mixed parent's child. So, this Missionary zeal in practice was anything but close to a religion of equality, liberty and fraternity; rather it served as a jumping pedestal to propel him forward in money making enterprises.

Burnham Brightwell is the man who advocated human conscience as the best barrier to fall in sin, in light of 'personal responsibility and fear of God'. He argued with Neel that "... the antidote for addiction lies not in bans enacted by Parliaments and emperors, but in the individual conscience... and awareness..." (117). This 'important Christian lesson' is what he wanted all Mandarins to realize through their Free Trade. He is the same person who adopted orphan White girls like Paulette to entrap them in Christian teaching and his personal methods of sexual chastisement! He is a surprising mix of high theories and indecent applications. His very being is an allegory of all colonial designs to entice the subjects; he is a "phenomenology of the lie on which every claim to authority is based", as Haydon White wrote in another context<sup>22</sup>.

Burnham as a colonialist views reformation as 'a disease' (79), reflecting his distance from the true Evangelical teachings. The indenture system was only another 'door opened by God' (79) for the benefit and Enlightenment of the Asiatic tribes after the Africans. Ben was a 'pukka fellow' (79), an essentially Eurocentric who viewed the African trade as "the greatest exercise in freedom since God led the children of Israil out of Egypt ... free of the rule of some dark tyrant..." (79). It means that his Evangelical training had not washed off the taint of racism from his mind and practice. In fact, this is what helped him flourish. Ben's "chastisement lesson to Paulette" (302), Kendalbushe's proposal to Paulette are examples of the religious hypocrisy practised by people in power.

But for this, Burnham can't be blamed; for it was his livelihood to nourish upon the sweat and blood of the poor people as merchant. Even persons like Karl Marx also defended the cause of colonialism in India, hailing Britain as a tool of history. This great thinker of liberation theories believed – "...English intervention... [in India], produced the greatest and to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia"<sup>23</sup>.

The journey of *Ibis* can be taken as a symbol for the colonial power, corresponding to how the world was shaped for Europe through Cartography, missionary associations and Enlightenment theories. Nicholas B. Dirks finds this writ large in "ships' logs, narrative route-maps ... boundaries, treaties' texts, newly discovered spaces' naming and appropriating and many other things"<sup>24</sup>. The *Ibis* seems to represent the English might overriding all, as she 'swims like a swan and ...steers like a shark...' (77). Ghosh further writes –

"The *Ibis* seemed to grow ever more exuberant as she went lashing along on the open sea (424), ...the alchemy of the open water had endowed her (*Ibis*) with her own will, her own life" (425).

*Sea of Poppies* shows how all the roads had diverged from Rome to Britain on water, land and air equally during this high time! British roots had spread wide over the whole world, as the sun never set in her Empire in the nineteenth Century. It had been opened to her, full of incentives for accumulation of all kinds from knowledge to spices, all kinds of objects to human beings. Sir Vidya Naipaul has also recorded that the British Empire came to Trinidad as an empire of plantations and Negroes with "the whip, the brandishing iron, the knife (for cutting off Negro ears), the stake and the torture cells..."<sup>25</sup>.

This is just the contrast of what the colonial demigods in the *Sea of Poppies* and everywhere claimed to give in exchange of the Eastern gifts- 'the benefits that British rule has conferred upon India' (115), 'the God-given duty of the British' (115), and how 'India... had recently been opened to the benefits of civilization' (235). The Jury conducting Raja Neel Rattan Haldar's trial also hammers it down that to fail to chasten a child was thereby 'being guilty of shirking the responsibilities of guardianship' (236). The 'child' mentioned here of course, means the tutored country India which was to be trained and taught by the disciplinary English masters. Their



“obligation ... imposed by Almighty himself was... the welfare of such races as were still in the infancy of civilization” (236). It was this sacred burden which required Neel Rattan’s ‘properties to be seized and sold’,... and he himself is to be ‘transported to the penal settlement on the Mauritius Islands for seven years’ (240). Amidst all this sermonizing, Amitav Ghosh the new historical, post-colonial author speaks through Neel who is in a stream of sub-consciousness, responding to each of the allegations inaudibly in his mind. Ghosh writes –

“In the course of his trial it had become almost laughably obvious to Neel that in this system of justice it was the English themselves - Mr. Burnham and his ilk – who were exempt from the law as it applied to others: it was they who had become the world’s new Brahmins”, (239). They had become the latest “...twice-borns” (77).

The Jury is simply wording Jules Harmond, a French advocate of colonialism who said, “... there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations... our dignity rests on moral superiority and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity. Material power is nothing but a means to that end...”<sup>26</sup>. Amitav Ghosh leaves no illusions about the hypocrisy underpinning colonialism.

Neel could easily see through the authoritarian philosophy of a callous and exploitative tyranny “gently repacked ... where pretence becomes the dominant modality of transactions between the state and society, between the rulers and those who are supposed to obey”<sup>27</sup>. In fact the European tutelage, the La Mission Civilisatrice was only a disguised policy of coercion, an opium like ‘palliative’ (116) which lessened the sting of gradual subjection. It spread the pall of normalcy over these outrageous squanderings of one’s independence through the ritualistic laws and reasons. Neel Haldar’s case points to the way, the British brought a self-made constitution which trapped the natives by deception and “naivety” (137), in a unitary system of interconnected ensnarement. There was no way to escape it!

In another instance, it is Captain Chillingworth - the very strict and innately colonial minded, dependable friend of Burnham ‘from their chocolateering days’ (76). He becomes a subaltern voice amidst all the English ones high with the drink of success, glory and further atrocious ambitions. It is the enviable dinner at Bethel, where all the high class colonialists of consequence had congregated. Chillingworth shocked them all as the only person to contradict the opium-war cheers. Amitav Ghosh shows his

words emerging very slowly as if they had been pulled up from a deep well of bitterness, as he agrees to the benefit reaped by wars, in an ironic tone:

“The truth is, sir, that men do what their power permits... We are no different from the Pharaohs or the Mongols: the difference is only that when we kill people we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this pretence of virtue... that will never be forgiven by history” (262).

It reminds one of the post-colonial interpretations of colonialism as ‘a repackaged pretence’ being a phenomenon of supreme deception. Chillingworth’s words seem to come from Amitav Ghosh’s nonfictions concerning the state of Cambodians, Burmese, Indians and Pakistanis in proximity to the nuclear threat. This draws parallels with the modern world scenario which is afflicted with American monopoly. The present day globalization in its commercial aspect is also given a mirror image in the British advancement in this novel. We can easily compare the two ages with lot of similarities.

These are the points of time which matter for a new historical study of texts. This strong view comes not from any of the Indian, native characters, not from Nob Kissin or Zachary but from an English man. Chillingworth had lived all his life with the colossal assignment of sweeping in new provinces and amplifying the White power. In this incident he signifies the presence of sanity, humanity and foresightedness in a time blinded by the storm of ‘filthy money’.

*Sea of Poppies* can be read as a subaltern history not only from the broad canvas of impoverished, caste and class stricken villagers’ point of view. But even the European middle and high class had a section of subalterns within them. Captain Chillingworth, Sir Lambert and Paulette make such a group with unconventional and compassionate views. Pierre Lambert was a declared ‘atheist’ (68) and an iconoclast in many senses. He was in love of Indian forests and foliage, detested any relation with power. He died anonymously with an accumulation of substantial ‘debts’ (68), after parting with his own valuables in various magnanimous contributions. Paulette is a living example of his immaterial and unnaturally humane nurturing. She is a marginal character without home and family to depend upon. But she emerges as a beacon of light for all other coolies on the *Ibis* deck because of her intelligence, unassumed learning and

openness for adventure. All these figures along with the original subalterns like Deeti, Jadu and Kalua are going to make the spine of the tale.

The *Ibis*-centred *Sea of Poppies* is in many senses, a special labour history. The subaltern history has usually been interpreted in terms of peasants as Guha and Gyan do, or woman as Gayatri excels in, or a Marxian study of working class as Dipesh Chakravarty does. Amitav Ghosh has been deeply moved by life on water, and its share of hardships and adventures. His very first novel *The Circle of Reason* along with *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* can be named to reveal this long nourished adoration – the long sea voyages of yore. *The Hungry Tide* is very much of a river- novel in line of Mark Twain's works. *Sea of Poppies* appears a 'Conrad'-ian saga but 'with a vengeance', to borrow the phrase. The *Ibis* is in the water, from the very second part of the first chapter, reminding one of the *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's fiction deals with Kurtz's ivory trading empire, depicting the Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in Africa. Marlow's journey up the river, on 'Nellie' shares the common theme of looting adventure and forming a narrative of it.

*Sea of Poppies* also traces the business of the Empire, no less than a plunder with the atrocious persuasions through all means. It shows how "once an adventurous and individualistic enterprise had become the empire of business"<sup>28</sup>. But while Marlow's audience is a listening group, Zachary Reid's subordinates and underlings make a surprising mix of disparate backgrounds. The 'multiple selves' of various of the characters, the 'confusion of tongues' represent this medley of differences. Peter Parker finds the 'polyglot communities'<sup>29</sup> of both Calcutta and the *Ibis* a revelling and energetic way of expressing reality, through the multilingual British, American, Indian, French and Lascari characters. The babel of languages depicted in *Sea of Poppies* has received extraordinary attention for its brilliance and the delight it lends. But one can read a teasing tone in this aromatic, spicy mix! The non-Indian readers can find it a bit challenging but the pull of the story makes one look for meanings and go on. Caliban's tricks of tongue are yet not over, it seems.

But above all else, we come to know about the lives on duty, of sepoy and lascars in this novel. They were the immediate beings on whom the colonial power depended for exercise and transference of power. Amitav Ghosh could understand their

importance, for they made the colonial hands to bear guns and batons, the guards of the torture cells, the spokespersons to deliver the rules in vernacular to the common folk. They made a particular species of men who worked against their own folk to help and propitiate the British authority. This particular aspect of dilemma they must have had faced after induction in this job, is something already dealt by Ghosh in *The Glass Palace*. Hardayal Singh, Kishan Singh, Arjun Roy and others who finally became rebels from that of 'Mercenary' army men, makes a significant part of the previous novel.

*Sea of Poppies* catches the early recruits here who could take pride in being close to the Whites. They made a part of the military squadrons, the low ranks of the administrative and managerial services. Their duty lay in discovering the sources of wealth of their own country, tapping and extracting it and to hand it over to the masters. They were far behind the conscience-stirring phase of their career, simply enjoying the life of a regular salary. These were the people coming from villages whose fates hung upon the timely monsoons and solar-lunar cycles. They had changed their seasonal semi-gods with the tall, White and power wielding colonialists now. That's why Amitav Ghosh seems to have placed them in the centre, relegating the usual characters to the margins of this narrative. The disregarded subjects, in a particular uniform of hate and detest under the imperialist enterprise, take the mainstream position in this novel.

Serang Ali appears as one of the most prominent figures along with Nab Kishan Panda and others among the Burnham employees. He is capable of supervising not only the allotted lascar members and coolies. He also maintains a smooth deal with the ship owner and all the considerable people in the management. When dysentery broke out on *Ibis*, killing three men and causing two black crewmen's rebellion (12), the Serang and Zachary took the matter in hand to stop any further damage. They came close and high in posts by the virtue of 'desertions and dead-tickets' (15). Serang introduces the Black Second Mate Zachary to Indian food (23), herbal medicines, language and the most private of the native morals. It is under the Serang's direction that "all the stewards work" (19), making 'Malum Zikri one big piece *pukka* Sahib' (20).

The Serang was the intermediary between the Ship's Captain and the Lascars of their gang. He also served as the ship's navigator with the local knowledge of coasts, hazards, currents and winds. The Tindals served as his right hand men. Serang and his stewards are creation of the advent and expansion of trans-oceanic shipping aboard wooden, wind powered vessels between India, Europe and her colonies. Raju, Jodu, Mamdoo, Sunker, Bhyro Singh and others are some other minor but significant workers. They had to work in uniquely onerous conditions as seamen, very distinct from the coastal and land based employment everywhere. This earned them a decent position but at the cost of their free will. Bomma's story traced by Ghosh himself in *In an Antique Land* elucidates this feature very well. This kind of service was above the teleological assumptions, as the cultural notions played a very important role here. In old days, this relationship used to be based upon reverence and faith towards the master.

These seamen sailed for indeterminate long periods of time within constricted and unhealthy spaces with insufficient food owing to the uncertainty of the journey. The author writes, "... the crew was on half rations. eating maggoty hard tack and rotten beef..." (12), they had to fight even for fresh, drinking water at times. They accompanied an unrelenting hierarchic authority of Europeans amidst the deep sea and pitiless regulation of routine. Because of these work features, one can call them 'un-free' labourers as expounded by Gyan Prakash inspite of living in an age of banished slavery. They could not choose their working time and ask for rest or increment. They could not quit or change jobs at will, as *Sea of Poppies* exhibits. Anybody trying to desert the ship was liable to brutal punishment.

Historians like Willem Van Schendel and Gyan Prakash associate this kind of labour condition to the rise of capitalism. They observe this taking shape in profits from structures ranging from peasant production to plantation slavery. Prakash claims that "history of unfreedom is the history of capital in disguise"<sup>30</sup>. He makes it clear that 'capital as power' suppresses the workers prior human essence and freedom; as advocated through European concept of Enlightenment and civilization. Rather this power manifests itself in restrictions and renders labour power to the state of commodity. This "appears in its juridical form, as an 'extra economic coercion'

suspending the workers' rights and essence. They naturalize these predicaments in the 'bondage' status quo, which is almost concealing servitude"<sup>31</sup>.

The progress of *Ibis* on water shows these lascars as a single maritime labour gang. They had an appreciable co-ordination in spite of diverse origins and languages. They gradually formed a solidarity during their arduous duties and the implausibly difficult voyages. As Amitav Ghosh's Anthropological training informs, lascars "came in groups of ten or fifteen, each with a leader ... to break up these groups was impossible..." (13). Michael H. Fisher also informs that they all "shared a willingness to serve on the vessel collectively under the immediate command of their Serang or head man. The marine parlance, vernacular familiarity and expertise bonded them together as the glue"<sup>32</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh shows this efficiently throughout the unfolding of the saga, as all the lascars join together for a chit-chat –

"...when both Serang Ali and Zachary were gone, the *Ibis* was a vessel transformed: someone would be sent aloft to watch for their return with a pitcher or two of *arrak* or *doastā*: then the whole *lashkar* would gather, on deck or in the *fana* (hood) to sing, drink and pass around a few *chillums*..."(188).

It had the effect of "loosening every one's tongue" (187), and the lascars often gossiped late into the night as they lay under the stars. "The two tindals - Babloo tindal and Mamdro tindal... were as devoted as a pair of nesting cranes although they were from places far apart, Hindu and Shia Muslim ..." (188). The special feeling of communion and bonhomie is tenderly treated by Ghosh who looks at the height of variation, shades of colour, and nuances of dialects mingling together wonderfully. He comments -

"Sometime the lascars would gather between the bows to listen to the stories of the grey beard. The steward, Cornelius Pinto;... a Catholic from Goa ..., Cassem meah, ... Simba Cader of Zanzibar, unfortunate Sunkar of a high Caste landlords family Jodu, Rajoo and many others"(189).

The lascars' job was arduous and perilous. They faced the open sea dangers of attacks by noxious sea animals, pirates as well as uncertain weather changes. Tides, deluge of rains (373) and untimely brutish supervisions kept them alert. The unending passages

and a horizon-less water world kept testing their patience as the “pull of the land was hard” (405). But they got used to these circumstances; we find Zachary and Serang Ali’s fine “life ashore far more attractive” (183) because of their incongenial profession as seamen.

Ghosh leaves no chance in reminding readers of the intellectual and emotional equality of all races aboard the ship. He shows all of them at par, or the reverse of the propagated myths related to regions, languages and races. Keeping to this natural right of retaliating with reason, Serang Ali’s act of throwing off the belongings of the dead English Captain on *Ibis* (24) is one such instance. Asian and English, both of them found each other dirty and ‘untouchable’ in peculiar ways.

While Zachary’s unplanned and untrained induction in the virtual Ship-captaincy made him struggle with the ship’s log and navigation charts, his little arithmetic learning with the watch and the sextant gave him difficult times. Serang Ali had been quite calm in steering his course all along using an Oriental navigation method, which could be declared by the Whites as simply non-scientific. He did it with reading of the stars (18), very much like Mangala and Lakhan’s effortless experiments with human body and its diseases in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. In *The Glass Palace* too, Ghosh breaks down the “racial mythologies of the old mercenary army” which were mere “theories without foundation”<sup>33</sup>. The new decision of enrolling Malay and Tamil plantation workers demonstrated that they were much harder and more dedicated under fire, than the privileged professionals!

In many ways, *Ibis* had foraged an empire of its own, where lascars made the armed force to look after the Coolies on board. These migrants made an instantaneous community. These men and women with “washed off” (431) pasts, had little power in hand. Their stories, “framed against the grand narratives of history, invite other ways of thinking...”<sup>34</sup> as Shirley Chew notes. While Captain Chillingworth professes himself to be the sole maker of the sea laws, “I am your fate, your providence... with the whip and the noose as keepers of law...” (404). Bhyro Singh, the Subedar is heralded as the ship Zamindar to be obeyed, “your *mai-baap*” (404). His ‘mercy’ will only save them from punishment. Mr. Crowle had an authority high enough to insult and abuse (348) and put Zachary in danger for the simple reason of being a Black (448). Serang Ali hated Jodu, the low rank for being close to Zachary (184), could put

him in a precarious situation on a pretext (370). While Mr. Crowle could send a young lascar for a task beyond his training, only to be killed finally on the very first day of duty (230). Thus, the life on board had its own rules and discipline with such people in command whom power made to act in ‘inexplicable ways’ (305).

Neel Rattan, the high caste prisoner among the coolies is the first and the most sophisticated person to feel the pain and pining of the enigmatic deportation. He expresses it not only for himself but for all those on water, leaving their homes behind. He also becomes a spokesperson for the author, to wonder upon the British might, the cruelty brought on their subjects and the whole injustice of it -

“How had it happened that when choosing the men and women who were to be torn from this subjugated plain, the hand of destiny had strayed so far in land ... the most stubbornly rooted in the silt of the Ganga, in a soil that had to be sown with suffering to yield its crop of story and song...” (399).

But the other aspect of this story is how the people aboard the *Ibis* make a nation of their own. It could come into being, only by shedding all barriers – when differences of caste, colour and creed are forgotten. All schisms get demolished when pitting themselves against the Empire of rules and hierarchies. Being on *Ibis*, was literally ‘losing one’s caste’ as Deeti expressed her fears to Putleshwari - the disguised Paulette Lambert as a Brahmin, by “crossing the Black water” (356). Whereas, Paulette called it a “...boat of pilgrims with everybody being equal as ‘ship-siblings/*jahaz bhais and bahens* to each other” (356). This novel idea being, ‘daring and ingenious’, sticks with everybody throughout the journey working as an instant adhesive. It seals them all together in one cocoon. That’s why Raja Neel Rattan could feel the frustration of a pirate Ah Fatt in chains as his own (363), Sarju’s coming to know of Deeti’s pregnancy first instead of the prospective mother herself (408). Their happiness and sorrows seems to be going parallel. So, Heero’s marriage proposal makes everybody “overjoyed” (431), Jodu’s punishment smarts and stings them altogether (480). Old ties become “immaterial” (431) with their rebirth in “the ship’s womb ... as a single family” (432).

The high fraternity could also be felt in the way Serang Ali tries to find his son-in-law Malum Aadam in the present Malum Zikri. He wants him to progress, to be promoted to higher posts, “as a father” (445). That’s why critics like Jacki Lyden<sup>35</sup> call *Ibis* the



heterotopias- a Foucauldian term, referring to a floating piece of space. The *Ibis* as heterotopias accepts all, juxtaposes the incompatible as one. Between Neel and Fatt, Deeti and Paulette, Jodu and Raju – the degree of separation has rapidly and oddly reduced over time. Their differential is mellifluous forming a single paradigm ultimately. It erases their national and religious differences subversively. It feels as if the water beneath the *Ibis* has flowed within, routed within themselves to make a blended narrative. It hybridizes them all along.

Amitav Ghosh successfully invokes the local atmosphere, the diurnal routines of ordinary people with an extraordinary imagination. His smooth village life narrative with its rites and rituals does not force down any stylistic pirouettes, rather it sails on an easy flow of natural observation. Through Deeti specially, Ghosh seems to say that although they could not take much along, they had managed to hide the home behind their hearts.

The marriage proceedings of Heero with Nack, their sharing of pickling methods, their observance of a sea-borne shrine and Paulette's informative sessions complete this unique travelling community. Their sympathies, love-bonds and even petty jealousies help build up a Cliffordian travelling culture, specific to a Diaspora or an immigrant group. This assemblage of heterogeneity leads to a new linguistic and political hybridity. It happens under the very effect of shifting spaces - from *Land* to *River* and then on to *Sea* - as Amitav Ghosh names the sections of this novel. If these migrants' life on land was a scattered one in search of employment, shelter and honour, their worries are tossed away on the river. Once they have sustained the "pull of land" (400), "the glowing cinders of memory from the ashes of their pasts" (397) - they were embraced by the depth lent to their life by the sea. As the gravity of the new discipline dawns on them through Bhyro Singh's *lathi*/beating stick and the Captain's martinet words, they hold each other closer. These striking moments of violence unify them.

It was this microcosmic community only which could help the persons – Neel, Jodu, Kalua, Ah Fatt and Serang Ali to be free of the *Ibis* for a different kind of life and adventure. They could mislead the *Ibis* watches and all supervisions only with their common strength. The five rebels who sailed away on the boat carry the kernel of the second sequel of this novel. This could be an allegory for the initiation of another

history, another tale which brought even different minded characters like Deeti, Zachary and Paulette together under one roof of secrecy and confidence.

They invent new names and histories in this transit position of uprooting. They try to recreate fresh rituals surrounding marriage, funeral and other rites of life innovatively. This is inevitable too as they can't be performed in their "original manner" as Shantanu Dutta comments in the review<sup>36</sup>. Christopher Rollason appreciates this feature as embodying the "capacity of ordinary folk to survive and celebrate despite oppressive incursions of power"<sup>37</sup>.

In various senses, *Sea of Poppies* re-invokes the Indian potpourri culture with its rich and bright shades - be it the caste-marked mannerism of Nob Kissin or Munia, the sweet and pungent aroma of Bengali and Bhojpuri languages, the relishing *dumpokht* curries of rich and poor. Amitav Ghosh pays a tribute to all those coolies, lascars and the bonhomie they propounded as a tool of resistance against the Empire. The Captain and the first mate tried hard to instill the caste differences among the Coolies by punishing Kalua for 'polluting' a high caste Deeti. Captain Chillingworth announces to Zachary and others that the English authority is based on the inviolable principle of not rupturing the true Indian traditions of 'marriage and procreation' -

"The natives' faith in them as the guarantors of the orders of castes ... is what sustains their power in Hindoosthan" (428).

The English could realize the significance of this institution because they had their own barbaric rule 'to kill a mocking bird'! This is something keeping in full accord with their glorious plot of maintaining Empire -

"An Empire whose morning drum beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, encircles the globe with an unbroken chain of martial airs"<sup>38</sup>.

Their observances naturalized the English expansion methods, as Bhyro Singh is allowed to torment the high caste and class Raja Haldar in chains as revenge for his past. So Babu Nab Kissan as a heterodox *Vaishnavite* tried hard to rope in Elokeshi, Neel's mistress in order to take vengeance of his family's bigoted observances. Whereas Bhyro Singh had a high time in heaping insults and offences upon Raja Neel throughout the *Ibis* journey (458). Such instances prove how some Indian sections were given powerful stakes in new formulations and assumptions about caste. It was

one of the causes for the success of colonial discourse. The colonial administrators and thinkers canonized the caste structure, both in their newly evolved Anthropologic Studies and practices. They maintained caste as an essence of Indian culture and civilization. The English designs simply kept with the tunes of Indian rituals to carry on their vested interests. It also proves that colonialism by its very nature was separatist and parochial. It reinforced and separated the rich and poor, one caste and the other tribe.

Thus, the English sailors encouraged chieftaincy of Bhyro Singh and kept alive the various old confraternities. So the customary chiefs and *zamindars* like Neel Haldar were destroyed to unify and earn the compliance of the naïve subjects. These illiterate villagers, happy and contented with their new found placement and power could never realize their true position. Because even educated soldiers like Hardy and Arjun also had been late and myopic in understanding the facts in *The Glass Palace*. They could come to know much later only that the “murky shadows” of “prejudice, distrust and suspicion” and inequality at every level including salary, were some of the unclear things surrounded by a “mist of regulations”. They were all just “tools”, “stooges” mindlessly serving under their deceptive rules. Ghosh writes—

“It seemed that in these stories (of Colonel Buckland), ‘the men’ figured only as abstractions, a faceless collectivity imprisoned in a permanent childhood – moody, unpredictable, fantastically brave and desperately loyal...”<sup>39</sup>.

*Sea of Poppies* is exceptional in the singular manner it calls back the high opium days. It is true that the English and Europeans made the Indian soil bleed to the core, wrenching it in shreds for the profit they procured of it. But we can’t connive on the role of Haldar Rajas, the Indian clerks, accountants of high class and the English educated officials who accomplished according to English demands. Dinu Raha in *The Glass Palace* condemns this breed of natives who helped the rulers by all means, “by doing their jobs!”<sup>40</sup>. Nab Kissan, Ram Saran and many of the Sudder factory managers simply gave in to the pressure and worked dexterously to build the foreign tower of affluence and dominance.

In one of his interviews, Ghosh complained of the Indian historians’ failure to write in depth about the opium trade and related wars. He believed it to be so because we are still in complicit to Eurocentric historiography. We do not dare to count upon all the

wrong doings of the White rulers and more over the shameful Indian contribution extended for vested interests of several sections. Thus *Sea of Poppies* breaks a new ground for overcoming the “ideological habit of passing over the embarrassing passages ...in the interest of Attic purity”<sup>41</sup>. This novel re-invokes our anxiety for a pure and purged image of our past. In historiography, we all aim for a past which looks upon the winning side, which is ‘privileged’ and ‘genealogically useful’. Thus, we don’t ponder upon the unwanted vestiges and disgraceful remnants.

*Sea of Poppies* is constructed of a different design from such ideal histories. Rather it caters to those narratives which may hit the seams of a well-bound history – opening it and revealing some ulterior aspects. Amitav Ghosh ultimately implodes narratives of purity, reclamation and redemption by presenting these uncommunicated aspects of the colonial system. We knew it to be a society complete in its morals and ideals. But Ghosh discovers it for us that any formal coherence imposed on the clutter of life is always illusory. That’s why Hayden White could boldly opine that the European “monological authority was based upon something ... worse than an illusion - a lie”<sup>42</sup>. Ghosh’s take upon history is not that of a perfectionist. He embarks upon this project in a unique way, very much like what Neel makes of Ah Fatt’s ability to transport him across the continent –

“It was not because of Fatt’s fluency that Neel’s vision of Canton became so vivid as to make it real: in fact the opposite was true. For the genius of Ah Fatt’s descriptions lay in their elisions...” (375).

For Neel as for we all readers of Ghosh, Canton or any place has to be a “venture of collaboration... a shared imagining” (375), which took Neel to a wholly unfamiliar realm. Ghosh, as if by habit looks in to the suggestive nooks and discontinuities with a dash of imagination. The result is unfolding of little known facts which have not been paid attention to, for the history to be neat and substantial. This is something we find in *The Shadow Lines* also, in a very similar manner. He wakes us up to the reality that we live upon our own identity and past without knowing it properly. *Sea of poppies* is one such work, telling us not to take things for granted.

Amitav Ghosh shows the reality of the colonial civilizing mission through these incidents. Paulette’s recognition of evil in sugar-coated humanitarian acts, Kalua’s fiendish abuse by the village Thakurs as well as the on-board rulers; Neel’s

continuous indignity caused by Mate Crowle, Singh, the Jury Rowbotham, Burnham and petty Havildars in Alipore jail - all represent the same phenomenon of mystified deception. What is most appalling is that in spite of such open and glaring instances, well educated people like Paul Leroy Beaulieu could boast that –

“...only civilized peoples colonize,... those who have arrived at a high degree of maturity and strength,... give birth to and protect colonies”<sup>43</sup>.

People like Crowle, Rowbotham and Beaulieu propagated that colonization accompanied exploitation in “the most benign manner of a father to child for advancement on the path of civilization, justice and liberty”<sup>44</sup>. But isn't this a sophistication imposed with cannon balls and whips? Amitav Ghosh expresses the indenture people's fear –

“Despite the heat of the sun, the captain's words had chilled [them] to the marrow... They had just woken to the realization that they were entering a state of existence in which their waking hours would be ruled by the noose and the whip” (405).

This horror at once makes their numb senses come alive to beckoning of nearby islands, causing suddenly three deaths in a row (407). One can easily read this mission as another form of barbarism, offering the colonies nothing but violence. This glorious task is simply depriving others' rights and humanity for one's own Darwinian progress.

But in turn, what comes across is that the unreasonable brutality rendered to Jodu and Kalua seems to make these weak and subjugated beings brave. As Jodu says – “For myself..., I'm done with the *Ibis*. After being beaten like a dog in front of everyone, I'd rather drown myself than stay afloat in this boat” (484).

They are cleansed off their subjectivity and passivity. This undeserved fury makes them fearless enough to regain a will and respect for themselves. As Frantz Fanon further adds – “...illuminated by violence, their consciousness rebels... against the demagogues, the opportunists and the magicians...”<sup>45</sup>. They were not the supine and inert beings, rather they turn out to be daring in a special way. They could literally take the bull by its horns, accepting the challenge of 'do or die'! They had a silent manner of responding to the insensitive violence unleashed upon them, may be they were the precursors of Gandhian non-violence.

These rudely treated characters become the real heroes of the novel by declining to bear the colonial insolence any more. They easily put their lives in danger. This is where Amitav Ghosh stops his pen - making the readers wait for a new dawn. But this fresh day will take its time to get through the darkness of the night!

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Art drinks the water of sustenance from the well of experience on the soil of time. Its attempt to depict life is a regular activity, so literature is no exception. The first chapter introduces the idea of history, its reception and significance in the East and the West. The Introduction depicts how an interest in history was the esteemed yardstick of reason and culture of a civilization instituted on rational doctrines characterized by intellectual maturity. The novels of Indian English writing show that intellectual maturity for them does not come in the form of heavy historical volumes only. In fact, curiosity for historical knowledge is part and parcel of common upbringing in most of the Eastern societies. It is quite contradictory how Indians or Easterners were said to be laid back in the past and yet unaware of it. Our methods of restoring history have been different, as Amitav Ghosh's novels depict. We have the richest oral histories breathing in and among us- that does not mean we lack it. Every culture has its own ways of preserving the 'ghosts' as Egyptian fellahin termed it amusingly. Because the Indian ethos maintains the value of knowledge as a means of salvation- which is the prime aspiration, implicitly treasured in every heart inhabiting this land. Thus, history makes home in hearts here! Unlike in the West, our past mingles with our present.

The second chapter is an overview of how English writing in India first came as an adventure for Indians; then with the passage of time, it became part of the norm. Owing to the time of its inception, this artistic endeavour took to an historical channel as a natural response. By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Indians had started showing signs of discomfort towards the foreign rule. The revolt of 1857 was a strong demonstration with disastrous ramifications for the native side. The unrest and turmoil was sent for dormancy, haloed with silence and an assumed fear by the unquestionably powerful British Raj. The Raj had reached its pinnacle of glorious victory about which all the school books on half of the globe were made to tell the newly inducted children that the sun never set on the British Empire.

By the end of the new century's first decade – direct and true expressions of resistance to the Empire had been declared a proscribed and prohibited act. All those

who spoke against were either brutalized or jailed. Thus, came the revival of folk lores, puppet shows, Non Co-operation movements. It also crept in literary writing which could guise the nationalistic fervour of people with conscience in innocuous fables or romances. A.S.P. Ayyar tried to awaken common people towards the Swaraj movement through his *Baladitya* in 1930. His contemporary Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* also succeeded in making waves, it showed Indian villages utilizing old myths and *Gita-saars* as fount of the independence message, a few years later. *A Bend in the Ganges*, *The Devil's Wind*: Nana Saheb's story, *Train to Pakistan*, *Azadi*, and other novels stand witness to the strong sweep of history over the so far indolent atmosphere of beauty oriented rosy romantics of modern novels.

This chapter pays a heartfelt tribute to all those authors depicting this new India witness to changes brought by time. Each of them involves a telling and an apparent witnessing of history in its different aspects. They try to make sense of the "intolerable pile with a cultural absence"<sup>1</sup> of history, as interpreted by Stephen Slemon, in various creative ways. They all deal with certain events chosen from the palimpsest of time, giving a context of details. They don't take upon the grand and exuberant lives of the royal and majestic dynasties, battles of triumph and betrayals only. But they have spun out billowing tales out of the dullest civic chronicles too. Most of them seemed to have vowed like Voltaire to write "a history of men"<sup>2</sup> instead of kings and generals, unlike the historians of the day. While some of them voice the usual notions and effects on the national life like *Sword and the Sickle*, *Shadow from Laddakh* and *A Time to be Happy*.

Some of them really succeeded in reading the laid out plan of all those incidents which had an historical significance for the generations to come. They could see through the purpose history was constructed for. They construed it as a discourse and a code of recognition to the extent of destabilizing its fixity. These works uproot "History's given-ness and open it up to the transformative power of imaginative revision"<sup>3</sup>.

That's why at times, these authors sound more antic and mischievous than those traditional absolutist viewers of history who took it to be 'over and out'. Their impetuosity to dive down rabbit burrows can put even Alice of the Wonderland to shame! Kalpish Ratna views this 'rabble of historical novelists surging with their ink-

stained fingers... (to be) hard on their heels and in a mad scramble to beat others at the game”<sup>4</sup>. This comes natural to Indians dabbling in fiction who had been rendered as a race by Europeans to be indifferent and benighted of the resonance of history. If Gibbon found large parts of the East to be allegedly lacking in historical compositions, claiming that “the art and genius of history has ever been unknown to the Asiatics”<sup>5</sup>. This observation of historical destitution ran like a refrain through majority of the British and European scholarship on Indians as well. They found this dearth to be a sign and measure of intellectual impoverishment. This analogy was used to justify the enslaving attitude of West towards these regions, to help them proceed onto the hierarchies of Enlightenment and new learning.

But Amitav Ghosh and writers of his ilk endeavour to repudiate such spurning observations about India and the East, at large. The fictions of these authors begin with a challenge to the idea that history reading with chronology and the assumed objectivity of the West is the only way to know one’s past and predecessors! They reject the institutionalized history to be epistemic and the only ‘determining principle of all knowledge’<sup>6</sup>. This new breed of historically oriented novelists goes for other prototypes of knowing one’s world. So they value the Indian cultural emphasis on oral history, its recitation and narration in community gatherings. *Kanthapura* presents a wonderful rendering of this tradition to keep “the repertory of grandmothers always bright!”<sup>7</sup>.

*The Circle of Reason* by Amitav Ghosh gives another archetypal instance of oral narration- its persistence and significance in Asian culture through Zindi and his clan. He writes:

“...They crouched on mats around Zindi, listening intently to every word. They had lived through everything Zindi spoke of and had heard her talk of it time and time again; yet it was only in her telling that it took shape; changed from mere incidents to a palpable thing, a block of time... That was Zindi’s power: she could bring together empty air and give it a body just by talking of it. They could never tire of listening to her...”<sup>8</sup>

To the bafflement of Westerners - Indians had abandoned history to the level of an impiety and a heresy. In the Western view- this indifference amounts to a defiance of the categories of knowledge. The other scoring point with the novelists like Ghosh,

Rushdie and Ngugi Wa Thiong, is the interpretation of this history as the most potent and crafty means of persecuting human kind till date.

Thus, each of the novels and even most of the non-fiction writings by Ghosh present this observation lucidly and cogently. The third chapter deals with *The Circle of Reason*, in which the readers encounter the people of a place, Lalpukur. It is symbolic of the Indo-Bangla border – where brutal mistreatment on the premises of religion, region, language and caste was a norm of common life. The journey of 1947 freedom to 1971 Partition was a long and arduous path for the villagers of this region. Wars were countable but riots and communal tensions made part of their routine. They witnessed whole decades of darkness during which peace was illusive and violence kept swishing around. They experienced governance only as a spying absence, morphed into brute force from time to time.

One can read this part of *Circle of Reason* as conforming to the stock history making, adopting the policy of nation dividing. It picturises the new nations playing the safety games on its borders, encouraging suspicion and distrust among the people within. Thus, the once friendly Balram becomes an acid sprinkling maniac in order to combat the acid spitting local politician, Bhudeb Roy. It causes innocent and unoffending people like Toru Debi and Maya to either get “licked up by fire”, or chased out like a guilt-ridden and fabricated terrorist. Alu has to run fast and deep in and out of the South Indian and Middle Eastern shores.

The perennial class fight with contrasting ideology regarding money appears in all junctures of the novel. Balram dies in fierce flames, trying to establish a new socio-economic practice of equality of all labour. His practical ‘School of Reason’ made Alu a weaver instead of a teacher or advocate, unlike other family members. Parvati Devi turned a mad woman. The ‘germs’ of this theory also struck down lives of Karthamma and others with the spray of bullets by the aeroplane-perched aristocrats of Al Ghazira. This incident refers to the history of Middle East, as a society of unequals where any intellectual or social stirring among the poor and low class is curbed down inhumanly. Here the rich grow more prosperous by pulling out the apparently slum dwelling, small Souq-infested lands from the poor citizens and migrants. The Oil Sheikhdoms believed in building up skyscraping city malls instead

to make customers of the poorest of the poor. It represented the new world order, “designed to defend the rights of certain people at the expense of others”<sup>10</sup>.

If *Circle of Reason* is read scrupulously in 2010, it reads like a prophetic book. It predicts the ominous downfall of the global Capitalism, the phenomenal meltdown of 2008. Whenever, Capitalism has raised its malevolent head crushing the moneyless commoners, it has met a resistance. History is witness to numerous of such episodes, Ghosh shows the same in this novel. It can be interpreted in the collapse of the Star building about which Hajj Fahmy in the novel said, voicing every proletariat heart:

“Let me tell you, why the Star fell. It fell because nobody wanted it. The Malik didn’t want it... nobody in the Souq wanted it...they haven’t forgotten the Battle, ... nor the confiscations...of shops... A house that nobody wants, cannot stand”<sup>11</sup>.

*The Shadow Lines* is a much celebrated novel about the second Partition of the Indian subcontinent, taken up in the fourth chapter. While it sheds light on the families divided and torn apart along with the national splitting up. It depicts how the march of history proceeded undercutting the close kins and blood-relations dispersing them on different sides of the line. These people changed so much internally on account of the tumultuous times they went through that it made the grandmother feel nervous when she heard people say: “We’re like brothers”<sup>12</sup>. Thus, Thamma and her sister, uncle and the new burgeoning family are replicated in the symbolic family feud traced out figuratively by Ghosh:

“...they had grown so thoroughly into the habits engendered by decades of hostility... They liked the wall now; it had become part of them”<sup>13</sup>.

Another aspect which this historical novel takes in account is the recurring riots hampering the normal social lives across borders. Ghosh’s own interpretation of this part would offer something very meaningful. He writes in an essay entitled “The ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi”:

“*The Shadow Lines* was...bound to be influenced by my experiences...earlier memories of riots, ones witnessed in childhood. It became a book ... about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them”<sup>14</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh has a knack for dismissing the readers’ expectations as he ends the book on hope and a calm emotion, unlike the agonizing feel recreated before. Tridib

and Jethamoshai are killed, the Indo-Pak wars are fought, massacre enters common households but still there's a sense of reassurance in *The Shadow Lines*. It remembers the horrible violence ensued by the particular events taken in the novel, and yet it radiates with "the affirmation of humanity"<sup>15</sup>. It pervades this gory tale like a perfume heavenly sweet! It does not let this world to be clouded over by fear and mistrust, rather Khalil's sacrifice in Khulna and Mayadebi's warm welcome by Germans and English alike in the war-torn England predominate. It highlights the risks taken by ordinary people for common good of all, without faltering in fear.

But the most noteworthy and eloquent episode in *The Shadow Lines* is when the narrator stumbles upon some mysteriously 'hidden' and suppressed parts of his native history. He comes to know by personal experience and analysis that the official history which is vowed and revered for being unquestionable and seamless, is not at all so. We as readers are acquainted with this inescapable fact that proper history belongs not only to the category of discursive writing but also to a judgmental one at that. That's why many of the 'major' parts of history leave upon the 'minority' points-and that's an arbitrary and deliberate choice of historians. The Khulna riots which killed a number of innocent people like Tridib, is one such incident which stirs the narrator to check records. Ghosh shows how even the prime library of the Indian Capital and most trustworthy newspapers went blank upon this event. By this, he underlines the big loss of history, caused by negligence or suppression, setting our own experiences to go out of sync with the government records.

*In an Antique Land*, making the fifth chapter, is a uniquely hybrid creation of Amitav Ghosh which is all the more attractive for its Protean structure. Some read it as nonfiction – as a travelogue, as an Anthropologic project or history of a slave. But some like us mount it to the platform of a pure historical novel, enchanting in itself for all the additional qualities counted above. In fact, *In an Antique Land* can be taken as that centerpiece of all his writings which explains Amitav's views regarding history, colonialism, Europe and the Eastern culture he takes pride in.

At the onset, the novel exclaims with wonder about the finding of a slave's appearance at the footnotes of a medieval Indo-Arab history. Ghosh finds "his presence...less than a recognizable face in the obscure theatre ... like a prompter's whispers"<sup>16</sup>. He introduces this slave as M.S.H.6 only, who turns out to be Bomma

after travelling through half the book. It is a real spadework for digging out an unexpected part of an unforeseen history that Amitav Ghosh undertakes as a researcher and then puts it in a narrative for us. By pursuing letters across three continents, varied languages and cultures, Ghosh succeeds in making a plausible story out of the congeries of 'facts'. He, of course, flourishes in this heavy task with what Haydon White terms the 'constructive imagination'<sup>17</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh turns out perfect on the R. G. Collingwood paradigm that "a historian is above all a story teller"<sup>18</sup>. When his historical sensibility along with his creative imagination applies a fitting 'emplotment'<sup>19</sup> to mere chronicles, he triumphs over the prosaic bits of information to weave out a factual story. This is what Haydon White calls a historical narrative, to be an 'extended and symbolic structure'. It does not "reproduce the events it describes, it gives directions for finding sets of past events with meaning"<sup>20</sup>. In creating this wonderful narrative of *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh interweaves all the above mentioned categories of Anthropology, Sufism, Literature and Middle East-South Asian histories and geographies. His impeccable style also points to the exigency of revising the distinction between poetic and prose, factual and fictitious discourses conventionally drawn. This work reinforces the need to converse and confer the narrative forms of historiography. It makes the readers recognize that the differentiation as old as history itself between the two obscures as much as it irradiates both.

Another significant contribution of *In An Antique Land* is the unraveling of many of the myths promulgated as facts in our world, 'coloured' and 'identified' by the European colonialism. Amitav Ghosh has testified the theories of Orientalism, the fabrication work of the West in this pretext- literally showing it in practical ways. The history of Geniza in Egypt, reproduced in this novel, is an evidence of how historicism enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century.

Amitav Ghosh does come across difficulties of finding out some necessary links for the complete interpretation of the Bomma history. It summons two important points simultaneously- the presence of incongruity and silences in the historical documents. And the resultant lack of consummation and conclusion in history as a subject. The discordance and breaks in such inscriptions are caused by many factors- negligence, ignorance of the whole matter, loss of evidences by accident or by deliberation. All of



these aspects reflect upon the truth that historical documents cannot be treated as complete and accomplished. There are many joints out of place in this discipline and that means we should be ready for a change of opinion and interpretation regarding the same. *In an Antique Land* and *The Shadow Lines* basically enable us to see that there are no 'true' discourses, only more or less powerful ones. Amitav Ghosh as a contributor to this task comes across as an important literary figure who values the post-colonial practice of re-reading and re-writing the given histories, knowing it to be the utmost required need of our time.

The sixth chapter consists of *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fever, Delirium and Discovery* (1996). It is a novel which has a jolting effect upon the conscientious readers. First of all, the theme may be jarring to many as it breaks down conventions of fiction so utterly. It does not flinch in capturing the unattractive subject of malaria-treatment undertaken by British and French scientists over Indian soils. Thus it directly takes up the colonial theme of 'knowledge giving power' and the vice-versa situation of power enabling knowledge to exist.

In this novel, Ghosh comes smoothly in the subaltern writer's form, whose signs were evidently open even in the preceding work *In an Antique Land*. So we don't have to sniff upon nauseating odours, colourful liquids and fumes of colonial laboratories only. Yes, that's a part of the Ghosh investigation in juxtaposition to many of the Eastern and Indian practices of mythical and superstitions origin. It involves experiments which were never labelled 'scientific' or meaningful but were captured and packaged as Western discoveries by the force of the Empire.

Ghosh dons the cap of Subaltern writer by attempting to stage Mangala and Laakhan together, the two destitute rustics working as lab-helpers to Ronald Ross, Farley, Cunningham and others. The tale provides evidences that the study work was Western but the practical and manual part was very Indian: rural illiterates, uninstructed and yet contributory to the Nobel Prize winning Malaria eradication project. The author shows how the active assistance of these village folds remained unacknowledged for they did not try to clash with the high power for any reward. Rather they had their own self-made challenge of turning the reincarnation myth a reality and a possibility in 'the ante-rooms' of the majestic bungalow-laboratories of the colonial masters.

They had adopted the philosophy of 'silence' to do their work privately which culminates in success to a great extent.

By spinning a tale mixed up of ghosts, science, myths and folk tales- Amitav Ghosh has extraordinary targets to meet here. On the one hand, he has explored how European advancement, her success story, her power wielding imperialism was made a possibility by propagating "the Orient as almost a European invention"<sup>21</sup>. One of the powerful elements of West was science which is revealed by this novel that it was not an exclusively European phenomenon. Rather it has been a process, made up to a large extent with the help of and by drawing from the traditional, cultural part of India and the East. The West has rather been a genius in propagating oneself, by repackaging others' ideas and findings with its own brands. It maintained a scientific hegemony quite by the force of the political power. So, they built up bridges and railways with Indian iron in the same way as the wonderful medicinal science with Unani, Ayurvedic and essentially Indian materia-medica. And yet the irony is, their discoveries were miraculous, scientific and modern; ours were mythical, unreasonable and oriental!

Amitav Ghosh makes another significant discovery out of this story of 'fever and delirium'. He explores the meaning of this profound insistence upon 'silence', the Indian tendency to be mysterious mounting to the level of losing its very history. Why India, represented here by Romen-Lakhan and Mangala- Phulboni coterie, defied the categories of knowledge so well- propounded by the West. Perhaps the best exemplum of this puzzling attitude towards history recording is interpreted by Vinay Lal in the following words:

"Indian intellectual and cultural traditions present something of an anomaly that appears to be perfectly apposite, for a civilization that has chosen to burn, not bury its dead"<sup>22</sup>.

The West tried to find power where East tried to find salvation in knowledge, in the same edifice.

Lastly, one can reckon this cognition that with all these discovery games Ghosh indulges in – he doesn't try to bifurcate the two traditions. Rather he has drawn attention to the complex alliance of 'roots' and 'routes' making up cultures. No culture is an 'island'<sup>23</sup>, no history is accomplished; rather everything turns out to be

connected and inter-related. Thus, Ghosh in this novel ruffles the past readings and meanings in a way which sheds enough light on the present as well for making us aware and alert in time.

*The Glass Palace* is covered in the seventh chapter. It is another historical saga that takes up the times of British colonialism over India and its neighbours, especially Burma or the present day Myanmar. This work has a comparatively wider spectrum than the previous, not only for the extensive geographical scope. It is also for the two centuries it covers spanning over a range of characters across borders from all strata of society. Beginning at a street side tea stall, reaching the private chambers of the Burmese Queen Supayalat to that of Indian middle class in Calcutta brings all classes and castes together- all affected by the massive colonial power in some way. While this overwhelmingly strong mammoth of British rule throws the royal family of Burma in exile to an Indian backwater town, it provides a handsome salaried post to an English educated and properly 'trained' Dey Babu. But in turn, this provides Uma Dey with the opportunity to get closer to those early nationalists like the Ghadar group in Europe. Colonisation comes as a boon to once impoverished orphan Raj Kumar in granting him the first railway contract, making no difference of its subject-population and being highly drunk of its colossal sovereignty.

All of these small stories become historical narratives in themselves, trailing the forceful presence of imperialism on their lives. Ghosh shows how the absence of the maidservant Dolly could have relegated the royal history to the notional 'true' accounts, without knowing their essential nature. So, it is through Dolly that we come to know the 'weaknesses' of these supposedly strong kings and queens- the fetish for pork, binocular or new fashions of petticoat and *sari*. The dark secrets of the monarchy- the princess bearing children of the low-caste cart driver, the queen's insistence on *shikoing*, the English masseur's disobedience to her orders. At the same time, the Dey household enlightens us of the Bengali middle class culture, its preference for government employed bridegrooms, the marriage rituals, the cruelty of a forced wedlock and the abstinence rules for a widow. Kishan Singh and Arjun inform the readers about the real 'drilling' process of colonial army, how it not only prepared them to fight with their own compatriots and neighbours in defense of the

Empire. In fact, how the English educated section of the society was 'formed', 'shaped' and 'manufactured' as a "toy... a weapon in someone else' hand"<sup>24</sup>.

Raj Kumar as a beneficiary merchant of this foreign rule comes out a representative of that business class which found ways of minting money in all circumstances. They were concerned with money and profit only, spared of the need to see the source and means. Because, colonization served them lucratively, they worshipped it as god, misusing poor labour for any purpose. Through this section of the *Glass Palace* family of – Raj Kumar, Saya John, Mathew and others, Ghosh traces the path of Capitalism piercing the docile village lives. A theme, he approaches full fathom in his later novel, *Sea of Poppies*.

The most magical feature of *The Glass Palace* is the way Amitav Ghosh exhibits the possibility of 'a change' in destiny. He doesn't let this dream- theme of the pre-Independence struggles in India and Burma go awry as a historical novelist. He shows how any dominion, any power doesn't remain invincible forever. So, the maid Dolly becomes the secondary head of a wealthy and substantial family in Burma besides Raj Kumar. The princesses' lives go account-less, the royalty festers, rots and gives up to anonymous ends, because of the colonial game-tricks. Arjun dies a martyr after knowing and recognizing the stinking army policies, Illongo the low-birth stupid boy of a labourer woman becomes the supreme power of Morningside state. Uma Dey- another Subaltern figure as a widow and a woman gains a high stature as a freedom fighter by her dedication and open minded outlook. She recognized the value of Independence for India much earlier and more earnestly than Arjun or Dey, in spite of being a woman fettered and shackled in so many ways.

Amitav Ghosh ascertains Peter Robb's assessment true that "the British were rulers with sets of ideas and the Indians were subjects with minds of their own"<sup>25</sup>. *The Glass Palace* determines this particular datum that no colonized people remained inert for long. They struggled hard for winning their freedom and identity. They strove, exerted and resisted until they won! Burma and people with Aung San Suu Kyi will also see that day soon when the sun of real democracy will rise on their land.

*The Hungry Tide* makes the eighth chapter of this thesis, which once again deals with the Partition theme. But this time, it is from a distinctively unique point of view

regarding this historical incident. It takes in account the geographical and geological perspective too which suffered along with humanity the blows of colonialism. When Bangladesh became a nation of its own, a number of non-Bengali Hindus found themselves unwelcome in this new avatar of their own country. They found themselves homeless within days of the ascendancy of the new regime. India, the previous mother country was a foreign place for them; Pakistan had shut its shores upon them. The Sunderbans islands which had been inhabited and cultivated against Nature's will by the flick of an English colonel's adventurous mind had proved a failure, years ago. But this clan of 'disinherited' destitute tried to rekindle that whimsical idea by risking life on those unfriendly islands. They had come into the whirlwind of disguised death, with danger of attacks by tigers, crocodiles and other aqua species lurking around. It was literally living in the gargantuan mouth of death, as people like Fokir could become orphans just by the satiation of a tiger's one time meal. But this was not the end; they had to see more of the dark misfortune. The high class intelligentsia with their undying love for animals, specially the royal Bengal tiger found human society posing a threat to the Sunderbans flora and fauna. The Government carried out a forcible eviction drive to chase them out, towards the habilitation centres of Danda Karnya and Kalahandi. The presence of socialist like Nirmal Roy couldn't make any difference to this class war culminating in the Morichjhanpi massacre. It cleaned the whole place out, set free and safe for the wild nature to spread out. All "thirty thousand"<sup>26</sup> squatters who had prepared a world of their own resembling "an entire civilization"<sup>27</sup>, was wiped out within a week. Though initiatives by Nilima Bose and Piyali Roy promise to make Lusibari advance towards a bit of additional comfort and normalcy, the loss of so many peoples' aspiration to make it home remains an agony, unforgotten.

The incidence of history failing the toiling and striving minority of this place is an eye-opening and unbelievable fact. They couldn't even earn the margins of the grand history, so many of us take pride in. Very few had known before that the lush greenery of the Sunderbans radiates today as an enchanting spot only after being tilled with these unwanted settlers' red blood!

At the heart of this compelling tale surrounding Piya, Moyna, Fokir and Kanai Babu – we have the conflict of urban-rural, the upper middle class and the low-born stratum

making the 'scum' of a successful nation, the scientific education versus the instinctive learning, the Western values versus the Eastern realities. Amitav Ghosh touches the core of his readers' conscience as we will never be able to enjoy the bounties of the global, capitalistic life style sweeping us all torrentially without the intuitive need to see the other side! With this work, Amitav Ghosh has proved true that at times 'history' begins in novels and essays also. *The Hungry Tide* comes across as one of the very few writings about this aspect of colonial repercussion and partition. Amitav Ghosh evinces clear that "what is told in the fullest and most accurate annals bears an infinitely small proportion to what is suppressed"<sup>28</sup>. The Morichjhanpi incident like the Khulna riots taken in *The Shadow Lines* has been a victim of suppression by the official documents. One can't disagree that all such accounts are 'tailored' and doctored to a great extent.

The latest addition to Ghosh's impressive and scholarly fiction is *Sea Of Poppies* – a Landmark novel capable to grapple with the absolute *Raj Quartet* by Paul Scott. The ninth chapter shows this novel locking horns with the high capitalist era of British colonialism in India point blank, in an unswerving manner. Though, this is just the first part of an ambitious trilogy promised by Ghosh to the print world. It reads like one of the most awaited work, brewing for the last sixty years. No Indian writer in any of the twenty five formal languages has stood so firm on the ground to look on the face of this curious and enigmatic episode of history – a common history of almost more than half of humanity over the globe.

In order to present a closer to reality character and spirit of the high colonial period reigning in India, Amitav Ghosh has depicted a complete miniature society of North India in this novel. He begins with the villages lining the Gangetic plains, taking Ghazipur as an archetype. He locates ordinary village folk as they appear in their customary business, in their ordinary sorrows and pleasures. Like an exemplary historian with the soul of a novelist, he mingles in the crowds of these places obtaining admittance to their humble abodes and domestic hearths. He comes across these strong and determined characters like Deeti, Kabutari and Kalua. We also come to know the Singh family of a peculiarly dubious nature, bearing their miserably poor fate, singeing under the haze of opium. Their lives are entirely dependent on and commanded by the overwhelming presence of this inebriant crop. This is a colonial

rule, which they can't imagine to resist in any way. Once a respectable farming domiciliary, now has given way to the sweeping immorality under the force of intoxication – caused by both opium and easy money. But this money doesn't buy them happiness or ease.

After death of her husband, Deeti undergoes vagaries of victimhood in all forms-financial, sexual and social. Thus, the opium which had become the backbone of British trade in the subcontinent has a baneful shadow over the villages. They were all 'compelled' to cultivate this blood-sucking golden crop. Their misery looks pornographic in contrast to the high boundary walls and the majestic structure of the British flag bearing Opium factory guarded by the trustworthy White soldiers only.

Opium had roped in the Bengali Zamindars also, unaware of its calamitous consequences. Amitav Ghosh has chosen the Brahmin Haldar dynasty to demonstrate how colonial merchants played dirty tricks with this sophisticated and influential coterie supposedly ruling over sets of villages as 'Raiyat'. They met a worse fate, after getting embroiled in debt-net. All the luxuries and extravagant pleasures which the English merchants had slowly guided them to indulge in were snatched away and seized completely by British trial systems. They had nothing to claim or defend not even their own country and citizenship. Like the actual last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, and Burmese king Thebaw, Neel Rattan Haldar was exiled to Mauritius along with indentured labourers. Kalua, Deeti and a host of hunger-stricken villagers, all lured by the prospect of good occupation and better life are made to uproot from their native lands. They all join together, tied by the frail thread of hopes and mount upon 'Ibis', the grand ship previously used as a slave carriage.

But they are all unaware that like poppy, sugarcane is going to be their bane, sucking out every last bit of sweetness from their lives. It is so because they are all in the immediate vicinity of the most brutal side of colonialism- cash crops' agronomy was the fastest route to money making. That means that they should be the most obedient hands ready to work as long as possible without having anything to do with a contemplative mind or a passionate heart. Thus, the Iris journey is a gruesome period of a rigorous training: for 'shaping' them up as the perfect 'subjects'. This was undertaken with the help of the heavy whip, a narrow noose, a close vigilance and heavier doses of lectures aimed at mental shackling. They were all made to undergo

the ambivalent process of 'mimicry'<sup>29</sup> which Homi Bhabha categorized as the most effective strategy of colonial power. It was a convoluted way of reforming, regulating and disciplining aimed at "appropriating" the Other. Fear for these lords became their only religion. But this forced mimicry turned out to be very elusive for some- they seemed to be trained but for some exclusive purpose.

*Sea of Poppies* gives a close description of the colonial life style of English policy makers, merchants and priests of worldly heaven. We, the readers are given whiffs of their convivial tables, magnificently imperial gatherings, parties, the White moralities and their godly confidences. This also gives us a feel of the intercultural effects on the two races intermingling, if not on a level ground. Thus Paulette is more comfortable as 'Putli', unlike Neel Rattan Halder who could glide comfortably to English language but stammered in Bhojpuri.

Thus, the last chapter of the thesis is a good peep into the real game of imperialism at various levels. But the other side of the picture has more startling facts to reveal. It is the subdued and enslaved Indian side, which bows to the masters' orders but without letting the inner soul be subjugated.

Thus, by studying the archive of novels by Ghosh, we move closer to the bygone times through another route. It is the one exactly opposite to what we all learnt by rote- through the Enlightening 'mimicry' classes. For long we continued to attend them in order to become the "reformed, recognizable Other as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite"<sup>30</sup>.

Ghosh's novels, by treating history in the particular manner as explicated in the present thesis, make an attempt to humanize the discipline of recapitulation, differently. It aims to allow for a "certain measure of equality between historians' histories and other constructions of the past"<sup>31</sup>, as proposed by Dipesh Chakrabarty too.

Amitav Ghosh succeeds in convincing the readers that the historical narratives can't be taken as worlds shut- reputedly finished, done with and over. Rather he shows how those days, people and values of yore have not diffused totally yet. We are living them in some ways, in some aspect of extension. He also emphasizes the urgency to know our past and to revise our understanding of it with progress of time. He rejects



the stagist, historicist distinctions between East and West, high and low classes. He invites us to join in this new movement to democratize the writing of Indian and European history. This is very possible by looking on subordinate social groups of both East and West as equal participants in making all those changes which we know by the name of historical. He is a subaltern historian in the real sense that he boards upon the boat of novel writing to do the job perfectly – one doesn't need to be a master for trying all trades. We have come out of the monological times! Because history is not the only way to interpret one's past, fiction in the hands of Ghosh does that even better. He can efficiently deal with the plurality of both margins and centres simultaneously. He has been successful in stepping out of the problem of Eurocentrism, shared across the geographical boundaries, by knowing himself first. His scholarship on Indian and Eastern matters and issues related to economy, culture, history and even science makes him come through proficient.

Ghosh could make us aware how the experience of political modernity in non-Western nations could be rejuvenated and reaffirmed from and for the margins too. He almost revises our very heritage by taking this abundant challenge of and careful being contemplative towards the proliferation of languages, practices and intellectual traditions existing in South Asia. His educational background stretching from Kolkata, Delhi, England and Egypt; across Bengali, Hindi, English, Arabic and French, brings him at the centre stage flanked by Alu and Kanai Babu. Both of these characters, his creations of the impeccable craft, excel in the welter of languages with one huge difference. They are discrepant in class, while Kanai's language proficiency is a gift of expensive education, Alu's is natural and uninstructed. Ghosh too knows as much of the rural life as of the urban luxuries. His love and respect for the multicultural ethos of all the Asian civilization made up of various languages and traditions is well expressed in his novels.

This open attitude contained in his novels definitely has a liberating effect. He does not reject the defined categories but he endeavours to release and unchain into the space occupied by particular European and high caste- class, canonized histories. By setting them free, he relishes in bringing out some 'other' normative and theoretical thoughts sedimented in other archives and practices. These novels cater to the search of plural horizons, essential for better possibilities in the coming times. They occupy

us with the enquiry regarding diverse ways of being in the world, by envisaging new precepts for reflecting upon our past and future.

As a post-colonial writer, he is rethinking the structures of knowledge and power in a new liaison. His treatment of historicism critiques anything that was projected as the central and the ultimate. He finds the previous history based upon Europe as its theoretical subject. At the national level, he sees the official history promulgated as the real – surrounding pure dynasties, unerring virtuous high castes and righteous urban politics along with upper class history. The rest had no passage meandering towards the annals. It is also a supposedly equable and secular history but Amitav Ghosh's novels highlight the persisting lacuna in such writings. They chance upon some of those gaps, lapses and ellipses of these over-arching narratives. He calls attention to how many of the subaltern, even middle class narratives have been skipped and tripped over in the official stories. His tales endeavour to restore agency to these missing and/ or stolen out parts of our history. He comes out as one of the band, bent upon writing back to Classicism, Centrism and Euro-centric annals.

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