Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“This then is the peculiar paradox of the novel: those of us who love novels often read them because of the eloquence with which they communicate a sense of place. Yet the truth is that it is the very loss of a lived sense of place that makes their fictional representation possible.”

Keeping in mind the proposed research concern, the quote by Amitav Ghosh, the writer himself seems quite aptly placed at the very outset. The attempt of this work would be to peruse Amitav Ghosh’s fictional works and trace the major thematic concerns dealt with in his fictional works and the patterns inherent therein.

The above quoted words uttered by Amitav Ghosh about the fictional mode echo the true essence of contemporary Indian English novel and our diasporic novelists. The Indian novelist today refuses to be categorised merely as an Indo-Anglian novelist because he has successfully carved a niche for himself in the international world of fiction writers. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her ingenious research on the antecedents of Indian fiction points out that today’s novelist from India ‘aspires to be part of a global league, and not contribute to some outmoded category called the Indo-Anglian novel.’

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 of 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. Moreover 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 into 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.

Amitav Ghosh by following the precedent set by Salman Rushdie has made significant contribution in creating a separate class of writers who delude all borders and classifications that limit the scope of their writing and their readership. Amitav Ghosh follows Salman Rushdie not just chronologically but his very first novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986) bears testimony to the inspiration he gained from Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981).
Amitav Ghosh is at the forefront of the contemporary creed of diasporic writers who celebrate the loss of a definite ‘rootedness’ or ‘sense of place’ as our proposed work would attempt to unravel. It would be a dwarfing of their talent to classify this cosmopolitan breed of writers merely as Indian writers in English or Indo-Anglian novelists. In fact today’s global novelist refuses to bind himself in terms of genres or any fixed definitions that impinge upon this freedom. Brinda Bose comments in her introduction to *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*:

“Amitav Ghosh today cheerfully – if humbly – bears numerous mantles of responsibility in the world of book (case): anthropologist, sociologist, novelist, essayist, travel-writer, teacher, and slips in and out of these veiled categories with admirable aplomb.”

The contemporary Indian novelists like Arundhati Roy besides Amitav Ghosh refuse to limit themselves to their Ivory Tower existence; rather they are conscientious human beings forever vigilant to the happenings around them and express their concern in very vocal terms. To illustrate besides his other non-fictional writings like *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1998), *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces* (2002), Amitav Ghosh has also written *Countdown* (1999) – a long essay in response to India’s nuclear testing in May 1998. He himself speaks about his anguish and inner urge that led to the essay:

“I had always imagined that a nuclear blast was a kind of apocalypse, beyond which no existence could be contemplated. Like many Indians, the image that I had subconsciously associated with this eventuality was that of Pralay –the
mythological chaos of the end of the world – listening to Kanti that day as we drove around New Delhi; I realized that I like most people, had been seduced into thinking of nuclear weapons in symbolic and mythic ways. The explosion that Kanti was describing would not constitute an apocalyptic ending: it would be a beginning. What would follow would make the prospect of an end, an object of universal envy.”

Coming back to our research concern, Amitav Ghosh prefers fictional mode over others yet a historical and anthropological researcher as he is, he is constantly looking for ways in which he can mingle as much of history into his fiction, as he can. His works contain elements of varied genres like science, history, anthropological research into his works. In an interview Amitav Ghosh defends his choice of fiction over history:

“I think fiction has always played that part. If you look at Tolstoy’s War and Peace… I think the difference between the history historians write and the history fiction writers write is that fiction writers write about human history. It’s about finding the human predicament, it’s about what happens to individuals, characters. I mean that’s what fiction is… exploring both dimensions whereas history, the kind of history exploring causes, causality, is of no interest to me.”

In Ghosh’s novels this human historian keeps on travelling from one culture or country to another in an effort to creating a neutral space which is devoid of all boundaries and where borders are blurred and subsequently dissolve. It is precisely this cosmopolitanism which makes today’s Indian novelists stand at par with and not separate from global writers in English. Meenakshi
Mukherjee points out that Indian writer today, ‘aspires to be part of a global league, and not contribute to some outmoded category called the Indo-Anglian novel.’ She places the credit of this exuberant creative outpour on Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and remarks on Rushdie that ‘...his inventiveness, his irreverence, his audacity, and above all his success – became liberating for a large group of Indian writers living either at home or abroad. At first many of them became Rushdie clones, but over the years unusual writers with distinctive voices have emerged, many who do not have more than only a vague family likeness to him.’

Contemporary fiction writers are at times accused of being too politically detached. Amitav Ghosh defends himself and his tribe and says;

‘We who write fiction, even when we deal with matters of public significance have no choice, no matter how lush and or extravagant our fictions, but to represent events as they are refracted through our characters. Our point of entry into even the largest of events is inevitably local, situated in and focussed on details and particulars. To write of any event in this way is necessarily to neglect its political contexts... what then are the contexts that we, as writers of fiction, can properly supply? It seems to me that they must lie in the event itself, the scene, if you like it must be in some part the reader’s responsibility to situate the events within broader contexts to populate the scene with the products of his experience and learning. A reader who reads the scene literally or mean spiritedly must surely bear some part of the blame for that reading.’
Having briefly dwelled upon Amitav Ghosh’s place in the contemporary literary scenario, it would be worthwhile to take a cursory view of the overall flux in Indian literary scene and its place in the world. In comparison to the past, the thinking and critical fraternity is more liberal and open minded in accepting and evaluating literature written in English in subalterner colonial countries. Earlier these writers were looked upon with doubts and condescension and were denied the benefit of a sincere critical analysis. Even their use of English as a medium of expression was either ridiculed or dismissed as being unworthy of international review. This widespread, interest in Indian English literature and a proliferation in this genre is a consequence of the charm of international awards brought by a few of our writers and a lessening of financial worries with an increase in internal support.

It would be unfair here to discuss the rich fruits of labour and to ignore the years of struggle and strife that led to its birth and evolution. A very comprehensive analysis would be difficult under the limitations of the proposed research work but the endeavour would be to make a brief sketch of the Indian fictional scene from its origin onwards. Besides the individual effort and creativity, one cannot ignore the role of the sociological factors in the origin of any great body of literature. The ‘Western Influence,’ a term which has more of derogatory connotations, contributed to these sociological factors and created the milieu conducive to the creation, and birth of ‘Indo-Anglian literature’ i.e. the great body of writing, written by Indians in English. When we peruse the pages of our history we’d realize that this western influence was not the
work of a single entity or a single culture, rather it was a mixed influence of all the different invaders who came at different times and in different manners, be they Portuguese, Dutch, British or French. Hence when we now see the rich corpus of Indo-Anglian literature, we must admit that the impact of the British rule and the consequent introduction of Indians to English language and literature played a very vital role in its creation.

This contact with English language and education promoted not just writings in English but also played the role of a catalyst to enhance the production of good creative literature by writers in their mother tongue like Bengali, Telugu, Gujarati, Tamil or Marathi. These writers didn’t hesitate to write in any language they were proficient in and even translated their works for the benefit of the readers. Much before the renaissance in Indian English literature came and the Indo-Anglian novel took birth, stray bright sparks of talent did brighten the Indian sky with their works. But they were isolated instances like Toru Dutt of the Dutt family, and Manmohan Ghosh of the Ghosh family.

As with every new literature in its infancy, the renaissance in Indian literature also began with writers like Raja Rammohan Roy, who were predominantly social reformers and sought to cleanse the soil of India of evils like superstitions, ignorance, sad plight of women in general and widows in particular and the general backwardness of the country. But this triggered creative individuals with potential into action and the movement gained further impetus in the period between the two world wars as this was the time when our country was under the inspiring spell of Mahatma Gandhi.
Although Gandhian influence resulted in a general preference for the mother tongue but we see a proliferation of literature in both regional languages as well as English. ‘Besides whatever the language medium chosen the stress has been more on simplicity and clarity and immediate effectiveness than on ornateness and profundity or laborious artistry and this has been as marked in English writings as in the regional languages.’ The Gandhian influence is all the more visible in the character portrayal and the stress on village life rather than urban life. We have novels like K.S. Venkataramani’s *Murugan the Tiller, Kandan the Patriot*, Kamala Markandaya’s *Some Inner Fury*, R.K. Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable, The Sword and the Sickle* and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*.

Before we discuss in detail how the Indian novel in English has gradually evolved from a depiction of sociological concerns in a form that was more of an adoption and imitation, to the present much more mature rendition of ideas in a form more complex, using style and techniques both at par with the best novelists of countries where English is the native language; it is pertinent to dwell upon the origins of Indian novel in English. The novel form in India evolved during the latter half of the nineteenth century again as a result of western influence. Indian scholars began translating English works, beginning with the Bible, into regional languages. The translation of western novels followed this. This led to the scholar’s creation of original works in imitation of the western classics that they had translated. This was further facilitated because novel as a form is easier to translate and compose as it
gives more freedom to writers than other literary forms.

This creative outpour by Indian creative writers in the form of fiction began in Bengal but quickly spread to other parts of the country as well. *Alaler Gharer Dulal* is said to be the first novel in Bengali published in 1858. But the real beginnings are acknowledged from the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94). His first novel *Raj Mohan’s Wife* (1864) was written in English. His next novel *Durgeshnandini* was written in Bengali but later on translated into English in 1890. His other fictional works like *Kopalkundala, Vishavriksha, Krishnakantar Uyil, Anandmath, Devi Chaudhurani* appeared in Bengali from 1866-1886, but were later translated into English. Other writers also produced good novels during this period like Raj Lakshmi Debi’s *The Hindu Wife* (1876), Toru Dutt’s *Bianca*, Kali Krishna Lahiri’s *Roshinara* (1881), H. Dutt’s *Bijoy Chand* (1888) and Khetrapal Chakravarti’s *Sarata and Hingana* (1895). These works in English have more of a historical than a literary value for us today. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee deals with themes like the sad plight of widows in Hindu joint families, a theme which recurs frequently in novels by other writers also. Todd’s *Annals of Rajasthan* and Scott’s historical romances were the inspiration behind Bankim’s historical novels. Besides the widow, Bankim introduced *sannyasis* into his novels that appear repeatedly into Indian English fiction sometimes as evil influences and sometimes as comic characters. Apart from this, the novels of this period also sought to imbibe in the readers a spirit of patriotism, as the seeds of the freedom movement were sown during this period only. So, novel as a means of creating political
awareness among masses was also initiated.

Commenting upon the various stages through which novel in India has passed Ananda Sankar Ray, himself a novelist says:

“When Bankim wrote, the chief question was how to restore the national self-respect. In Rabindranath’s time, it was how to bridge the East and the West. In this dynamic age, it is how to identify ourselves with the common people.”

After Bankim Chandra Chatterjee we come to Rabindranath Tagore, another great novelist. Although his name reminds us first of the Nobel Prize winning verse epic Gitanjali, with his Choker Bali (1902) he triggers a change in the earlier concerns of the novel. The recurring subject of a widow’s life is seen here again but with the passage of time the widow’s rights to life and freedom are emphasized more and more.

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) after a brief stint with imitative writings, produced works in which his sympathy with the subaltern classes, the have-nots comes to the fore. Srikanta, Grihadaha, Pather Dabi, Bipradas and Ses Prasna most of which were subsequently translated into English were his major works. Besides these, there were some minor novelists like Tarasankar Bandopadhyaya, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyaya (Pather Panchali), Manik Bandapodhyaya, Naini Bhaumik, Gajendra Kumar Mitra, Manoj Basu, who presented through their fiction, the superficial life as well as a profound study of Bengal life.

Before independence Indian novelists took inspiration from the English novels but afterwards we find influence of other
countries and cultures as well. This major change in the Indian political scenario led some writers to write nostalgically and glorify the past whereas some sensitive minds portrayed through their writings the tumult brought about by this change in the form of partition. The realisation that by overthrowing British rule, they couldn’t purge their country of the corruption, poverty, superstitions and communalism, became the subject of many creative works of fiction. Because of the lack of economical and social support to the creative writers the novelists had to face numerous problems, still novel as a literary genre kept on evolving and prospering.

Novels dealing with plots and characters set by the side of rivers formed another type. We have Indian novels written in English set by the riverside like K.S. Venkataramani’s Murugan the Tiller (1927) where he tells the story of village Alavanti situated on the banks of river Cauvery, Humayun Kabir’s Men and Rivers (1945) dealing with the river Padma – R.K. Narayan’s novels deal with Malgudi, the fictional town situated on the banks of river Sarayu. In Raja Rao’s Kanthapura the river Hemavathy is a dominant presence. In The Serpent and the Rope the river Ganges attains the position of a deity. The river sometimes brings death and destruction while sometimes it takes the role of a mother who gives life and bounty. And where agrarian way of life is represented, the river has to be worshipped and pleased if favour and security are sought for.

Tea and coffee plantation settings in novels also make an altogether new creed. These plantations were culturally very rich
since natives, tribals and Europeans worked together and the consequent conflicts of ideas and tempers gave ample scope to the novelists for the creation of a variety of plots. Mulk Raj Anand’s *Two Leaves and a Bud* is a very impressive depiction of life in an Assamese tea-estate. The action of Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* partly takes place in a coffee-estate in South India. In Manohar Malgaonker’s *Combat of Shadows*, the action takes place in an Assamese tea-estate although both are different in the way the theme is dealt with.

Meenakshi Mukherjee speaks about the various ways fiction developed in India:

> “Since Bengal was the first region to come in close contact with the British, the earliest Indian novels came to be written in Bengali. The first few attempts consist of sketches of contemporary Bengali society, but the new genre really became established with the historical novel form. Novel emerged at different times in different regions in India, but almost every where the first crop showed a preoccupation with historical romance. In fact, the full development of the Indian novel as a whole, allowing for certain oversimplification of details may be divided into three large stages; 1. Historical Romance, 2. Social or Political Realism, and 3. Psychological novels showing an introspective concern with the individual.”¹¹

The creative representation of history into works of fiction has always lured novelists in the past as well as the present. Very early in 1903, T. Ramakrishna wrote a historical novel in English, *Padmini* dealing with the great sixteenth century battle of
‘Talikote’. *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909) by Romesh Chander Dutt and *Nur Jahan* (1909) by Sir Jogendra Singh are also in the category of historical romances. Vimala Raina’s *Ambrapali* (1962) deals with the story of the Vaishali dancer by the same name, who enters Buddha’s fold in the times of Ajat Shatru. A.S.P. Ayyar’s *Baladitya* (1930) and *Chanakya and Chandragupta* (1952) also deal with ancient Indian history.

The Indian revolutionary movement of the twentieth century also became the subject of many a creative novels.

“The novels set in the 1930s and 1940s invariably touch upon the national movement for political independence. This is inevitable because the long years of struggle and sacrifice have shaped and coloured every experience of modern India. A great national experience must surely help in maturing the novel form because an experience shared by the people at large becomes the matrix of a society and the novel flourishes best in a society that is integrated.”

Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Home and the World* and *Four Chapters* deal with such movements. Mulk Raj Anand’s *The Sword and the Sickle* and K.A. Abbas’s *Inquilab* also indite the political situation of the twenties. Gandhian civil disobedience movement in the early thirties forms the background concern of K.S. Venkataramani’s *Kandan the Patriot* (1938) and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938). There was a proliferation of novels during the Second World War period in India as this was the time when the Hindu-Muslim rift was widening and India-Britain conflict was also increasing and there was the Bengal famine and the Quit India Movement. The resultant increase in frustration and misery is
covered in novels like N.S. Phadke’s *Leaves in the August Wind*, Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers!* (1947), R.K. Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) and Kamala Markandaya’s *Some Inner Fury* (1957).

The horror and bestiality evidenced after the partition of India and Pakistan gave birth to a new class of partition novels. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a very humane and compassionate record of post partition horrors. Balachandra Rajan’s *The Dark Dancer* (1959), Manohar Malgaonkar’s *Distant Drums* and *A Bend in the Ganges* present the same event in different ways. The civil unrest after such a mammoth shift of population overshadowed all social and political happenings and occupied the novelists for a considerable time.

The novels that deal with themes of social criticism also form a separate but noticeable group. Romesh Chander Dutt’s *The Lake of Palms* (1902) takes Bengal’s social life as its subject and is revolutionary in the sense that it depicts the remarriage of a widow, till then considered a taboo even in imaginary creative works. T. Ramakrishna’s *The Dive of Death* (1912) deals with the superstitions prevalent in the society. Sir Jogendra Singh’s *Nasrin* (1915) and *Kamini* (1931), Balakrishna’s *The Love of Kusuma* deals with social life in Punjab. Firoz Khan Noon’s *Scented Dust* again deals with life in Punjab. Hari Singh Gour’s *His Only Love* is a study of the consequences of the liberation of Indian women. Ahmad Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) portrays Muslim life in modern Delhi. In a culturally eclectic country like India, there is no dearth of social issues and subjects to write about.
Faith and renunciation occupy a special place of reverence in our society. The ascetic in the form of Guru is always looked upto in our society. The ‘sannyasi’ motif as has already been mentioned has figured very frequently in Indian English fiction. In Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *He Who Rides a Tiger*, the swami is a fake who misguides people to avenge himself on the society. In *The Guide* by R.K. Narayan, Raju becomes a swami by chance. In Kamala Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire* and *Possession*, we have a sannyasi who’s a social counsellor but people sometimes begin doubting his integrity. Some novelists have even tried writing about the old ‘rishis’ like *Bhagwan Parshuram* by K.M. Munshi.

The Indian English novelists of yesterday rarely experimented with techniques of plot, characterization and narration. But the trends are changing and Indian English novelists have started experimenting with style. Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

“As the novel developed in the West, the problem of what to say has sometimes been outstripped by the problem of how to say it. Especially in the early years of the twentieth century, the technique of the modern novel was the primary concern of writer as well as of critic. This concern with technique has been slow to evolve in Indo-Anglian fiction, but as early as 1938 we find Raja Rao asserting that the epic method is the most suitable for Indian temperament ‘and our paths are paths interminable…Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop, our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling…’ This very attention to technique is a sign of maturity of Indo-Anglian fiction.”13
The stream of consciousness technique, a narrative style that keeps jumbling the time between past, present and future has been used impressively by Indian novelists. Instances are numerous like G.V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), some passages in Khushwant Singh’s *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, Anita Desai’s *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1965). With the passage of time prominent novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgaonkar, Kamala Markandaya have shown great adaptation with the times both in terms of subject matter and in terms of style. Bhabani Bhattacharya talks about ‘godmen’ in *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978) but in a changed manner. *Princes*, shows Manohar Malgaonkar turning to historical biography.

Novels with themes like the predicament of coloured immigrants in European countries came in vogue, like Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man*, Anita Desai’s *Bye Bye Blackbird* and V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Man*. Here we see a shift of the novelists concern from the external predicament of the characters to a revelation of their innermost psyche and the impact the external forces exercise on it. Anita Desai’s *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* (1975) uses the stream of consciousness method on the times of Virginia woolf and Margaret Atwood and further repeats it in *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) and *Clear Light of Day* (1980) with effective ease.

Although Anita Desai successfully reveals the stark reality of life by stripping it of all hypocrisy yet she’s more drawn towards the manner of presentation, as she herself confesses:
“...it is a style that interests me most – and by this I mean conscious labour of uniting language and symbol, word and rhythm... one must find a way to unite the inner and outer rhythms.”

Novelists like Nayantara Sahgal present through their novels the political situation of India about thirty years back from present, *This Time of Morning* and *Storm in Chandigarh* and *The Day in Shadow* (1971) are some of her works. *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) shows all the violence and turmoil in terms of student activity and a background of greater politics. Arun Joshi through his *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1978) and again *The Apprentice*, explores the psychology of people which make him run towards escape in different ways.

The political and social situation witnessed a marked transformation in the 1990s. The period saw electronic revolution taking technology to unimaginable heights, globalization, liberalization, cultural homogenization, crime, corruption and an increasing concern for ecology. But before this and after independence, the country’s peace has been overshadowed from time to time, by hostile events. The aggression India witnessed in the latter half of the 1980s led to a deluge of literary output. At the same time the country opened its doors to liberalization and globalization. Such intensifying crises and structural changes in the society provoke an urge to analyse and understand it. The result is a literature more and more inspired by the social environment. Such periods characterized by progress hurdled by hostile regressive events urge a desire for introspection, consequently stimulating creativity in the form of fiction.
The 1990s and after happens to be a golden period in productivity of Indian English fiction. The writers are asking cultural questions, emphasizing the central point that it is necessary to find some means of surviving tolerantly in such a dangerous world. India is home to many introspective and eloquent writers. With no conventional boundaries and restrictions at play, many of these new novelists are grouping to figure out their own technique, giving full reins to their creative imagination. The major factor common among these works of fiction is that they distance themselves from the contemporary by annihilating the usually accepted concept of time and even from the physical barriers of geography and other dividing and limiting factors.

Contemporary Indian English writing can be divided into two distinct strands: one comprising the home grown writers and the other dominated by NRIs like Vikram Chandra, Kiran Desai, Ardhasir Vakil, Kaizad Gustad, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Rau Badami, Bharati Mukherjee, Meera Sayal, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Anjanna Appachanna, Chitra Diwakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, V.S. Naipaul among others. The last two decades have seen an unprecedented spurt in the publication of writers from India. The sharp rise in the last quarter of 20th century in migration to Britain, USA, Canada and more recently, to Australia and New Zealand has resulted in a body of literature in English by these writers. These diasporic writers give expression to their colonial and post-colonial experience from the vantage point of both home and abroad. The discrimination and alienation they face in the foreign land coupled with the experience of
marginalization they face in their home country found voice in their fictional outburst.

The works of these migrant authors signals the contemporary condition, describing the predicament of various ethnic and racial communities inhabiting spaces that are shared with others. The haunting anguish of personal loss lies at the core of diasporic fiction by writers of Indian descent together with a feeling of homelessness that an awareness of India engenders. When we consider any diasporic fiction, terms like alienation, nostalgia, exile, despair, dislocation, abandonment and loss of identity come to the mind.

But the literary production, just before the boon of 1980s started by Salman Rushdie, was very slow. Meenakshi Mukherjee speaks about this in her preface to *The Twice Born Fiction*:

“I was an avid though somewhat lonely watcher of the Indian English literary scene all through the seventies, because of my vested interest in the field. And by the end of the decade I was almost convinced that what I had documented in my dissertation was a short lived episode in the multi-lingual literary history of India, an episode that was now coming to its natural end. The grandmasters of the Indian novel in English – R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand – who had started writing in the 1930s continued with unflagging regularity but they had ceased to surprise. Many of those who emerged after them had also fallen by the wayside after sporadic activity. No new name had caught the reader’s attention after Anita Desai and Arun Joshi...Suddenly all this changed. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) may be looked upon as a convenient
watershed separating the ethos in which the writers discussed in *The Twice Born Fiction* had written their novels from the confidence and effervescence of a new generation which no longer agonises about the choice of language nor seems overtly self conscious about *Indianness*.”

Amitav Ghosh, undoubtedly, is the flagbearer of this new face of Indian English novel but the credit of a swift and marked graduation of Indian English novel from a merely sociological concern to a study of the innermost psyche of the characters in very innovative and experimental styles, like the use of the technique of magic realism goes to a great extent, to Salman Rushdie. Indira Bhatt and Indira Nityanandam point, precisely to this contribution of Rushdie in their joint critical work:

“Another important aspect to which Rushdie draws our attention is the interaction of historical and individual forces. In the 1930s, the Indian English novelist was more concerned with national and political and social problems but the novelists of the 1960s shifted the focus to the individual’s quest for personal meaning and his existential problems and social relationships. In the 1980s there is a further discernible change. With Rushdie's *Midnight’s Children*, novelists were inspired to take up the relationship between national issues and the individual.”

Salman Rushdie paved the way and Amitav Ghosh played a very significant role in carrying forward the legacy of creating rich and influential fiction. Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands* is a perfect illustration of the alienation suffered by expatriate Indians. In this novel, Rushdie talks of the sense of loss experienced by exiles and
immigrants and their inner urge to reclaim what they’ve lost. He observes:

“It may be that writers in my position, exiles and immigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt... one writer who is out of the country even out of language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity of his being present in a different place from his past, of his being elsewhere.”

Salman Rushdie was the pioneer diasporic writer who articulated the predicament of writers with experiences of displacement and immigration. *Grimus* (1975) was his first work of fiction, which was rich with mythic and erudite literary allusions. But, the Booker Prize winning novel, *Midnight’s Children* (1981), remains his most popular work. With this pioneering work using the technique of *Magic Realism*, Rushdie came to be acclaimed as the master writer of post-colonial fiction. In *Shame* (1983) Rushdie writes about Pakistan to which his family had migrated from India. Rushdie is celebrated as the writer who put the post-colonial scene on the literary map. Migration is an offshoot of post-coloniality and this theme of migration and the predicament of the post-colonial migrant constitutes the subject of his next novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988). The novel is set in the west and gives voice to his own experience of uprooting and displacement, which ironically increased with the *Fatwa* he had to face because of this work. The book was deemed blasphemous by the Muslim Religious fanatics and a *Fatwa* was issued against him, and he was forced to lead a
fugitive’s life for almost a decade.

_The Moor’s Last Sigh_ (1995), his next novel is set in Bombay and represents his fictional return to India. His subsequent novel _The Ground Beneath Her Feet_ (1999) again, is set in Bombay, in India. Besides Rushdie’s characteristic concerns with the great issues of our time, his fiction discusses the themes of intermingling, displacement and innovation.

_Fury_ (2001) is set in New York. It is an attempt to weave myth and science fiction into the contemporary world.

V.S. Naipaul, is celebrated for voicing his experience of migration and struggle to deal with the pangs of an uprooted artist. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2001. His early novels _The Mystic Masseur_ (1957), _Miguel Street_ (1960), _A House for Mr. Biswas_ (1961), are all set in Trinidad. After these, he moves over to other locales such as Africa, Latin America, India, which he visits in both fictional and non-fictional modes.

_The Enigma of Arrival_ (1987) deals with an uprooted community’s longing for acceptance and a sense of belonging, and their realization of the futility of nostalgia. His recent novel _Half a Life_ (2001) alongwith his other works expresses his concern that the diasporic writers should strive to create a self in their own words and assert their voice in the country, where they live.

The migrations and large-scale movements of people are an outcome of globalization. The impact is directly visible in literature with a representation of multicultural communities. All the fictional and non-fictional works by Amitav Ghosh bear testimony to it, as
would be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters of the proposed research work.

Vikram Seth’s works are also steeped in the same search for home and identity. His *An Equal Music* (1999) describes expatriate Indian’s perpetual search for roots and endless discourses about the impossibility of homecoming. Unlike *A Suitable Boy* and the more recent *Two Lives*; Seth’s triumph in *An Equal Music* lies in creating a central character that has no direct relationship to Seth’s cultural context.

Rohinton Mistry, contemporary writer of much significance can be said to have undergone double Diaspora, first being a Parsi, from Persia to India and from India to Canada. He is an Indian by birth presently living in Canada. Mistry in his novels goes back to India to the Parsi community. *Such a Long Journey* (1991) is set against the backdrop of the Indo-Pak war and the birth of Bangladesh as a nation. Dealing with a Parsi family, the novel shows the Parsi community as a model of multiculturalism, and how it has blended into Indian culture without losing their own cultural and religious identity.

*A Fine Balance* (1995) is written under the backdrop of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency. It is the story of a widow Dina Shroff who is forced to return to her tyrannical brother, after spending sixteen years of her life earning and living alone. Freedom and home both elude her. The loss of home leaves a hole that never fills in the world of Nariman Vakil, the seventy nine years old protagonist of *Family Matters* (2002). It is really a recurrent theme in almost all of Mistry’s novels.
The great body of writing by women diaspora, who moved to the west from India either as professionals or as accompanying spouses, have contributed substantially to expatriate literature in English. They provide a fresh vision of colonial and post colonial experiences tinted with feminine sensibility, of patriarchal constraints of their colonial homelands and further the alienation in western society.

Bharati Mukherjee’s _Desirable Daughters_ (2002) thematizes the issue of diaspora through the story of Tara Chatterjee’s trajectory from India to San Francisco and back to Mishtiganj. It is the creative pursuit of writing that shows Tara the way to her emancipation by remembering her community’s history in a socially meaningful manner.

_Jasmine_ (1989), Bharati Mukherjee’s famous novel embodies the common experience of the Indian diaspora and raises the questions of identity construction and ethnic differences. The protagonist Jasmine is addressed with a different name depending upon where she makes her home and with whom. Her name, first like her home, is constantly reinvented and relocated.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s debut novel _The Namesake_ (2003) is based on the theme of migration and alienation. The novel spans thirty years of a Bengali family – the Gangulys in America, and their constant longing for home and belongingness. More painful is the journey of their son Gogol, who carries the burden of a name he doesn’t like, and his attempts to conform and belong to the society he was born into i.e. the West.

Chitra Diwakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) deals with Tilo, a healer and seller of spices in Oakland. Her other novel *Sister of My Heart* (1999) is a simple story of two girls growing up under one roof sharing confidences, willing to make sacrifices for each other, confronting the world together.

Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* (1999) belongs to the genre of partition novels. Meena Alexander’s *Manhattan Music* (1990) has a character Draupadi who has never been to India and feels guilty for her lack of history.

These diasporic Indian novels reflect the migrant condition and illuminate the ongoing transformation in cultural and personal identities. Recently women’s issues have acquired centre stage in literary works. Since, 1990s there’s an increased preoccupation with women’s assertion of their own right on their body. Body is a manifestation of woman’s assertion for her self and identity.

In Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), through the character of Ammu, the novelist underscores woman’s right to her body. Ammu asserts her right over her body by marrying out of the Syrian Christian community and refusing to relent to the lust of the white sahib at her husband’s behest and later takes Velutha, the untouchable as her lover. Rahel the chief narrator in the story becomes the writer’s self, giving voice to her consciousness. A representative of the third generation, Rahel is a rebel right from
her childhood. In the convent she smoked, burnt her teacher’s bun of hair and dashed against young girls to see if breasts hurt. Both Ammu and Rahel refuse to conform to the accepted social behaviour. Through the character of baby Kochamma, the novelist shows women as the worst perpetrators of suffering on women.

Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* (1998) is a realistic representation of mother-daughter relationship. Virmati is the difficult daughter for her mother Kasturi but when Virmati’s daughter Ida grows up, she also feels stifled by her mother. The novel presents Virmati’s quest for her selfhood in the process discarding all social taboos. She too like Ammu in *The God of Small Things* is a master of her body. She has pre-marital sex with Prof. Harish and later in violent defiance of her family, marries him and becomes his second wife. However, she refuses to be a victim and transforms her marginal experience into a creative force and potent energy.

The central protagonist in Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman* (2003) is Astha, a married woman who struggles to keep her identity intact while seeking equal opportunities within and without the familial threshold. Frustrated because of an incompatible marriage, Astha reclaims her body and manifests her dissatisfaction by seeking love in a lesbian relationship with Pileeka.

Gita Hariharan’s *Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) won the Commonwealth Writers Prize. The novel again looks at the institution of marriage with the perspective of the suppressed female. The American educated heroine Devi, seeks love in marriage failing to find which she feels frustrated. She leaves her
husband and later her lover, to live on her own terms in her own home by the sea.

Hariharan’s *When Dreams Travel* (1999) also gives voice to women who were silent or absent in the stories of *Arabian Nights*. She uses the *Arabian Nights* as the theme and context and includes Shahrzad’s sister, their mother, and the mother of Shahrzad herself.

Shashi Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* (2000) has Madhu as the central protagonist, a woman who describes herself as a housewife, who loves her son Aditya and is complacent in the happiness of her home. Madhu, the narrator, shows resilience in the face of life’s tragedies. Madhu travels to Bhavanipur to write the biography of Savitri Bai, doyen of the Gwalior gharana and arrives in the wake of her adolescent son Aditya’s death. In a sense, she’s trying to get away and escape, to piece together her shattered life.

*A Matter of Time* (1996) again takes up the theme of woman’s search for her own identity. Sumi, who has been deserted by her husband, refuses to be pitied, rather takes up life as a challenge and successfully gives voice to her daughters, who establish their identity through education, inner strength and sheer determination. Both Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur deal with significant issues like motherhood, marriage, the various roles of women as wife, sister and friend and present a picture through mature feminine sensibilities.

In *Fasting Feasting* (1999) Anita Desai creates a microcosm of the patriarchal world where the women, be they wives or sisters have to submit to the unexpressed needs of their fellow males.
Kavery Nambisan’s *The Scent of Peppers* (1997) deals with the brutality of patriarchal society to Nanji, married at twelve, widowed at thirteen, married again at seventeen, mother of thirteen becomes an old woman at forty six. Though Nanji is a representative of countless such women in India, yet she stands out with her compassion and tensile individualism.

Anjanna Appachana’s *Listening Now* (1998) is a retelling of the Shakuntala legend. Padma is the single mother, abandoned by her husband. The story has six narrators and deals with the themes of female bonding, female sexuality and mother-child relationship.

Shobha De talks about the battle of sexes in *Surviving Men* (1997).

These significant writings by women, about women, focus on the psychological complexities of female subjectivity. These novels interrogate and explore women’s space and place in a patriarchal milieu. They seek to promote their point of view to reorganize the world realities, a step towards sanity in human relationships.

Besides making the earth a better place for the fairer sex, an influential body of literature seeks to rebuild our bond with nature, our origin which we seem to have forgotten.

Gita Mehta in her novel *A River Sutra* (1993) links the river Narmada to the main story and six sub stories. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) is replete with a description of world of nature, tiny insects and tiny creatures. Roy’s concern for and voicing of Nature’s existence is corroborated by her active participation in *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and recently her support
to people who are opposing *Sardar Sarovar Project*. She has judiciously mixed her celebrity status with her involvement in popular public causes.

David Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes* (2003) also has nature as an integral part and a sensuous protagonist. Charity Dorai shares a special bond with nature which is a significant message to the whole world.

Besides females and trees, there are numerous marginalized minorities who require a representation. Minority discourse is characterized not only by an eagerness to adopt and assimilate but also by a culture of protest and resistance. Contemporary Indian English fiction reflects the psychological vulnerabilities of minorities, be they individuals or communities.

Writers like Dina Mehta, Rohinton Mistry, Boman Desai, Firdaus Kanga, Karanjia, and Allan Sealy have given a new face to the literary discourse. Recent years have witnessed a remarkable growth in Parsi writing. Boman Desai’s *The Memory of Elephants* (1988) deals with the tiny but influential Parsi community in India. Dina Mehta’s *Milo in Love* (2003) is a story of Sharmila, a spinster who has secretly loved Rayhaan, a family friend and a Parsi Punjabi hunk. Sharmila goes to California to study but returns when she doesn’t fit there. Parsis is a marginalised community, on the verge of extinction. Inbreeding has led to a diseased people in the community, so, many young Parsi girls and boys are opting for mixed marriages. Firdaus Kanga’s *Trying to Grow* touches upon the subject of mixed marriages. As has already been discussed Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey, A Fine Balance* and
*Family Matters*, portrays the Parsi community in India. Parsis have guarded their cultural and religious identity by isolating themselves from other communities. Mistry’s novels tell us about the life of Parsi community, its social norms, religious practices, food habits, and their distinctive language and idiom. The community comes out as an ideal of multiculturalism and shows how well they have assimilated into Indian society without giving up their cultural and religious identity.

I Allan Sealy’s *Trotternama* (1988) weaves history and fantasy in a remarkable manner. It covers seven generations of Anglo-Indians. In David Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes* (2002), the second book entitled Doraipuram, describes Anglo-Indian community, when Kannan falls in love with Helen while in Madras Christian College. The Anglo-Indian community makes its appearance felt in many a fictional works like Nayantara Sahgal’s *Lesser Breeds* (2003), and in Kavery Nambisan’s *The Scent of Peppers* (1997). The Syrian Christian community is seen in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. Esther David’s *The Walled City* (1990) is a moving account of the Jewish community in Ahmedabad. It is about the process of including the marginalised group into the mainstream, in the guise of a family saga involving three generations of Jews.

Travelogues or literary works primarily occupied with the travel motif are another genre, which has recently been getting a lot of academic attention.

Vikram Seth’s *From Heavens Lake* (1984) is a postcolonial travelogue, which won Thomas Cook travel book award. Complete
with a map of his journey, poems to express his emotions and even photographs, the book is a perfect travelogue. The multiple languages, religions, geographical landscapes, climates and cultures have been discussed in detail for a fulfilling reading.

The travel motif forms an inseparable part of almost all the works by Amitav Ghosh though his works defy classification and can not be limited in their scope by being called merely travelogues. Salman Rushdie’s *The Jaguar Smile*, is an account of travels in Nicaragua.

Recent Indian writers in English are deeply engaged with questions of history and Amitav Ghosh is the forerunner amongst them: a perfect illustration would be *The Glass Palace* (2000) which can be called a chronicle of the factors and history behind World War II. But even a quick glance at all his works would reveal Ghosh’s preoccupation with history. But besides Ghosh’s novels, which would be dwelt upon in detail in the forthcoming chapters, history forms the backdrop of most of the Indian writers in English. Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* presents a historical record of the events of the 1940s. Nayantara Sahgal’s * Lesser Breeds* (2003) and David Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes* (2002) have freedom movement as their backdrop. There is an array of novels with partition and the violence it accompanied, as the articulate background, like, Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980), Gurcharan Das’s *A Fine Family* (1990), Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking Through Glass* (1995), Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* (1991).
The scar of partition is still fresh in India’s mind, with Babri Masjid violence and other communal riots adding to the sores. Shashi Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* concerns the lives of two women Madhu and Savitribai who have lost their son and daughter respectively in riots after the demolition of Babri Masjid. The Ayodhya incident also appears in Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman*. Kiran Nagerkar’s *Cuckold* (1997) deals with the legendary Mira Bai’s husband Maharaja Kumar. The background is a significant period of Indian history when Babur won the throne of Delhi.

Gita Mehta’s *Raj* appears as a documentary on the Roy as she makes use of authentic historical material in the form of speeches and proceedings of the Indian National Congress.

Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) chronicles the political history of the twentieth century India. *Riot* (2001) by Tharoor is concerned with the communal issues bedevilling our national politics and society in the 1990s. Communal issues and fundamentalist mindset is the issue of Gita Harihanar’s *In Times of Siege* (2003). Dealing with a professor besieged for writing a politically incorrect history lesson, the work speaks volumes for the politically influenced history writing.

The use of myth to control his world of fact and fiction is another characteristic of Indian English novelist. The *Jatakas*, the *Puranas*, the numerous intersecting stories of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* provide ample anchorage for stories retold in present times. Salman Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) makes use of hundreds of mythological references. Allusions to
Gods and legendary beings stick out everywhere. When a boy offers an apple to three girls on a Bombay Beach, *The Judgement of Paris* is evoked. The story of Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama, the book is like something out of a mythological dictionary. Rushdie’s other novel *Fury* (2001) uses classical mythology, in this case the myth of the three furies, the snake haired Goddesses who avenged crime in an exploration of Prof. Mallick Solanka’s mid-life crisis. The novel attempts to weave myth and science fiction.

Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* (1996), is structured in three parts: ‘The House’, ‘The Family’ and ‘The River’. The first two sections begin with an epigram from Bradaranayaka Upanishad, third from Katha Upanishad. Mother daughter bonding reminds us of the myth of Prithvi and Sita. There are numerous other mythological parallels that can be drawn as the text is thickly inlaid with myths.

Sunny Singh’s debut novel *Nani’s Book of Suicide* (2000) combines myth and contemporary reality to explore the cultural identity of an Indian woman. Sammie, the coke addicted wanderer who moves from Varanasi to Mexico travelling from place to place, is linked to mythical women like Kunti, Draupadi, Sita, Suneeti, Meera and Padmini.

These mythical women are not only the integral aspect of her consciousness but are living creatures that haunt her through her travels across the globe.

Anjana Appachanna’s *Listening New* (1998) is an interesting telling of the legend of Shakuntala, the primal single mother
abandoned by her partner. A story that has six narrators, the novel creates a complex world for each one with their own desires and despairs.

The use of myths in fiction has an aesthetic advantage both thematically and structurally. These myths, which are an integral part of our shared cultural heritage, contain the basic ideas that govern the entire culture of a nation.

The late twentieth century, saw the advent of post-modernism in all fields of cultural life from architecture, films, literary subjects to political and social situations. The role of postmodernist cultural theories like post structuralism, post Freudian psychoanalysis, new historicism, reception aesthetics, post-colonialism etc, in the interpretation of the new fiction is quite conspicuous. Whereas a modernist would try to see meaning in the world through myth, symbol or formal complexity, the postmodernist artist welcomes the absurd and the meaningless confusion of contemporary existence with a certain numbed indifference.

In Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* (1981), the conventional hierarchy is reversed - the marginal is suppressed and the peripheral are given central place. Conventional history is hampered with the use of magic realism, the absurd, conceits and black humour.

Gita Hariharan’s *When Dreams Travel* (1992) is a novel about a woman’s search for her story. The terror, oppression and injustice of the patriarchal system, is brought out, using the old story of
Arabian nights as theme. Hariharan uses subversive devices of meta-fiction, intertext and magic realism in order to foreground her feminist discourse in the post-modern context. The writer calls into question the validity of conventional writing practice at the same time using this practice to develop a pattern of coherence which breaks radically from the closed, linear narrative.


Rajkamal Jha’s *The Blue Bedspread* (1999) a novel spread over one night centres around the incestuous love of the unnamed narrator for his sister. It follows the same unconventional form of narrative.

His recent novel *If You are Afraid of Heights* (2003) is about two unlikely people, who find their lives briefly joined by a tram accident in Kolkata. Another parallel narrative shows a journalist’s investigation of the discovery of the body of a child, raped, killed and abandoned in a canal. Flying back and forth between the two narratives is the figure of a crow. The dark, eerie, mutilated images, which abound, are nightmarish to the reader.

Shashi Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* appears to be a biography of Bai. Madhu is a writer and she is at the same time reflecting upon and writing about her own life. Similarly Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* blends historicity and meta-fiction. The post-modern novel’s characteristic feature is the metafictionality and the major aspect of meta fictionality is inter
textuality. There is in all the texts, the presence or suggestion of a plethora of other texts and the novel deliberately draws attention to those texts.

Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1996) is connected by a series of interlinked and interacting stories stretching across continents and centuries. There is a use of magic realism as the human monkey types the tale of his previous life as the poet Sanjay. Chandra’s text makes use of intertextual strategies. The text abounds in literary allusions to Melville, to Kipling, Shakespeare, R.L. Stevenson, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Rushdie and Poe. It is a post-modern novel, which breaks both chronology and stream of consciousness by turning both upside down, shuffling the sequence and space.

The creation and reception of art, whether literary or otherwise is altered in the contemporary world with global communication technology, multinational capitalism and changing social values. Indian English novels have shown a tendency for reception of the innovative collaboration at a global level. The genre is open to growing demand for diversity, a necessary increase in the assertion of minorities and a valorisation of hybridity both in society and literature. Steeped in the culture and history of the Indian subcontinent, Indian English novel needs to be studied in the context of our history and our culture, both classical and contemporary. The contemporary Indian English novel places our socio-cultural concerns in the foreground and even the literature written in Indian regional languages helps in providing the context for the text.
Unlike other regional Indian language literatures which have fixed and composite readership and are restricted to a fixed geographical territory and religious sections, Indian English writing has a universal appeal, defying regional geographical boundaries, integrating various states within the country, it becomes a medium of co-operation and exchange. It is this tendency to bring together and at the same time break all dividing lines and categorisations, which gives to Indian English novel its universal appeal.

The range of Indian English fiction is truly eclectic and wide. If works abound in East-West encounter, there are new versions and interpretations of ancient mythologies. If there are works on newer interpretations of history, there are also novels in which women’s issues remain a tangential concern. New areas are constantly being explored and brought to light. Rohit Manchanda’s first novel *In the Light of the Black Sun* (1996) presents a picture of childhood in a remote mining district of Bihar. Kavery Nambisan’s *The Scent of Peppers* presents an authentic picture of life in Coorg, exploring new geographical and social arenas. Even a satire in the form of an animal fable has been attempted: Ranjit Lal’s *The Crow Chronicle* does not have any human characters. *The Night of the Krait*, a fast paced thriller has been written by Shashi Warrior. Tara Deshpande has written India’s first e-book *The Motive* which is co-authored by Tara Deshpande and ‘You’.

Fiction remains the dominant form of literary art, more than any other genre. Fiction writing represents India’s most valuable contribution to the world of books. Contemporary novelists daringly experiment with the language as well as the technique of
fiction. The use of science fiction, fantasy, magic realism, and blending of various literary genres has enriched the form of the Indian English novels.

This trend has been evolving ever since and has reached its pinnacle in the contemporary world of fiction writers – a fearless new creed who’s not afraid of experimentation in any form.

Amitav Ghosh, is at the forefront of this newly acquired fearlessness and freedom of Indian writers. 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 upon 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. Attempt in the proposed research work, would be to make a thematic study of the fictional works by Amitav Ghosh and try to unravel the patterns inherent therein.

Thus, this introductory chapter is an endeavour at placing Amitav Ghosh in Modern Indian Literary Context. The various routes, through which the Indian English Fiction has travelled to reach the present scenario, have been traced in this chapter. Attempt has been to trace the progress of Indian English Fiction right from its birth to its gradual evolution into the present mature and internationally acclaimed form, with Amitav Ghosh at the forefront. The tendency of Ghosh to blend the various genres to produce unparalleled works of literature is a literary innovation of which Ghosh is the supreme master. With 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 novelist of today have been studied in the light of changing patterns across decades. It is against this literary background, keeping in mind the various themes that have occupied Indian English Writers that Amitav Ghosh’s novels would be studied in the later chapters. The subsequent six chapters would be devoted to a deep critical analysis of six novels by Amitav Ghosh in order to highlight the different dimensions of the topic that is, ‘Thematic patterns in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh.’

The second chapter entitled ‘The Migrant Subaltern: The traveller in ‘The Circle of Reason’, would dwell in detail on the migrating subaltern and his predicament keeping the feminist perspective in mind. Ghosh’s persistent and recurring concern with the porosity of national, cultural and mental barriers would be introduced in this chapter. The chapter would attempt to make a study of the deployment of the journey motif and the significant junctions like circularity and reason on the way. The influence of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, in his use of ‘Magic Realism’ is combined with Ghosh’s experimentation with the fictional mode. Ghosh the story teller and delineator of characters, combines various genres to produce a unique literary representation, which would recur in his subsequent works to bring out varied thematic interests.

The third chapter entitled ‘The Blurring Borders: Post-Colonial Travel in *The Shadow Lines*’ would deal with the new
dimensions given to the theme of negation of discrete cultures and borders and the idea of nationalism. The chapter would attempt to study how Ghosh employs memory, time and place to establish the futility of cartographical divisions, in a non-linear narrative. 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, where the native is the traveller, would be discussed. Above all, the effect of the violence which came in the wake of the partition, on the inner consciousness of the protagonists as presented in the novel would be dwelt upon.

The fourth chapter is entitled ‘Giving Voice to History: Subaltern Revived in In An Antique Land’. The endeavour in this chapter would be to reveal how Ghosh’s concern for and insight into the world of the subaltern predominates the rest of his ideas. The chapter would discuss how Ghosh gives voice to the obscure subaltern who is lost in the oblivion of historical annals. An attempt would be made to reveal how the novel defies categorisation in terms of genre with a melding of different generic traits.

The fifth chapter entitled: ‘The Subaltern Scientific Researcher in Ghosh’s Medical History: The Calcutta Chromosome’ would highlight how the novel continues to explore Ghosh’s peculiar themes in a genre that is predominantly science fiction, but imbibes traces of history, detective chase and even spirituality. The chapter would discuss how the author examines the late nineteenth century history of malaria research, restoring to the subaltern researcher, his deserved place in history. The endeavour would be
to further reveal how the subjugated subaltern, especially the twice-colonised female is given an authoritarian voice in the novel. The chapter would emphasize how the borders between the discoverers and the discovered are gradually blurred and subsequently erased in this unconventional work of science fiction which seeks to project into the past.

The sixth chapter entitled: ‘Post-Colonial Migrations: The Displaced Generations in *The Glass Palace*’, would be 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*. It would unravel how Ghosh weaves the stories of a proliferation of characters, of various nationalities into a post-colonial narrative of epic magnitude. The chapter would discuss in detail the identity crisis faced by the Indians especially Indian officers in the British army in the years before independence. The emphasis again would be on unravelling the obliteration of borders that is a result of crossovers and transitions presented in the novel.

The seventh chapter entitled: ‘Borders – dissolved: An Ecological Perspective of *The Hungry Tide*’, would take 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 would attempt to discuss how Ghosh deals with the more intimate world of personal divisions between men and women, besides geographical divisions. The chapter would discuss 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.

The eighth chapter would be conclusive in nature and would be devoted to the manner in which the various themes are interrelated. It would sum up the findings of the preceding chapters and offer an overall view of the findings. The chapter would take a cursory glance at Ghosh’s non-fiction which is the true precursor of the themes dealt with by him, in his fiction. Besides his essays, the chapter also includes a brief mention of Ghosh’s proposed Ibis trilogy which includes *The Sea of Poppies* published in 2008 and *River of Smoke* his latest venture published in June 2011. The recurring and pervading theme of dissolution of boundaries and divisions is dealt with, in detail. The chapter also dwells upon Ghosh’s craft of fiction, the structural and formal features of his works under study. In the end, the findings of the preceding chapters are summed up and an overall view of the findings is offered.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


12. Meenakshi Mukherjee, “The Literary Landscape Ch.2” 35-36.


