SUMMARY

Amitav Ghosh can be seen as the flag bearer of the fearlessness and freedom that the contemporary Indian writer in English embodies. Although Salman Rushdie is the pioneer who put the post colonial scene on the literary map, yet Amitav Ghosh has become one of the central figures to emerge after the success of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Yet when compared to Rushdie, published criticism on Ghosh is not very substantial. Most of the critical essays are limited to his more popular fictional works like *The Shadow Lines*, *In an Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Ghosh is one writer who combines history with a very contemporary vision of a world free of discrete cartographical divisions. The advancement in electronic technology, instant communication and networking, a proliferation of global television channels has to a great extent dissolved all kinds boundaries and brought the world a lot closer. Amitav Ghosh’s prime thematic concern likewise is using the travel motif to create a neutral space where barriers dissolve and borders are blurred. It is precisely this cosmopolitanism which makes today’s Indian novelist stand at par with and not separate from global writers of English. More over the constant concern with the subaltern who’s lost in the annals of history, endears him to the readers. The immense amount of research that he puts in to his works is woven beautifully in a blend of generic expectations making them perfect encasements for the prominent thematic concerns of contemporary Indian literary world. A critical study of the prime thematic concerns of Amitav Ghosh’s novels is thus an opportunity not just to peruse a substantial body of work that meditates up on a core set of issues concerning post colonialism in the contemporary fictional writing with special focus on the marginalised subaltern; but also to view history with a novel perspective. The proposed research work, is an attempt to make a thematic study of the fictional works by Amitav Ghosh and a revelation of the patterns inherent therein. A tentative scheme of chapter progression is as under.

**Chapter I: Introduction:** The introductory chapter is an endeavour at placing Amitav Ghosh in Modern Indian literary context. With due emphasis on the author under study, due credit has been given to the predecessors, the harbingers of Indian novel in English who set the stage and prepared the soil for the contemporary novelists. The emerging trends in terms of thematic concerns of novelists of today have been studied in the light of changing patterns across
Chapter II: The second chapter entitled ‘The Migrant Subaltern: The Traveller in The Circle of Reason’ attempts an analytical study of The Circle of Reason, the first novel by Amitav Ghosh, with focus on the migrating subaltern and his predicament. The chapter discusses how the novel written in the style of magic realism, popularised by Salman Rushdie in his Midnight’s Children – a mixing of historical and fantastic elements to create an interesting work of fiction, can be studied as a bildungsroman, the study of coming of age of the main protagonist Alu. Carrying forward the travel motif, his picaresque adventures in the course of his journey from Lalpukur, across the Indian Ocean to the oil town of al-Ghazira on the Persian Gulf, form both the setting and the chief concern of the novel.

Ghosh’s penchant for obliterating borders both in terms of themes as well as generic experimentation is introduced in this very first fictional work. But overriding all this is the representation of the subaltern class and the travel motif as the subalterns are in a perpetual journey. Indian philosophy inspires the circular pattern of this novel. Ghosh takes inspiration from The Bhagavad-Gita to name the three sections of the novel. The three parts are named after the three gunas – Satwa, Rajas and Tamas with the respective characteristics dominating in each part.

Chapter III: Entitled ‘The Blurring Borders: Post-Colonial Travel in The Shadow Lines’, this chapter discusses the impact of momentous events like the freedom movement of Bengal, the second world war, the partition of India and miasma of communal hatred breaking out into riots in East Pakistan following the Hazratbal shrine incident in Srinagar in 1964. It is an apt revelation of the fragility of partition, borderlines between countries and the cartographical lines which claim to separate people and communities. It is the collective consciousness and the memory of common historical events that transcends the boundaries of nations and brings people of different countries together.

The Shadow Lines is a non-sequential journey moving back and forth from past to present and back again with the narrative taking the characteristics of a palimpsest, with past seeping through to the present.

Ghosh’s division of the book into two parts ‘Going Away’ and ‘Coming Home’ to bring home the implications of ‘Home’ in a post colonial scenario,
CHAPTER IV: Entitled ‘Giving Voice to History: Subaltern Revived in In an Antique Land’, the fourth chapter is an attempt at discussing, how Ghosh gives a prominent voice to the obscure subaltern, who is lost in the oblivion of historical annals. The narrative of the book can be split into two distinct parts. The first is Ghosh’s autobiographical account of his anthropological research trip to Egypt as a researcher where, as he reveals to the reader, he experiences alienation and cultural isolation. The second part is Ghosh’s discovery of Bomma, the Indian slave of Abraham Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisia, who arrived in India around 1130 AD, via Egypt and Aden.

Typical of a Ghosh novel, In an Antique Land also creates borderless cultural spaces with a free flow of religious and cultural ideas and practices. The novel defies the classifications of genre, being an amalgam of a travelogue, an anthropological research thesis, ethnography and a novel. But all said and done about history and research, it is the concern for and an insight into the world of the subaltern that predominates the rest of the ideas in the book.

Chapter V: The fifth chapter entitled: ‘The Subaltern Researcher in Ghosh’s Medical History: The Calcutta Chromosome’, is an attempt at analysing how The Calcutta Chromosome further continues Ghosh’s peculiar themes and techniques albeit in a changed garb. Set in the near future, the main narrative of the novel revolves around an examination of the history of late nineteenth century malaria research by Murugan, the cynical protagonist, who is of the conviction that there is a secret history that has been erased from the scribal records of medical history.

The chapter tries to unravel the theme of post-coloniality, dealt with in an unconventional manner, wherein, it is the subaltern colonized native who has the upper hand, in place of the privileged colonizer. And the fact that it is a woman, who spearheads the research work, implies the victory of the twice-colonized female, that too, one belonging to the backward class of sweepers.

Throughout his entire oeuvre, Ghosh has exhibited his love of histories, and his novels stick to the verity of annals to a great extent. The chapter discusses how Ghosh’s concern with the predicament of the subaltern who has been obscure in history, predominates in this medical history in the guise of science-fiction.
The book revolves around discovering the ‘interpersonal transference’ of knowledge, since it offers to dissolve the barriers between elite and subaltern classes, between the educated and the illiterate. Throughout the text, readers are in the quest of the real discoverers and what they have discovered. The chapter highlights how the borderline between the discoverers and – those who are discovered is a very porous one, bringing into focus Ghosh’s persistent concern with the dissolution of boundaries.

**Chapter VI:** The sixth chapter entitled, ‘Post-Colonial Migrations: The Displaced Generations in *The Glass Palace*’ is devoted to unravel the theme of alienation and colonial displacement of the characters, who cross boundaries and make several transitions during their lifetime, in the novel *The Glass Palace*. The emphasis, like all Ghosh’s fiction is again on highlighting the obliteration of borders that is a result of crossovers and transitions presented in the novel.

*The Glass Palace* is a perfect manifestation of almost all the major concerns of Ghosh, blended into a wonderful epic narrative. But over riding all the thematic concerns is the theme of post-coloniality. Nation formation is a major tool in the process of colonization and *The Glass Palace* records and indites the experiences of first such races inhabiting British occupied territories in South East Asia, who are dying to make their own nation. The novel is the author’s attempt to remap the history of three south Asian countries, Myanmar, India and Malaysia all sites of the British Empire through the late 19th and 20th centuries. The turbulent cultural crossovers, conflicts, histories and nations as a metaphor of loss make up the central concern of Ghosh.

This displacement and movement on an epic scale leads us to the major concern of Ghosh in most of his fictional and even non-fictional works which is the blurring and a subsequent obliteration of borders whether geographical, cultural, racial or even psychological.

**Chapter VII:** The seventh chapter entitled: ‘Borders – Dissolved: An Ecological Perspective of *The Hungry Tide*’ takes an eco-critical view of Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* where it is predominantly nature that takes the onus of destroying and re-defining boundaries. It attempts to discuss how Ghosh deals with the more intimate world of personal divisions between men and women besides geographical divisions. The chapter further discusses how Ghosh continues his experimentation with genres by combining ecological perspective
with scientific research work and a pervading desire for a society free of all divisions.

Chapter VIII: The eighth chapter is conclusive in nature and is devoted to the manner in which the various themes are interrelated. It sums up the findings of the preceding chapters and offers an overall view of the findings. The chapter takes a birds eye view of Ghosh’s non-fiction which is the true precursor of the themes dealt with by him. Besides his essays the chapter also dwells briefly upon Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke, Ghosh’s latest venture.

Through an analysis of Ghosh’s fictional works, the proposed work has tried to unravel the various thematic concerns that have recurred in his novels. The omnipresent travel motif and the desire to dream of a world free of divisions and separations, has been inculcated in all his works, though in varying manners. The predicament of the migrating subaltern and the changing perspectives of the post colonial subject are discussed, involving a variety of characters in diverse and exotic geographical settings that change with each of his work. All his works characteristically defy any categorisation in terms of genre.

To conclude the proposed research work, it is discussed how Ghosh’s fiction reveals recurrent patterns of the major themes of boundary crossing and travel which chiefly involve the subaltern class with each fiction involving mass movements of individuals. A vision of a borderless space where all divisions blur and disappear pre-dominates all the themes. Ghosh diligently researches each situation and location, emphasizing the history behind it, in all his fictional works which are difficult to classify and limit within the characteristics of particular generic expectations.