Chapter-1

Introduction

‘You must see the truth of your subject in your mind . . . if you know the truth of what you see, the rest is mere execution.’ (509)

---Amitav Ghosh in The Glass Palace.

‘Because what I do think is true is that human beings live in narrative. Where the narratives don’t exist, in some way life does not exist.’ (246)

---Amitav Ghosh’s views in an interview with Lila Azam Zanganeh.

Narrative is defined as ‘something that is told as a story’ or ‘the art of telling a story’. There are many events that happen all around us and we weave them into words while recounting them as stories to listeners. Narratives are in fact present in the telling of the stories, whether the stories that are made up of our own experiences or the stories that we dream up to make our lives more colourful. Narrative may be written, as in the books of fiction which address readers in various ways.

All around us we find life presenting different challenges and narratives pour out of this seeming chaos, telling us stories of historical upheavals, political struggles, natural disasters, scams, scandals, conflicts, struggles, wars, personal suffering and trauma on one side; happiness, joy and celebration on the other. Narratives may be of fugacious value and may vanish soon after the telling or they may have a quality of permanence and may be recounted or read again and again through successive generations. Daily life experiences shared with friends and family get lost and have less permanence as compared to narratives that take the form of folk tales, ballads, myths and classics which have enduring value and permanent imprint and are passed on from generations to generations. Narratives are told through different mediums like
newspapers, magazines, books, cartoons, leaflets, drawings, comics, radio, television, music, dance, drama, films, advertisements, and in this digital era through SMSs, blogs, chats and messages on different social media. Narratives unfold real or imaginary worlds before us and in the telling of the stories we get insight into human experience.

Narratives help us to understand and learn more about ourselves and the world around us. The making of narrative is the making sense of things which in turn helps us to make sense of other things around us. Narrative is thus an indispensable medium and stuff of our knowledge of life and also the medium of human understanding. It is difficult to detach the narrative from its background, assumptions and the values of community out of which they arise. Narrative texts cannot be de-contextualized from the context of the culture.

Indian Writing in English has marked its presence and established its identity and importance by intermingling traditional and modern modes of narration in the presentation of its narrative. In India there is an age old oral tradition of narrating incidents and stories like telling of kathas by sutradhar. In the very beginning, oral communication was the medium of Indian narrative tradition. It attracted lovers of literature and imprinted an undeniable mark on their mind and heart. This rising interest encouraged writers to turn their energy to bring about new narrative techniques, forms and styles of writing.

The Indian narrative tradition has a long history of oral narratives. In Amitav Ghosh’s novels the characters have this ability which shows how by reverting to indigenous force of orality, the novelist has changed the form of his novels and Indianized it to a point where one can call these novels peculiarly Indian in style. The reader must focus at the dynamic relationship between Indian narrative tradition and the form a particular novelist concentrates upon in his novels.
A trend which emerged as twentieth century critical practice and reached its full definition in last two decades of the twentieth century is postcolonialism. After decolonization, the colonized people were harassed and belittled by the colonizing west that called them illiterate, uncivilized and barbaric. The postcolonial writers used varied strategies to ‘write back to Empire’. To create their national identity and assert their presence and individuality some of the methods introduced by these writers were dismantling narratives by polyphony, re-writing historiography, re-storing indigenous wisdom, and re-generating the rich cultural heritage of the past.

With this agenda to establish the regained self or identity, great efforts were made to re-inscribe Euro-centric historiography through intuitive insights, clear perception and deep reflection of the East. Just as literature, history is regarded a human product which may be reframed and reinterpreted. Redefining and re-rendering history, myths, folk stories and legends have become a very common trend among writers to present their work locally posited and located instead of universally relevant and acclaimed. Polyphonic narration with multiple voices replaced the traditional monologic method of narration of the important European writers in their narratives. Narration in chronological order, a technique used by Western masters, gave way to non-linear, zigzag and fragmented pattern of the narrative. This delineates the running thoughts of characters and working of their minds through memory, recall, interior monologue or stream of consciousness. No one can know the working of the mind of others. So the thought process is presented by postcolonial writer through non-linear fragmented narration to present real picture of the inner psyche of a person. After Salman Rushdie, some of the pioneer figures of this period in Indian Writing in English are Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Amit Chaudhri and Amitav Ghosh. As the new trend setters they introduced new and different styles, methods, practices and conventions in writing.
Indian English novels. Earlier generation of Indian writers in English such as R.K. Narayana, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and later V.S. Naipaul aimed at sheer urbanite or “Oxford” English. But later, Salman Rushdie and others introduced words from the Indian languages extensively and Ghosh, following Rushdie and others, has also introduced in his novels, the words not only from different Indian languages, local dialects and slangs from different pidgins, creoles and laskari—the Lingua franca of laskars and the ocean sailors, traders and migrants in India and the other Asian harbors during opium trade since the 18th century but also from other major languages of the world. Ghosh has extensively used many such words mainly in the *Ibis* novels. He has searched thoroughly the colonial period dictionaries and lexicon for maritime speech.

Ghosh, a writer with mature view of Indian reality, has taken up new themes with utmost clarity and confidence by experimenting new techniques to express novel ideas. He is highly influenced by the political and cultural environment of India and being a historian and anthropologist, Ghosh’s novels depict both past as well as present scenario and situation the world is passing through. The major preoccupations in his writings are history, national boundaries, colonial and neo-colonial power structures, cultural fragmentation, mass migration, decaying human relations and values, search for love, loss of identity, offshoot of development, materialism, modern civilization, insecurity, diasporas etc. His novels focus on important contemporary issues and concerns along with highlighting the position of side-tracked, ignored groups of society or dispossessed people like migrants, convicts, indentured labourers, prostitutes, illiterates, disabled and poor. Ghosh is known for making his readers aware of other serious issues and concerns through his novels, essays and travelogues. His works incorporate cultural, social, political, economical, philosophical, national and global issues without being pedantic and didactic. All these various issues and themes in
Ghosh’s novels are presented generally in highly innovative, inventive and heterogeneous ways of narration. Ghosh’s literary insight is reflected in his efforts of combining and amalgamating many genres in his writing mainly history, autobiography, anthropology, travelogue, adventure, photography, science, myth, poetry, folk songs, folk stories, drawing and painting and thus his writing cannot be easily categorized.

The present thesis endeavours to examine and explore narratology in Ghosh’s novels in the context of innovational narrative strategies that have been experimental in his novels. Ghosh has used different narrative strategies which are intricately woven into the texture and structure of his novels. Before discussing the major aspects of Ghosh’s writing let us explore his biography in brief. Ghosh always wanted to become a writer. He was born on 11 July 1956 in Calcutta, a place that has a permanent impact on all his works. His father was a lieutenant-Colonel in the army and later a diplomat. Ghosh grew up and spent his time in Sri Lanka, Iran and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh), while studying at boarding school in India. Ghosh studied in Doon School at Dehra Dun and one of New Delhi’s most prestigious educational institutions, St. Stephen’s College. Many of his fellow students later achieved prominence as novelists or as active participants in the Subalterns Studies movements. After completing B.A in History from St. Stephen’s in 1976, he obtained M.A degree in Sociology at the University of Delhi in 1978. At St. Edmund Hall, Oxford he did post graduate work in 1979, got a diploma in social anthropology while also spending time in Tunis learning Arabic. He went to Egypt in 1980 to do fieldwork for his doctoral research from the Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria. He was conferred an Oxford D. Phil. in Social Anthropology in 1981 for his thesis on “Kinship in Relation to the Economic and Social organization of an Egyptian Village Community”. In An Antique Land (1992) is his later anthropological travelogue in which the central figure is a researcher who has obvious resemblance and affinities with Ghosh.

Ghosh’s works have received numerous awards. Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) was awarded two prestigious Indian awards, the Sahitya Akademi Award and Ananda Puraskar and *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), the Arthur C. Clarke Prize for science fiction. He was conferred the Pushcart Prize (an award given for stories, poems and essays published in a literary magazine in the U.S) for his essay “The March of The Novel through History: My Father’s Bookcase” and the Grand Prize at the Frankfurt International e-Book Award for fictional work *The Glass Palace*. There was a controversy when he declined the best book award for the Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize that was conferred to him for *The Glass Palace*. He justified his position by saying that he was unaware of the fact that his publishers had entered the book for the Prize. He also objected to its categorization under “Commonwealth Literature”. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) was awarded the Hutch Crossword Book Prize, a major Indian award. The most prestigious award Padma Shri
was conferred to Ghosh in 2007. His *Ibis* novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008) was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. *Sea of Poppies* was awarded the Crossword Book Prize and the India Plaza Golden Quill Award. Ghosh was also a member of jury of the Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland and the Venice Film festival. He was also awarded honorary doctorate degree by Queens College, New York and the Sorbonne, Paris. He became a joint winner of Dan David Award for 2010, along with Margret Atwood. He was awarded the International Grand Pix of the Blue Metropolis Festival in Montreal in 2011. Ghosh lives in New York with his wife, Deborah Baker, author of *In Extremis: The Life of Lora Riding* (1993) and a senior editor Little Brown and Co. and his children Leela and Nayan. At present he is staying at Goa working on his last sequel of the *Ibis* novels—*Flood of Fire*.

Ghosh is equally famous for his non-fictional prose, academic expositions, book reviews, reflective essays, political commentaries, autobiographical articles, and translations from Bengali and literary anthropology. These non-fictional works also incorporate the narrative strategies that Ghosh uses in his fictional works. Against the backdrop of macro historical developments and changes, Ghosh evokes unanticipated connections through interlacing the lives of small, unacknowledged and real life people.

*In an Antique Land* (1992) is a history in the guise of a traveler’s tale. It is a combination of history, fiction, anthropology and travelogue which forces the reader to review the political boundaries that divide the world and the generic boundaries that divide narrative styles. *The Imam and Indian* (2002), a collection of essays, mirrors certain characteristics of Ghosh's fictional concerns—the relation between past and present, between past memories and events in life, between countries, cultures and people having the same past. *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1998), the travelogue by Ghosh, is about his travel experiences to Cambodia and Burma and his contacts with the people of these countries whom he had met. *Countdown* (1999) is
about Ghosh’s journey into the Pokharan area where five nuclear devices were tested by Indian Government. Here Ghosh points out that possession of nuclear weapons in the subcontinent is the moral equivalent of civil war. *Incendiary circumstances: A Chronicle of the Turmoil of Our Times* (2006) is a compilation of essays covering two decades.

The comparison of dissimilar and unforeseen things is found in plenty in Ghosh’s novels. For instance there is an unexpected comparison between a book and a landscape in *The Hungry Tide*, which illustrates the pattern of different points of view, embedded everywhere in that place:

... in a way a landscape too is not unlike a book—a compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being same. People open the book according to their taste and training, their memories and desires: for a geologist the compilation opens at one page, for a boat man at another and still another for a ship’s pilot, a painter and so on. On occasion these pages are ruled with lines that are invisible to some people while being for others, as real, as charged and as volatile as high-voltage cables. (224)

Ghosh draws another unexpected parallel between writing and music. In *The Glass Palace*, where Ghosh has used very different metaphors, he feels that each reader will select a different fibril from this pattern of many stories as in this novel he writes:

‘A word on the page is like a string on an instrument. My readers sound the music in their heads, and for each it sounds different.’ (533)

In an interview to Lila Azam Zanganeh he reveals: “But for me writing is like music. It’s not just that you are working towards the book. But if you’re not writing a sentence, you lose your pitch” (Zanganeh 254). In an interview “India and its Locations”, with Subash Jeyan, Ghosh shares his ideas on novel and tells that the most interesting thing about novel is that it allows a writer a range with different forms of exploration.
In this context, it becomes really interesting to study the narratological aspects of the fictional works of Ghosh whose ultimate goal is to present the issues of globalization, nationalization, industrialization, materialization and cosmopolitanism. As a wandering cosmopolitan, an anthropologist and historian, Ghosh’s novels deal with multicultural and multiethnic issues. He blends them in his narratives very beautifully. The present thesis focuses on Ghosh’s narrative strategies which become instrumental to give voice to the unspoken and the homeless, to procure a privileged place to these marginalized and to establish their presence in the society. The primary purpose of this thesis is to find out different narratological devices used by Ghosh and to use these techniques at various levels of narration—narrator, narrative voices, focalization, time and space; language and oral and other different modes of narration.

Following oral narrative tradition, Ghosh’s fiction incorporates different genres like myths, legends, inter-textual references, history, historiography as well as Western narrative techniques like stream of consciousness, interior monologue, reminiscence, recall, memory, dreams and visions in his writings, which have been recognized as postmodern meta-narratives. His narratives are cosmopolitan, presenting the ideology of *Vasudheiv Kutumbkum* and not recognizing any political, social and national boundaries or lines. He incorporates not only vast Indian traditions, cultural heritage and history as background of his narratives, but the whole cosmos becomes the stage for his narratives, focusing on the importance of past in the struggle for survival.

In the present study the narratological aspects are studied in Amitav Ghosh’s narratives to depict how fiction and these narratological aspects to study a narrative can be complementary to each other and help the reader to understand the narrative in better perspective. The deliberation in the subsequent chapters attempts to establish Ghosh’s output through incorporation of all these narrative strategies and examining the role
played by the novelist to project the world in his narratives. The study also highlights how Ghosh gives an equal importance to contradictory ideologies. It also explores these narrative strategies in the novels of Ghosh which intermingle fact and fiction to recreate unbiased awareness among the readers to understand not only past, but past as background to understand the contemporary global, social, political, economical and ecological issues. The second chapter focuses on the theory of narratology and the subsequent chapters study Ghosh’s selected novels from narratological points of view.

The study incorporates Ghosh’s primary works along with other available sources of information that have also been reviewed to explore narrative strategies used by him. The thesis will concentrate mainly on the following five novels: *The Circle of Reason*, (1986), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011). The secondary works such as the critical works and articles on Ghosh used to support the argument of the study have also been analyzed to trace different strategies used in his novels. The articles available on the internet and interviews and articles in different journals have also been used as secondary sources to support the arguments.

It is evident that Ghosh is regarded as one of the new generation of cosmopolitan intellectuals, writing in English, emerging from the Indian literary scenario with a distinctive and emphatic voice. An anthropologist, a journalist and a globe trotter, Ghosh is a well known and universally acclaimed Indian writer, who has made his presence felt in the literary world. He has proved his mettle in creative writing on different topics like migration, displacement, identity, rootlessness and human relations in *The Circle of Reason*, the uselessness of social, political, economical, cultural, national and even fictional boundaries in *The Shadow Lines*, science fiction as in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, re-writing history as in *The Glass Palace*, ecological / human
relationship and displacement in *The Hungry Tide*, indentured labours and opium trade in *Sea of Poppies* and opium trade and opium wars in Canton in *River of Smoke*.

Ghosh incorporates various techniques in his novels like magic realism, irony, wordplay, mythology, metaphors, motifs, images, elaborated allegories and interpolated stories. With so many characters in his novels, Ghosh presents them as character focalizers giving various points of view in narration without any pressurized or absolute judgment of narrator. Each narrator and character enjoys a distinct voice which creates a sort of musical crescendo in the final outcome of the narrative. Ghosh’s novels span cosmos, continents, centuries and cultures. His characters are cosmopolitan. Most of Ghosh’s characters are uprooted, struggling to survive in alien environment filled with insecurities and difficulties, people who believe that it is not they who shape the world, but the world that shapes them. It is rightly said that to understand present one must un-layer the past, in the same manner to understand India, one has to live in five centuries at once and Ghosh’s novels incorporate not only the history of India but also of other nations in different periods. He allows his readers to inhabit several cultures at once.

To understand any writer, it is also important to study the shaping influence of his age. Every writer is the product of his period in terms of the forces and impression that imprint his mind and creativity, so to explore the characteristic features of his novels; it becomes relevant to focus upon different factors that shaped his literary sensibility. This assists in the understanding of the growing process of the writer’s creative instinct. The shaping influence of surrounding forces like post-colonialism, postmodernism, Indian tradition of oral narrative, Rushdie’s recent writings, Bengali writers and their literature, different Western writers like Marquez, Proust, Melville, etc. is clearly visible in Ghosh’s narratives and narrative strategies. His own life in which there is always movement has also a direct bearing on his writings. His novels have become
representative of different voices—cosmopolitan, postcolonial, postmodernism and simultaneously not separated from their pangs and stings—alienation, loss of identity, insecurity, and restlessness of modern global society.

About Bengali influence upon him and his narratives, Ghosh in his talk with Lila Azam Zanganeh, tells that he was highly influenced by Bengali as language. Ghosh also adds that the Indian personality which impressed him most is Satyajit Ray. In his talk he shares:

... Satyajit Ray... was huge influence on me, it was an enormous influence, complete formative for me. That's exactly where I come from. But equally I think for me, three or four other writers have been important... Balzac... Proust and I think the most of all: Melville. (256)

Ghosh further adds here that he got his inspiration in writing from the very beginning of his childhood: “When I was young, I used to read a lot of adventure books, popular history and a lot of science too.” Sir Walter Scott, Satyajit Ray and Rabindranath Tagore were among the major writers who influenced him. About the powerful influence of Marquez upon him, Ghosh further says in the same interview: “In reading Marquez you begin to think of all the ways in which the whole world is visible in the microcosm of this one small place, like Marquez’s Macondo” (Zanganeh 237).

Another powerful influence upon him that Ghosh names in the same interview is that of James Boswell:

I read the whole of The Life of Samuel Johnson. And it had this enormous influence on me because what Boswell really does, what is so miraculous about the The Life of Samuel Johnson is that he listens to people speak. And I see when I look back on my writing of those years that there’s a
pre-Boswell period and Post – Boswell period. In the post-Boswell period, I’m just listening so much more closely to what people say. And I think that was a very powerful thing for me; it got me to listen. (Zanganeh 237)

It is this listening—the listening to various voices from history that Ghosh re-voices in his novels like *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow lines*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, *River of Smoke* and *Sea of Poppies*. There are the voices from different countries, castes, creeds, cultures and communities that make his novels polyphonic. Apart from this, he has also explored the ideas of the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin’s conception of polyphonic narrative as a collection of various voices and consciousnesses free from author’s control and his idea of heteroglossia defined as the social diverseness in speech type are also dealt in the present thesis along with narratological aspects to analyze and understand the narrative strategies in the fictional work of Ghosh. Ghosh was also highly influenced by Balzac and Herman Melville. In an interview with Subash Jeyan, published in *The Hindu Literary Review* Ghosh says that Balzac explored different sections of society due to their cultural ‘finesse’:

Another great hero of mine is Balzac and again you have exactly the same kind of engagement with the working class, the prostitutes and similarly with the capitalists, the artists, the sculptors. You see this is exactly what I love about the novel. It allows you that range, those different forms of exploration. (“India and its Locations”)

Shameem Black examines Ghosh’s two novels *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide*. She analyses Ghosh’s novels as follows:

As Ghosh’s writing asks how fiction in English might accommodate the
multiplicity of multilingual and antilingual experience, it copes with the borders between languages by divesting English of exclusive aesthetic privilege. The flattened language of *The Glass Palace* eschews the hierarchies of dialect, favouring instead the visual techniques of the modernist photography, and the crowded selves of *The Hungry Tide* forge a comparison between the utopianism of the unspoken and fallible speech of translation. These aesthetic renunciations, paradoxically, expand the capacity of English to represent non-English words of experience. They testify to possible strategies for lives lived across the borders of language. (*Fiction* 199)

It is quite evident here that only Western narrative tradition could not be sufficient for Ghosh for expressing the complexity of his fiction as he is highly inspired by the Indian literary tradition of story-telling. These traditions and cultural ethos innate in Ghosh has inspired him to give expression to his fictional works in a form best suited to highlight the Indian culture. Thus he has used oral narration amply in his narratives as this narrative tradition is deeply embedded in Indian literary tradition. Indian epics, the *Puranas*, and *Ithihasas* like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the *Panchatantra* stories, the *Jataka* tales, the *Bhagwad Gita*, the *Gita Pardesham*, and the *Upnishads* are all written in the form of transcripts of orally narrated stories. It is this rich tradition of story-telling that Ghosh follows in his works both fictional and non-fictional.

In anthropology Ghosh finds the fundamental of his education and training as a writer. According to him an anthropologist’s real work is to go to people and talk to them. He shares these views in the same interview with Lila Azam Zanganeh:

> What does an anthropologist do, really? You just go and talk to people, then at the end of the day you write down what you see. So what it really
does is trains you to observe and it trains you to listen to the ways that people speak. So it’s really a very important thing to teach yourself: to observe, as a writer. And I think basically that was where I learned that.

(236-37)

In Ghosh’s narratives the personal family history of characters are linked to larger events in world history in an inextricable manner. These events have profound effects on personal history. Ghosh’s personal history also affects his narratives to a great extent. Ghosh reveals (in an interview with Michelle Caswell appeared in Asia Source) how his personal history does influence the novel The Glass Palace:

It is often war that creates a collision between history and individual lives. In circumstances of war, as in such situations as revolution, mass evacuations, forced population, movements and so on, nobody has the choice of stepping away from history. The 20th century visited many such calamities on Asia and The Glass Palace attempts to chronicle the impact that these events had on families and individuals. My family history has undoubtedly played a large part in opening my eyes to these events for my family was divided not only by the Partition of India and Pakistan but also by the Japanese conquest of Burma in 1942.

(“An Interview with Amitav Ghosh”)

Ghosh’s readers have to be aware of political, historical and economic status of not only India but the whole universe in order to understand his fiction in complete sense. The present chapter scrutinizes some of the influencing factors that shaped the literary sensibility of the writer to a great extent. One of these influences that cannot be missed is the 1984 riots in Delhi. In India, in the year 1984 there were separatist movement and violence in Punjab, an army attack on the Sikh Temple—the Golden Temple in Amritsar, and further the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Indian
Prime Minister, that led to big communal riots. Again there was another tragedy in India—Bhopal Gas Tragedy. Ghosh was one of those people who were severely shaken by these events. In his essay “The Ghost of Mrs. Gandhi” Ghosh writes: “Looking back, I see that the experiences of that period were profoundly important to my development as a writer . . .” (The Imam 46). He further says:

I was twenty eight. The city I considered home was Calcutta, but New Delhi was where I had spent all my adult life except for a few years away in England and Egypt. I had returned to India two years before, upon completing a doctorate in Oxford, and recently found a teaching job at Delhi University. But it was in the privacy of my baking rooftop hutch that my real life was lived. I was writing my first novel, in the classical fashion, perched in a garret. (The Imam 46 – 47)

Ghosh found his “real” life in writing which was totally different from teaching and research. But what should be the subject and which style he was about to adopt was yet undecided and not clear. The event of 1984 influenced his thinking in both regards. The Sikh people were adversely hit by the riots and remembering those riots Ghosh reveals in the same essay: “. . . it was not just grief I felt,” he writes, “Rather, it was a sense of something slipping loose, of a mooring coming untied somewhere within” (The Imam 48). Only in Delhi over 2500 people died. Ghosh writes:

“Like many other members of my generation,” “I grew up believing that mass-slaughter of the kind that accompanied the partition of India and Pakistan, in 1947, could never happen again. But that morning in the city of Delhi, the violence had reached the same level of intensity . . . . How do you explain to someone who has spent a lifetime cocooned in privilege that a potentially terminal rant has appeared in the wrapping?” (The Imam 52–53).
Ghosh spent his life in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, studied in India and England and then went to Egypt for his research work. These experiences influenced his sensibility as a writer. Ghosh talks about this in an interview with Ashwani Singh, “The experience of living in many different places has certainly had an impact on the way I look at the world . . . I travel a great deal so that I can have a proper sense of the places I’m writing about . . .” Ghosh often uses time travel as a concept which appears to be a literary device in his narratives. In an interview to Suja Sukumarn he says:

Writing a novel gives you freedom of time travel. Time and space fascinate me and that is evident in my writings. Each story has its moment in time with the characters in the story drawing out a story around them. It is important to do a lot of research on the characters and subject to make it more authentic. The human aspect is important. (“Citizen Matters When Amitav Ghosh time travelled to Bengaluru”)

Ghosh’s books have been called well researched where he gives a lot of importance to minute details. When asked about the degree of detailed research even in the narratives with travelling as their subject, Ghosh answered in the same interview with Suja Sukumarn:

The story comes first for me. I pick a moment in time and make it concrete and grounding. I do a lot of research on the topics before I embark on a subject. I studied about ships and their workings during that period. I also did ample research on trade, life in China and sea navigation before I started writing it. (“Citizen Matters When Amitav Ghosh time travelled to Bengaluru”)

In an interview with lavanya Shrinivasan, Ghosh remarks about River of Smoke: It’s kind of a symbolic thing, it’s not like research drives writing. I follow the characters; the characters always come first for me. If I’m following a character onto a ship, I’d want to know what kind of ship it is, where they
sleep and what is their life like. So it is in that sense that I start looking for concreteness. The difference between the sort of research I would do and the sort of research a historian does is completely different. They are focused on particular thing and because I’m following my characters, I just try to recreate their world. So in a way it’s sort of a slapdash thing then what historians do. But I do try and bring together the reality of the lived experience. And in this book I had to recreate this whole foreign enclave in Canton, so it’s a different way in which one approaches research. (“The Enchanting Story of River of Smoke”)

After discussing the major influences on Ghosh, let us move towards a brief survey of his novels. His career, as a novelist, starts from his first novel The Circle of Reason. It is a story of expatriation, quest and identity. It may be called, as J. C. Hawley comments:

. . . a complex tapestry of stories of individuals. . . . The book is an early example of this novelist’s tendency to push against the limits of particular genre: after all, The Circle of Reason is at once, detective story, a story of exile, a travelogue, a women’s rights tract, a Marxist protest, a plea for humanistic camaraderie, etc . . . . The narrative techniques employed here sometimes share the characteristics of magical realism but they are more generally straightforward and realistic. He does tend, though, to juggle a lot of characters, time zones and locales in the telling of his tale.

(Hawley 54)

Ghosh’s second novel, The Shadow Lines published in 1988 is highly innovative and complicated. It focuses on a fact of his history, the post partition incidents of violence in Dhaka and other places, but its overall form is an intricate and complex intermingling of fact and fiction, recall and reminiscence, memory and memoirs. Its
multilayered and complex structure makes it a complicated text. It is mainly organized through the intermingling together of personal lives and public events. It may be called a continuous narrative—a replica, reproducing the pattern of violence, experienced in 1964 and 1984 riots and it even reminds the reader of the 11th September incident of America and such other incidents all around the world.

*The Shadow Lines* is a documentary on a bourgeoisie, middle class Indian family with its three generations and multiple time frames. The first person dramatized / character narrator (unnamed) himself recalls his as well as other’s various fragmented memories and events. The background of the novel is the Second World War and the riots afterwards. The time span of the novel is from 1939 to 1964. The narrator’s grandmother Thamma initially believes in nationalism but later her ideology on nationalism changes. She represents Ghosh’s message in novel: the uselessness of national boundaries which superficially divide people, but cannot divide their memories.

Dealing with the theme of nationalism in this continuously growing and changing cosmopolitan and globalized world, Ghosh raises alarming issues regarding actual meaning of political, social and individual freedom and of borders which appear to both set up and set apart.

In moving from his first to his second novel, Ghosh adopts a more tightly controlled narrative style with a limited number of characters. From *The Circle of Reason* he retains the non-linear format, interpolated stories, the fascination with exotic location, the characters’ ability to move easily across national borders and the innovation of dishing out inverted commas in direct speech.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) is similarly difficult to classify. It is partly a work of science fiction set in the near future with computers that can project objects and people from anywhere on earth as holographic images in the user’s living room and with
enormous information retrieval capacity. It can also be read as detective novel, while one chapter could easily stand alone as a chilling ghost story. This appears to be different from the first two books, but the anthropological angle remains the same, with members of a strange cult reappearing mysteriously as the plot unfolds. The conflict between science and superstitions is also foregrounded. The narrative once again moves in a zig-zag or to and fro pattern in time, between the futures, the 1980s and the 1990s with the same easy fluency Ghosh displays in the earlier books. Thus the theme here includes history, technology, and memory among others. Like so many of Ghosh’s works, this one is also a merging of various generic expectations—science fiction, criminal detection, history and even spiritual meditation.

*The Glass Palace* (2000) is again on the surface a completely different kind of novel covering more than a century (1885-1996) with more or less linear narrative. It is a saga of three generations of three families, tied together by friendship, love, marriage and business dealings against the background of ascendance and dissolution of the British imperialism in India and South East Asia. The story takes off from a little known historical fact. It is about the last king of Burma who was deposed and exiled to Ratnagiri in India after the British conquest of 1885 and died in exile. The three families chronicled in the novel are those of Rajkumar, a poor orphan from East Bengal who grows up to become a successful timber merchant in Burma; Saya John, an ethnic Chinese businessman; Uma Dey, a middle class Bengali widow who becomes a nationalist politician.

In the acknowledgement of *The Glass Palace* Ghosh mentions that his father, to whose memory the book is dedicated, was an officer in the Indian Army during the Burma Campaign. His parents were originally from Dhaka and an uncle was a businessman in Burma, the two places where he records his personal memories show a
significant autobiographical element in his works *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*.

If much of Ghosh’s writing concentrates on the capricious nature of national borders, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is surely obsessed with more personal division between man and woman on one side and highly universal division between man and nature and man and animal on the other side. One of the major elements of the plot of this novel is the story of Kanai’s growing relationship with Piya and on the other hand her developing understanding of Fokir. The third is Kanai’s gradual transformation after his reading of his uncle’s documentation on the “Morichjhapi incident” happened some thirty years ago.

Though *The Hungry Tide* is in direct contrast to the splendour and magnanimousness of *The Glass Palace*, yet it employs many of the narrative techniques of the earlier novels. It also has double-helix, spiral and coiled pattern of alternate narrative strands. There is the use of flashback, analepsis, prolepsis, ellipses, memory, recall, reminiscence and the interpolation of textual fragments that offer alternative approaches into a history that is out of the memory of people. Its scope is though not as ambitious as most of Ghosh’s previous works because most part of the temporal setting in main narrative only stretches over a time period of some thirty to forty years.

*Sea of Poppies* (2008) is the first sequel of Ghosh’s *Ibis* trilogy. The real strength of this novel is that it is deeply grounded in the great tradition of storytelling which brings characters and situation alive. At the centre of this epic saga is huge vessel—the *Ibis* and its fateful journey across the Indian Ocean to Mauritius. The people on the board are sailors, coolies, convicts, laskars, a bankrupt Raja Neel, widowed village woman Deeti and many more. During their voyage, their old family relations and ties are washed off and they consider themselves as ‘Jahaz-bhais’ and ‘Jahaz-bahens’ who will build
whole new lives for them in a far-far away distant island. Here Ghosh has deftly created a web of beautifully interwoven stories and characters. He appears to desert the sophistication of literary experimentation that marked superb his previous novels. He is now channeling his creative energies into the skillful storytelling and pacy narrative development in a linear mode which made The Glass Palace a wonderfully engrossing, fascinating and gripping story. Here, he is falling in line with European novels and Indian narrative tradition as well.

The second part of his Ibis trilogy River of Smoke (2011) has also been written in meticulous detail by Ghosh. The novel does follow the storm-tossed characters of the Ibis from the awesome and amazing vastness of the Indian Ocean to those living in Canton—that little piece of land not much more than a quarter mile in length. Among them there are Bahram Modi—a Parsi merchant, Ah Fatt—Modi’s estranged, unloved and alienated half-Chinese son, Neel—a dispossessed Raja, Cinnery—a painter as well as Paulette’s childhood friend, Zadig Bey—a trader along with others. A writer, weaving imagination into the hard fact of history of opium trade and war in 1838 Canton, Ghosh does not find it difficult at all.

Ghosh has established himself as one of the most significant Indian writers of his generation. As far as academic criticism is concerned, Ghosh has earned considerable attention from literary scholars in America, Britain and India. Ghosh, as it is mentioned earlier, has been highly influenced by Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez who mainly developed the genre known as ‘magical realism’. Ghosh has mastered this genre mainly in his novels The Circle of Reason and The Calcutta Chromosome and later in Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke. Following Marquez and Rushdie, Ghosh very successfully amalgamates facts and fiction with magic realism. He re-writes, re-conceptualizes and re-invents history. He is very accurate and scientific in accumulating
the substance, careful in its management and highly creative to use this substance in the formation of unique artifact called fictionalized history. But Rushdie’s influence cannot be the final shaping influence in his work of course. In his new projects Ghosh experimented with new genres and styles.

Ghosh’s fiction envisages “scrupulous attention” paid to the words used in writing which he thinks to be highly relevant to the society. In the preface of *Incendiary Circumstances*, Ghosh echoes his views on terrorism and its violent suppression from an earlier essay ‘The Ghost of Mrs. Gandhi’ which was written after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1984. He finds that an important responsibility of a writer is to have serious consideration about the impact that words can have in “incendiary circumstances of contemporary” scenario (ix). He says:

> The deadly logic of terrorism is precisely to invite repression: it is thus, that it brings the social gulf on which its existence is predicated to write carelessly can all too easily add to the problem by appearing to endorse either terrorism or violent repression. In such incendiary circumstances words can lose lives, and it is only appropriate that those who deal in them should pay scrupulous attention to what they say. (ix)

In an interview with Ghosh, Kavita Chhibber quotes Shyamala Narayan, a well known critic, who said of Ghosh: “I keep looking for a word out of place in Ghosh’s writing. I haven’t succeeded” (“The Writer of Truth”). While reviewing *River of Smoke*, Shashi Tharoor says that Ghosh is particularly good at representing the distinctive voices of his characters, which are quite natural and convincing in this novel. They reproduce the “new hybrid language resulting from the mongrel mating of tongues”. He further comments that with this trilogy Ghosh has “come a long way from the magic realism of his first novel”. Tharoor also observes that *River of Smoke* is written in an old fashioned
style and its prose is straightforward and unadorned while its emotions are deeply affecting (“Amitav Ghosh’s River of Smoke: a history reclaimed”). Minna Proctor, in a review of The Glass Palace writes: “The pleasure about reading Ghosh's work comes not from the story only, but also from the description of the life style, behaviour of people, the subtleties of the cultural impact and of course the details of the day to day life”.

Ghosh’s novels show him to be an author with a historical cognizance and constant craving for polyphony that is equal to the huge requirement of the material he wishes to elucidate. Even when Ghosh writes historical novels, there is always certain contemporaneousness at the back of his mind. While writing an historical novel he also keeps in mind the present scenario of the birth of capitalism, crisis of consumerism, horrible present day “opium war” and draws some similarities between past and present. Ghosh, in an interview to Angiola Codacci says that:

There are many curious parallels between the situations in the early 19th century and now. As for similarities between the Iraq war and the Opium War, most of all in the discourses that surround them there is all the evangelical stuff. This assumed piety: ‘We are doing good for the world’. But beneath that there is the most horrific violence, the most horrific avarice and greed. I was writing the novel (River of Smoke) at a time when this kind of capitalist ideology was absolutely in its ascendant, where it was thought that market was God. (“An Interview with Amitav Ghosh”)

Aniravan Sen remarks on Ghosh's art and craft when he comments: “Only a handful of people in this world have the capacity to interweave history with travel to make a story and one of them definitely is Ghosh” (“Review on The Glass Palace”). Thus, Ghosh has elicited extensive responses of infinite variety. Most critics have
praised for Ghosh’s atriculatory to tell a tale and his facility for story telling which has been hallmark of his fiction.

Ghosh, being a blogger, is in direct touch with his audience through blogging his views. Since there are so many interviews by Ghosh published in books, newspapers and different journals and aired on different T.V channels, much biographical material is available on him that help the reviewers and critics to assess and understand Ghosh and his writing through the writer’s own reflections, comments and observations. The present study also explores such available sources to understand the writer and his works from all perspectives.

Delineating the different characteristics of Ghosh’s narratives, the critics discuss mainly the literary and cultural trends of which his novels form a part. The whole range of criticism reveals that chief preoccupation of Ghosh's writing is human predicament, displacement, boundaries—social, political and national. As a novelist Ghosh has raised these issues and problems in the light of which his identity is formed and shaped. It has been observed that there are several full length studies on the thematic concerns in Ghosh’s works, but there is hardly any book or study, that encompasses ‘narratology’ in most of his novels. Evidently, none of Ghosh’s critics or scholars has produced an all embracing study comprising most of his novels focusing on the narratological perspective while dealing with his art of narration. Though, there are many articles that study the narrative techniques mainly in The Shadow lines, the Sahitya Akedemy Award winning novel, but a thorough study devoted to this aspect of his art in his other novels does not exist. There is no such work that encompasses the vastness and the whole range of Ghosh's narrative craft in highly concentrated and focused manner comprising maximum of his novels. The present study is a sincere effort to investigate and map out different configurations of this aspect of Ghosh's writing.

Ghosh employs different narrative strategies and the present thesis aspires to discover beneath the layers of texts, the narrative techniques that applies recourses in
narrative language, oral narrative tradition of story-telling while using non-colonial forms of history-recording like myths, magical realism, ballads, folk songs, tales and stories. The use of traditional oral style of narrative and Ghosh's desire to manipulate the reader’s interest, leads to the frequent variation in stylistic emphasis. His narratives at the same time reveal that the storyteller needs to uphold his grip on readers and create in their mind the illusion that they hold the key to the mystery. The demand for the implied narrator in the completion of the story accounts not only for omissions or ellipsis, delays or gaps, but also for deviations and digressions of the narrative. This implicates a fundamentally different approach of narration in the Western tradition.

Ghosh’s works inspire to understand the world with better perspective. The present chapter ‘Introduction’ aims to present a brief survey of the major critical writings and the reviews on Ghosh. There is a brief autobiographical account of the writer to highlight the reasons and circumstances that influenced and shaped his sensibility as a creative writer to a considerable extent. The chapter also gives brief introduction of Ghosh’s works both fictional and non-fictional, critics’ views and lay out of the present thesis. The chapter also spells out the approach to be adopted in the discussion of Ghosh's novels; particularly the understanding of the strategies and techniques of narrative art used in different novels.

Chapter two ‘Theory of Narratology’ deals with the theory of narratology in general and how it studies a text in particular. Narratology, a term coined by Tzvetan Todrov (1969), deals with the general theory and practice of narrative in all literary forms. It concerns the structural analysis of any given narrative into its constituent parts to determine their function and relationship. The term became prominent with the publication of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* by Wayne C. Booth.

Narratology is the art of storytelling in which the author uses different narrative techniques. In principal, the word may be related to any systematic study of narrative; though in practice the use of the term is rather more circumscribed and restricted. The
theory is perhaps understood as a term with a stricter and loose sense. Broadly it is the name given to the critical and theoretical study of various forms of narrative discourses, mainly literary and film studies. In the chapter all the main narratologists have been discussed in brief, but to make the study more comprehensible and focused, it follows Rimmon-Kenan as a model narratologist.

Chapter three ‘Narrative Voice’ deals with different narrative voices in the novel through the typology of narrator, character focalizers, polyphony, multiple narrators, points of view, focalization, focalization shifts, mimesis and diegesis mode of narration. It also deals with how these strategies are employed by Ghosh in his novels. In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh follows both Western story tellers and great Indian narrative tradition of story-telling and there is preference for multiple narrators, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, polyphony, freedom of reader; and preference for mimesis rather than diegesis mode of narration. In *The Glass Palace* all the details are historically specified and presented by omnipresent narrator through the eyes of different character focalizers. The cultural space for most of the characters in Ghosh’s novel is very huge and so it is with the different voices. The historian narrator author has an eye for each small detail for which he gives detailed description. In discussing *The Hungry Tide* it is clear that the narrative function is performed here not by single narrator but by multiple narrators with multiple voices and different points of view. There are different voices of the omnipresent narrator, the character focalizers, Nirmal’s diary in first person narration, the collective voices of community people, translations of Rilke and even the voices of flora and fauna of Sunderbans. In *Sea of Poppies* the omnipresent narrator or the historian narrator author has an eye for each small detail for which he gives detailed description. The main characters are shown undergoing a journey from ‘land’ to ‘river’ and then to ‘sea’, depicting as focalizers, the condition of suppressed indentured labours in the *Ibis*, (earlier a slave ship) during the course of the novel. In *River of Smoke* with
the help of omnipresent third person narrator, first person dramatized character narrator (both as main narrators), different focalizers, and through documentation from history like the original and reliable edicts, Canton journals, *Hukamnamas*, etc. Ghosh represents various voices from history. Different voices of the colonized, the downtrodden, the oppressed, the sufferers, the marginal, the colonizers and real historical persona are presented through unparalleled richness of language of the period.

Chapter four ‘Time and Space’ deals with time and space in relation to Ghosh’s novels in general while giving the main focus on the novels selected for the present study in particular. Most of Ghosh’s novels begin in media res. So the characters in his novels move back and forth in time very frequently. Temporal aberration is a narrative technique that uses a non-linear timeline where the narrator moves forward or backward in time. Most of Ghosh’s novel use non-linear timeline, memory, recall, reminiscence, etc. and link past to the present. The characters in his earlier novels are always pre-occupied with past memories, as most of them are the displaced one. In this way the structure of his earlier novels like *The Shadow Lines*, *The Circle of Reason*, and *The Calcutta Chromosome* becomes so vague and disjointed that a writer like Ghosh could only unify it. In *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and the two *Ibis* trilogies—*Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, the writer uses non-linear pattern of time but not very frequently. In *The Circle of Reason*, written in a double helix pattern with spiral movements, the narrator moves between so many time zones—past, remote past, distant past, present and future of many of the characters. Here Zindi, Balaram, Alu and other main characters shuttle between the incidents of village Lalpukur, different cities and subcontinents. *The Hungry Tide* is also a less complicated novel in time and space management. Here the narrative moves back and forth between the Morichjhapi incidents in past, presented from Nirmal’s point of view in past and experiences of Nilima, Piya,
Fokir and Kanai in present. Because of these expeditions and time travel there are many plots and sub-plots and what I shall argue is that the overlapping of stories creates too much intricacy in Ghosh's novels mainly in his early works. Ghosh's characters in other novels too move in unknown time zones and places.

Chapter five ‘Narratology and History in River of Smoke’ deals with history in River of Smoke on one hand and role of narratological devices in projecting history in the novel on the other. While depicting the historical period of opium war he presents a counter-narrative of China opium war in 1838. Here Ghosh exposes historical discourse and argues for projection of those historical events that are deleted from the memory of the people with the passage of time by using different narratological devices in a remarkable manner. The chapter focuses on the study of narratology in relation to history in River of Smoke (2011). As it is the latest published novel, a full length chapter may be justified in the sense that ample scope is there to reveal and illuminate those unchartered terrains and unexplored zones which have not touched upon so far. This requires much space to do justice with the author’s latest Ibis trilogy novel River of Smoke. Through the critical analysis of the novel, a sincere attempt has been made to understand Ghosh's narrative craft and exact treatment of narrative techniques in relation to history. In this light the chapter encompasses several aspects of narratology that help the writer in projecting the historical period of opium wars.

For Ghosh, literature has a function similar to that of history. The selection of story, plot, theme, title, location, language, dialogues, background, typology of the narrators, narrative voices, characters, the modes of narration and narrative pace work together to depict the period of opium trade and opium wars. The other narrative strategies like presence of real characters from history, their prolonged and serious discussions present the live scenario of the period. There are other elements like that of
live speeches in the novel that are also the reminiscence of the British power politics in their colonies. Such discussions and conversations invite the reader to look into the hidden folds of history and understand the appalling period that the narrator has created in *River of Smoke*.

Finally the ‘Conclusion’ of the present thesis deals with the main findings related to narratology in Ghosh's novels taken up in the study. It also encompasses overall views of critics that provide coherence to this narrative mode. Thus, through an analysis of Ghosh's fictional works, the proposed work endeavours to unravel the various narratological aspects used by him to deal with major issues and concerns that have recurred in his novels.