CHAPTER 2

India in the Novels of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh

Since the time of its emergence as a distinct literary genre, two questions have led to various speculations on the nature of CIWE: a. which audience does an author from India write for? b. is the author exoticising India for a Western audience? Both the questions however are integrally connected to the nature of Indian Writing in English. These are also the questions related to the politics of representation as well as the intellectual formations and compulsions that go into the act of writing by an Indian English author. There is no denying the fact that CIWE is steeped in the idea of Indianness on the one hand, and acceptance of postcoloniality as an unavoidable condition, on the other. For Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh, large novels might seem typical of the post colonial Indian literary enterprise. But, this is not so simple an area of investigation as there are grounds to state that the largeness of the books allegorizes nothing but the largeness of the country it represents. But those who write about India, whether in English or in any of the vernacular languages, do not necessarily write about India but also about cultures and locations that are situated inside the territory called India. Their fictional landscape is not necessarily Indian, yet, their consciousness is Indian. This awareness enables us to examine how India has been portrayed and represented by both Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh in their novels.1

If we take a close look at Salman Rushdie, who left India in 1961, what is worth-noticing is the fact that in almost every major fictional work of his, there is a direct or indirect reference to India, its religion and culture, society and people. His perceptions of India is quite apparent in the ways from his first novel G to his latest LFL, he has discussed the various aspects of Indian culture, history, religion, and politics. However, an enquiry into how India emerges in Rushdie's novels will make it obvious that his main concern is the present-day India, and
the reference to India’s history and culture has been made only to highlight what contributes to the idea of contemporary India. Rushdie, in discussing what contemporary India perceives and recognizes, represents with awareness the concerns of our time with all its contradictions. Perhaps, this makes the discussion of Indianness a fitting response to Rushdie’s novels. At the same time, Rushdie’s portrayal of India in terms of his vivid description of Indian life and culture qualify him to be an Indian author against all allegations by their critics, that being an outsider, an author like him cannot be ‘authentic’ in their portrayal of India. Thus, much of his fictional works are set in the Indian sub-continent.

Amitav Ghosh too has extensively used the idea of ‘India’ both as a theme and a source of his fictional endeavours but with marked difference from the Rushdian kind of narrative style. Ghosh implies that the multilayered cultural set-up of India often produces multifaceted pictures of India which is explicit in his own fictional works. It is quite obvious from his background as a writer that he is also a historian and a social anthropologist, along with being a novelist. He has mainly dealt with the nature of British colonialism, Indian history, Indian language and culture. So, the ‘textuality’ of the Indian texts and the consequent discourse of Indianness as shaped by them, becomes the center point in any discussion done on the novels of Ghosh. His narrative mode, often seen through his tendency to tell stories about people ‘placed’ and ‘displaced’ at a historically given time, also makes his Indian ‘identity’ remain implicated in the representation of the self and the world around it (Mondal 20).

Salman Rushdie published his first novel \textit{G} in 1975 and it was based on his experiences as an immigrant Indian in London.\textsuperscript{2} Although there is nothing directly told about India in this novel, Rushdie foreshadows many ‘Indian’ mythological and religious tradition, and intertextually makes references \textit{Kāmā Sutrā} an ancient Indian Hindu text in Sanskrit widely considered to be the standard work on human sexual behaviour written by Vātsyāyana. Rushdie’s reliance on Indian mythical and religious traditions in \textit{G} is clearly visible in his
reference to Calf Mountain as being "like a giant lingam weltering in the yoni that is the Sea" (55-56). Lingam and yoni are supposedly the phallus and vulva in Sanskrit. Like the Flapping Eagle, the main character of the novel, the Hindu god Shiva is a force of both fecundity and destruction. However, in this novel, one may also trace the influence of *Shahnameh*, the tenth-century historical epic based on the deeds of the Persian heroes. Simurg, one of the characters in *Shahnameh*, had witnessed the destruction of the world, and possessed the wisdom of the ages. Although Rushdie brings together a variety of figures—the exiled "Indian", (it being Rushdie's first book on the theme of exile), and a European magician, the 'quest' motif is made relevant apparently by retracing the colonial encounter between Europe and India, or between West and East, but by presenting the story element in a series of language games. *G* introduces Magic Realism as a narrative technique that helps the writer to transgress distinctions of genres, and to discuss the confusions caused by postcolonial situations. One may also explore the religious tropes embodied in the pairing of Grimus and Flapping Eagle, Grimus representing the godhead of Islam/Sufism, and Flapping Eagle representing Shiva in Hindu mythology. It is to be noted that Rushdie has great fascination with the character of Shiva as it appears in many of his later novels.

Rushdie's next novel *MC* (1981), that won the Booker, is about India. It is recognizably his first novel that draws heavily from his personal memories and experiences of India. A mock-epic about post-independent India, it is the story of Saleem Sinai, one of the 1,001 Indian children born on the stroke of midnight, 15 August 1947—the exact moment in which India too officially became independent. Significantly, India's new national leaders rejoice and express their hope from the new generation of Indians, proclaiming that their lives "will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own." (122) and in the novel Nehru himself is seen congratulating the newly born babies. Subsequently, one finds that the events in the novel are arranged in such a way that Saleem's personal experiences and
activities became symbolic of the key events in India's political history after Independence. Like newspaper reports, or the “march of time” newsreels popular in Bollywood cinema halls in around the 1950s, the narrative moves from the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in 1919, through Partition in 1947, Nehru's first five-year plan in 1956, Ayub Khan's coup in Pakistan in 1958, the Indo-China war of 1962, the Indo-Pak war of 1965, the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, and the infamous “Emergency” of 1975 when Indira Gandhi dismissed all civil rights for the Indians and declared martial law to suppress dissidence from within India. But more than anything else this novel is about Saleem Sinai, an allegorical figure in India living his ordinary life here. However, Rushdie also claims that the representation of the multiplicity of India is also one of his main purpose in the novel. As Rushdie explains: “‘My’ India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity...To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once” (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 32).

But the Indian crowd enters the narrative of *MC*, not only in terms of what is portrayed but in terms of who portrays. Besides, in this novel Rushdie beautifully blends Indian mythology, legends, and various storytelling traditions in the narrative of the novel. As he writes:

So, I tried in my novel Midnight's Children, to set against a scrupulously observed social and historical background -- against, that is, the canvas of a ‘real’ India—my ‘unrealist’ notion of children born at the midnight moment of India’s independence, and endowed with magical powers by the coincidence – children who were in some way the embodiment both of the hopes and flaws of that revolution. (Rushdie, *Step Across 71*)

Thus, a miniature India has been nostalgically explored by Rushdie in this novel, and since its publication, it came to symbolize how India would be perceived and written about by an ordinary Indian.
S (1983), Rushdie's next novel is about migrancy. Based mainly on the political history of Pakistan, it contains certain themes similar to that of MC, but markedly departs from it in its narrative form. Much of the significance of the novel also lies in the references made of India while discussing Pakistan, as the narrator states: “A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani standard Times. The past was rewritten. There was nothing else to be done” (87). It is important to note that many of his excellent observations on the idea of India and the pre-partition Indian political history are available in this novel. This is also the first novel after G where Rushdie extensively deliberates on the state of migrancy and the idea of history. As he writes:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. (29)

While discussing the issue of migrancy, once again he makes a reference to India in general and Bombay in particular, as the following:

I too know something of the immigrant business, I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will). And I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown (85).

This novel grew out of Rushdie's unique consideration of shame or 'Sharam' in the context of Pakistan. In order to relate the bitter enmity between two families of Pakistan, that of Iskander Harappa (based on the historical Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) and his successor and executioner, Raza Hyder (based on the character of
Zia ul-Haq); this novel allegorically develops the themes of shame and shamelessness as the root cause of violence that engulfed the country.\footnote{7}

Rushdie perhaps had conceived his third novel *TSV* (1988) as the third part of a supposed trilogy, moving from India (in *MC*) to Pakistan (in *S*) and then to London, what he would like to playfully call “Babylondon” (a joining of “London” with “Babylon” which was used to refer to white civilization). By the time of writing this novel, he was fully aware of the predicaments of the colonial immigrants now living in the former hubs of the British Empire. Once again, the image of India in *TSV* emerges mainly through the portrayal of the city of Bombay and the Bollywood film Industry on the one hand, and the dilemma of the Indian immigrants in England, on the other. Such dilemma has been best represented by the characters Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. Gibreel, the Muslim professional, is a famous Hindi film actor who, before leaving India for England, had enjoyed a very popular acting career by playing the famous Hindu gods in typical ‘costume dramas’—an indigenous cultural form of veneration used in theological genres of Bollywood movies. Arriving in England, however, Gibreel suffers from a nervous breakdown, and badly affected by racial oppression, the foreigner's sense of alienation, and the loss of religious faith that had begun while he was in India, he goes insane. Saladin Chamcha, the other major character of the novel, is more westernized as an immigrant with his bowler hat and his mastery of “proper” speech (“chamcha” colloquially means a flatterer). But despite all efforts he takes to remain an ‘English’ man, he is rejected in England. He makes his living doing mimicry for radio and television kid's shows about ‘aliens’. Rushdie beautifully uses metaphorical strategies to depict “migrant consciousness” through the character of Saladin. Gibreel works in Hindu (not Muslim) religious films; Chamcha, on the other hand, is compared to “much-metamorphosed Vishnu” (17). But most interestingly, India emerges significantly through Salahuddin Chamchawala’s indifference towards India and everything Indian. *TSV* finally asserts that migrancy is a normative condition of
the twentieth century. Thus, it is through the predicament of having migrated to London that makes Rushdie’s narrator in *TSV* ask: “How far did they fly? Five and a half thousand as the crow. Or: from Indianness to Englishness, an immeasurable distance. Or not very far at all, because they rose from one great city, fell to another. The distance between cities is always small;...” (41). Thus, in this novel, the idea of India emerges in terms of its absence in the mind of the characters in the novel.

*HSS*, a very short novel on the theme of storytelling, appeared in 1990. It reminds one of *G* in so far as the ‘quest’ motif is concerned. It represents inquisitiveness, and source-hunting usually available in traditional Indian storytelling. What makes this novel so ‘Indian’ is the fact that many Indian places like Kashmir are alluded to in the text. At the same time, *Katha Sarit Sagara*, or "Ocean of Stories", provides the narrative background of the text.8 But more than anything else, it derives most of the ideas of storytelling from Indian mythologies and the *Tales from the Panchatantra*.9 Although it was written for his son Zafar, while Rushdie was still hiding following the “Fatwa”, the book is characteristic of children’s tales. This novel however, deals mainly with the issue of writers’ freedom to make up stories. Rushdie’s endeavour is to place a reply on the age old battle between the proponents of freedom of speech and its enemies.10 As Suchismita Sen states, through Horoun’s story, Rushdie provides a child’s eye view of the most intricate and intangible nature of interpersonal communication. Many would like to argue that Rushdie’s unique representational style in this novel brings home the reality of a lost Indian childhood to many of his readers. It is important to note that the Indian subcontinent plays an important role in all Rushdie’s major novels. In *HSS* too, as Sen argues: “Rushdie creates the magical land of Alifbay, where people speak in typical Indian English and live in a way that is familiar to Immigrants who grew up in India during the first two decades after independence” (662).
Rushdie's next novel *TMLs* (1995) is also the first after *MC* to use a particular Indian setting. This novel too is a pessimistic recollection of India's political history, and traces the rise of corruption and Hindu fundamentalism already foreshadowed in *MC*. This has been best exemplified through the plight of Saleem's son Adam, who carries so much hope from India. But 18 years after his birth, he becomes a corrupt businessman who deals with drugs, arms, money etc. Thus, he reflects what had happened to the new generations of Independent Indians. Set in two historically important Indian cities like Cochin and Bombay, it is also the first major work that Rushdie produced after *TSV*. The city of Cochin on India's South Western coast is the only part of India that has a substantial amount of Jewish population. India in this novel emerges as a place that people immigrate to; and the immigrants are not only Jews but also the descendants of the Portuguese Christians who were the first Europeans to colonize the Malabar Coast of India. Invoking this historically important past, *TMLs* recounts the life history of one Moraes Zogoiby, the child of a corrupt Jewish merchant named Abraham and an excellent painter named Aurora. But soon Moraes discovers that his father is a descendent of Boabdil, a Muslim, and a Jewish concubine, which naturally makes him a bastard. Although Moraes is the narrator of the novel, the actual exposure of the narrative is made possible by Aurora, his mother, who as a national celebrity of enormous stature, has painted an allegorical "Moor" cycle in which this entire lineage from Renaissance Spain to contemporary Bombay is recorded.

The action of *TMLs* however, describes the changes taking place in India over three generations that Rushdie could experience. Although the past of India is portrayed in terms of the history of colonialism, this novel is also about post independence India which is beautifully portrayed in terms of the rise of Hindu nationalism under the auspices of Raman Fielding and a struggle between two kinds of mafia: the 'criminal-entrepreneurial' and the 'political-criminal'. In course of the novel's narrative, Moraes is forced finally to admit that the only
thing that can prevent Hindu fascism in India is corruption and bribery. Bombay, like old Granada, becomes the meeting place of the corrupt entrepreneurs and political strongmen. And this is where the present meets the past through an interesting parallelism. When Aurora is murdered, Moraes seeks revenge by murdering Fielding in turn. Fed up with the violence in India, and shocked by his own plight, he escapes from Bombay which is destroyed through gang wars sparked by the murder of Fielding. The author writes:

And then there is corruption. In my novel *TMLS*, a character offers his definitions of modern Indian democracy (one man one bribe) and of what he calls the Indian theory of Relativity ('everything is for relatives'). Like most things written about India, this looks like an exaggeration but is actually an understatement. The scale of public corruption is now almost comically great. (Rushdie, *Step Across 177*)

*TGB* (1999) is Rushdie's sixth novel. It is a large novel about how India still beckons the people who left it. But throughout the novel, there is a startling juxtaposition of opposites: English v. Indian cultures, the terrestrial v. the unearthly, the ridiculous world of celebrity v. the insular human need for a spiritual grounding. A lot of transformation has taken place in the life of the character called Vina, as for her “India was still the only place on earth to which she could imagine herself belonging, corrupt and crooked and heartless and violent as it was. She could not define herself a meaning except here...” (246). This defines the sense of Indianness of Vina. India is for spiritual need. The narrator tells us: “As for India, I go there for my spiritual need...to provide for the planet’s soul, there is India. One goes there as one goes to the Bank, to refill the pocketbook of the psyche” (262). This book however is based on the Orpheus/Eurydice myth with rock music replacing Orpheus' lyre. The setting is entirely American and there is nothing so typically Indian except that some of the characters descend from India, that many references are made to certain Eastern cultural form. The novel begins with the sudden disappearance of Vina Apsara following an earthquake. Most interestingly Vina's death on Valentine's Day, 1989, correlates the date on which, Ayatollah Khomeini had issued the Fatwa...
against Rushdie after the publication of his \textit{TSV}. This correspondence is unique but important as the themes of exile and loss are examined in adequate detail in this novel. As the reviewer in \textit{New York Times} writes:

Like so many of Mr. Rushdie's earlier novels \textit{The Ground Beneath Her Feet} addresses the themes of exile, metamorphosis and flux, and also examines such issues through the prism of multiple dichotomies between home and rootlessness, love and death, East and West, reason and the irrational. We are once again treated to the story of several characters who leave India to wander the world and invent new identities for themselves abroad. And we are once again urged to read in their story a lesson about our fragmented, chaotic world, a world that, this time, is on the verge of cracking apart from tectonic cultural shifts and political and social tremors. The earthquake that takes Vina's life, along with Ormus's famous cycle of "quake songs," becomes a presiding metaphor for Mr. Rushdie's vision of our tumultuous age: a time in which both nations and families are being flung apart by the centrifugal forces of history, a time in which everything seems to be 'shifting, changing, getting partitioned, separated by frontiers, splitting, re-splitting, coming apart.\textsuperscript{13}

In 2001, Rushdie wrote another short 'American' novel \textit{Fury}. It is the story about Malik Solanka, a retired historian of ideas and about his experiences in New York, and the changing American culture and values that existed during a historically important time. This is perhaps the only novel which is 'non-Indian' so to say.

\textit{STC} (2005), Rushdie's next novel is again based in Kashmir. Comparable to his earlier novels like \textit{MC} and \textit{TMLS}, this novel is named after the Shalimar Garden, one of the most beautiful Mughal Gardens in Sri Nagar. Shalimar is the name of one of the characters of the novel who disguised as a clown excelled with his skills as a rope walker on a high wire without a net during the performances of the traditional Kashmiri entertainments Bhand Pather\textsuperscript{14} in the locality of Pachigam. Rushdie in this novel is typically back to his engagement with the idea of India by bringing the story of two peaceful Kashmiri villages-Panchigm and Shrimal in the Kashmir valley whose secular ambiance helps in
developing the love affair between a Hindu girl Boonyi and a Muslim boy Shalimar, but whose tranquil life has been destroyed by the presence of Indian army to tackle the problems created by the fanatical fundamentalist like Iron Mullah Bulbul Fakh and his jehadi group.

But the novel also presents an interesting tale of love and revenge. Maximilian Ophuls, the Ambassador to Kashmir, elopes with Boonyi, Shalimar's beloved. She later gives birth to a daughter named Kashmira. Finally, Max gets assassinated in Los Angeles by his own cap driver who is none other than Shalimar – the lover turned terrorist. What Rushdie wanted to show is that Kashmira brought up in America finally understands that the meaning of her life lies somewhere in India. Kashmir is a place where people of different cultures, religion learn how to get along together because the idea of being a Kashmiri was more important than what one's religion was. Hindu Muslims were not the divisions but mere differences in their composite society. As the narrator states:

The words Hindu and Muslim had no place in their story, he [Noman] told himself.
In the valley these words were merely descriptions, not divisions. The frontiers between the words, their hard edges, had grown smudged and blurred. This was how things had to be. This was Kashmir. (57)

In *TEF* (2008), Rushdie brings together Renaissance Florence and Mughal India of Emperor Akbar's time. Rushdie wrote: “And, if I may make one more tentative step toward an unwritten future, I have for long time been engaged and fascinated by the Florence of the High Renaissance in general, and by the character of Niccolo Machiavelli in particular” (*Rushdie, Step Across*, 76). In one way, it is a historical novel written in postmodern magic realism. Cursorily speaking, this is the story of the visionary Mughal emperor Akbar who tried to bring together diverse elements of the world's great faiths in a nation of conflicting beliefs. In this novel, Rushdie one again brings in the *Kama Sutra*, which has been cited as a source. It is obvious that Rushdie tried to fictionally recreate the connection between the lost imperial world of India as well as
Renaissance Florence, because in his analysis the 16th century is the beginning of the relation between East and West. This is very enriching a historical reality as there are many similarities available in terms of power politics in both parts of the world. When Machiavelli is thinking about power politics and justice, perhaps the same question is being faced by Akbar—if it is possible to become a good prince. Rushdie firmly believes that highly organized story telling may actually end up telling the truth about certain connections just like photographs or newspaper reports do. India in the West should not always serve the purpose of fantasy. And this is the most significant message that runs through this novel. The novel helps us to assume that the spirit of the Renaissance was not confined to Italy alone, and the Mughal, Ottoman and Persian courts were also part of the cultural and philosophical conversation of the time. Thus, this novel not only succeeds in representing typical ‘Indian’ people but also succeeds in historicizing the notions of India existing during Mughal India.

*LFL* (2010) is Rushdie’s most recent novel. It can be seen as a companion novel with *HSS*. The author writes:

> It has been my aim, in *Luka* as in *Haroun*, to write a story that demolishes the boundary between "adult" and "children’s" literature. One way I have thought about *Luka* and *Haroun* is that each of them is a message in a bottle. A child may read these books and, I hope, derive from them the pleasures and satisfactions that children seek from books. The same child may read them again when he or she is grown, and see a different book, with adult satisfactions instead of (or as well as) the earlier ones.  

This novel centers on Luka, Haroun’s younger brother, who must save their father Rashid Khalifa, the legendary storyteller of Kahani who has fallen into deep sleep from which no one can wake him. To bring his father back from sleep, Luka has to travel to the Magic World and steal the ever-burning Fire of Life. Thus begins a quest narrative with strange creature and challenges ahead as Luka passes through different sorts of obstacles, passes through the land of the Badly Behaved Gods, and finally reaches the Fire itself.
From the novels Rushdie has written so far, it is obvious that his main preoccupations are his sensibility as a migrant who is powerful enough to comment on the affairs of the world and a nostalgic reclamation of India. Besides, imagining the nation state, rewriting the history of those who are denied voice, locating himself in a world of several languages and communities, celebrating hybridity and migration and so on, are to be seen as his main preoccupations. And the anxieties over his identity and concerns over India and whatever Indian, can be read as ‘postcolonial’. But along with his postcolonialism, one must also consider his wide range of local referencing from within India, and his use of situated language to describe the historical as well the popular. In one sense, Rushdie has liberated IWE by not only using matters related to India in English, but also challenging the genre of the novel by interrogating its structure which is quite obvious from his use of disjointed narrative that also reflects his fragmented experiences.

To speak of the novels of Amitav Ghosh, TCR (1986) is his first novel. The idea of India emerges in this novel through the reference made to certain specific historical events like Indian Nationalist Struggle of 1930s, the Bangladesh War of 1971, and mass migration of people to Middle East 1970s onwards and so on. British colonialism (TCR mainly covers the period of British colonialism in India) sought to legitimize colonial rule and stage Western knowledge as part of a universally acceptable worldview. But underlying such obvious sources of influence, there is also an awareness of how the colonial ethos sought to legitimize colonial rule and stage Western knowledge as Universal. Thus, it becomes pertinent to discuss how Amitav Ghosh questions the legitimacy of knowledge based on the Western discourses of science. Interesting to note that TCR was born out of the debate on the relationship of science, technology and nationalism in India, and the resultant dichotomy of tradition vs modernity, and mysticism vs scientific rationalism. Ghosh dismantles the dichotomy between East and West idealized through concepts like ‘Science is
West’ and ‘Tradition is East’. That is why perhaps, Ghosh is concerned with staging in India what can be conveniently termed as pseudoscience.

Ghosh in this novel adopts a very unique form of the Indian Raga by dividing it into three sections entitled – Satwa (Reason), Rajas (Passion), and Tamas (Death). This novel also represents the two most important preoccupations of Ghosh as a writer: colonial experience and displacement of people across the world. Himself being a victim of the Partition of Bengal, Ghosh makes the Bengali village of Lalpukur, the locale of the novel. Mainly written for non-Western readers about India and Bengal in particular, Ghosh suggests that one cannot rationally solve human problems if the history of the people of a particular place is ignored. This novel is one of his earliest attempts to examine the cobwebs of relationships of the Indians across the world—a theme that he cares to incorporate in greater detail in his later novels. This novel also critically examines Gandhi’s nationalist self-sufficiency and independence through Balaram’s vision of ‘Weaving’ as a means of social progress. The scientific Reason with which Balaram is obsessed, combines Hindu ideas of purity and Western notions of cleanliness propounded in Louis Pasteur's microbiology. However, Balaram’s eccentric version of ‘Reason’ is almost wiped out in the novel by forces of unreason: ambition, paranoia, territoriality, and violence. Reason is of paramount theme in this novel. Alu’s uncle Balaram almost supernaturally believes in scientific reason being inspired by the work of Louis Pasteur which lead him to campaign against germs and Brahminical superstition in the local villages. As Yumna Siddiqui put it: “Its conceptual focus on reason, as signified by the title, makes it’s a particularly suitable text through which to explore the ambiguous legacy of Enlightenment rationality in postcolonial India” (177). Thus, Ghosh in this novel critiques the repressive tendencies of enlightenment reason.

TSL (1988), is set in postcolonial India. One of Ghosh’s finest novels, it won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award in 1989. In this novel he beautifully
blends Indian nationalist history, and postcolonial identity. The novel centers around a Hindu narrator’s family which fled from their ancestral home in Dhaka to Calcutta during the riot that erupted after the formation of East Pakistan in 1971. The time span in TSL is important as they exhibit actual influences on the writer. This novel traverses a time span from 1981 to the 1960s and 1940s. Ghosh’s adherence to exact dates makes his portrayal of India much more authentic. In this novel Ghosh also shows how the different cultures and communities are becoming antagonistic. This is a major issue in contemporary India. If the dominant tradition regards itself as the only legitimate source of India’s complex culture, then contradictions will grow. Novi Kapadia writes that historical events like the Freedom Movement in Bengal, World War II, the Partition of India, the communal clash erupting in East Pakistan after the Hazratbal incident in Sri Nagar in 1964 etc. have provided Ghosh with the raw materials against which he studies the historical truths like the meaning of nationalism and political freedom in the modern world. In TSL, the image of India is constructed through references to houses, photographs, maps, road names, newspapers, advertisements and other such instances. This technique has helped Ghosh to situate the text in its 'Indian' contexts and validate the author’s perception of the time and milieu covered by the novel (37).

One way to look at the novel IAAL (1992), although its form cannot be readily identified, is to examine the ways Ghosh makes a connection between historiography, ethnography and philology with the representational strategies of fiction. This becomes obvious in the way the narrator searches for medieval documents in Cairo as well as in various museums in the West. The narrator, who may be identified with Ghosh himself, brings along anthropological field work in Egypt and India, the history of a Hindu slave of a Jewish merchant in the 11th century, and Ghosh’s own diary written during the fieldwork. However, the book also acts as a travelogue. Very often the narrator self-reflexively comments on his own views and prejudices while interacting with the villagers. By
constructing many possible metanarratives, Ghosh in this novel tries to expose that certain areas of reality are eclipsed by writing that adheres exclusively to one particular paradigm. The narrative structure of the novel is fragmentary. The novel *IAAL* with its merging of different narrative models has popularised Ghosh in the whole literary world. The narrator sometimes appears to be a historian and sometimes an ethnographer during 1990s who provides a critique of colonialism and its continuing impact. But the main purpose of Ghosh, the author in *IAAL*, is to draw attention to today's political problems between Hindus and Muslims, or Jews and Arabs, caused by the ruptures brought about by colonialism and the all-invading power of modernity.

Amitav Ghosh's third novel, *TCC* (1996) is also based in Bengal and Calcutta to be more precise, as the title of the novel itself suggests. Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke award, it is an example of Ghosh's exceptional scholarship, narratorial skills, and experiment with webbed plot. Bringing together advanced computer science, religious cults and the parallel world of the Victorians and the contemporary Indians, this novel tells about the adventure of the Calcutta-born researcher Murugan who is engaged with the history of Malaria Research conducted by the Nobel winning British scientist Sir Ronald Ross, the army doctor in Imperial India during 1998. The Calcutta born scientist Murugan, is almost sure that Ronald Ross, who was awarded the Novel for his malaria research in Calcutta, was never the 'lone genius', as he believed that there is a secret history behind the research that had been erased from colonial records. Murugan's search for truth not only reveals many secrets of the city of Calcutta, but also proves Ghosh's inclination towards the "Subaltern Studies" group.

However, it is through Antar that Murugan's story comes alive. Once Antar had interviewed Murugan on the theory of the 'other mind' that "some person or persons had systematically interfered with Ronald Ross's experiment to push malaria research in certain direction while leading it away from others" (31). Antar and Ava, the super computer personified, investigate the
disappearance of the long-lost Murugan, the self-styled authority on Ronald Ross, who went to Calcutta in 1995 on the trail of some suspicious anomalies he had found in Ross's work. Finally, it is found that Ghosh’s narrative discredits Ross and places an Indian female ‘Subaltern’ named Mangala—the practitioner of the secret medical cult who could offer cure for syphilis. Mangala’s cure, seen in the novel as ‘counter science’ (88), was based on a technology of ‘interpersonal transference’ (90), against the linear methods practiced in colonial medical science. Here in this novel, the understanding of malaria and its treatment are reclaimed and redefined on distinctly Indian terms because they were significant not just for science and bodily health, but also for spiritual health and worship, fate and predestination, reincarnation, time cycles and other notions more identical (by and large) to Indians than Westerners. This novel thus provides room for an alternative historiography the malaria research itself.19

Ghosh’s next novel TGP (2000) can be read as a historical novel which employs the form of a family saga to tell an epic narrative about Burma and India of the late 19th century.20 Ghosh’s interest in history is clearly visible in the way he discusses how the Indians were engaged as workers, coolies and sepoys under the British troops in Burma, a colonial hub under the British. Moreover, the setting of Burma along with India was also important because Burma invited many ambitious Indians with many lucrative opportunities. This novel is autobiographical to a great extent. Like in TSL, the significance of TGP can be attributed to the lived experiences of others. As Ghosh states in the “Author’s Notes” in the novel: “The seeds of this book was brought to India long before my own lifetime by my father and my uncle...” 21

This novel examines the meaning of being an ‘Indian’ in a foreign land like Burma. The ontology of being Indian is best reflected in the character of Rajkumar. The narrator tells at the very beginning of the novel: “His name was Rajkumar and he was not an Indian, a boy of eleven—not an authority to be relied upon...he was a ‘kalaa’ from across the sea—an Indian.” This helps to
consider how the poor Indian workers were seen in Burma during that time.22 TGP makes many references to the Indians who served the Raj. Similarly, there are references to Indian soldiers under the British. For example, “There were some ten thousand soldiers in the British invasion force and of these about 2/3 were Indian sepoys...The Indians were seasoned, battle hardened troops” (26). The story of Rajkumar reminds of the ‘rags to riches’ stories common among the Indians in Burma. However, the reference to Mahatma Gandhi and his doctrine of nonviolence provides historical authenticity to the narrative of the novel. What makes this novel an extraordinary book is that the history of colonialism is described through the eyes of the common and ordinary people or the ‘subaltern’. Ghosh’s interest in an alternative historiography is clearly seen in the revisionist approach that he adopts to narrate particular historical events in this novel.

In THT (2004), Ghosh tends to focus on a ‘micro’ culture within the region namely, the Sundarbans or ‘tide country’ instead of parts of South Asia. India in this novel emerges through a realistic depiction of the Sundarbans situated on the islets of the Ganga Delta lying in the Southern part of Kolkata or the Bangladesh frontier.23 The narrator personifies Sundarbans as “the trailing threads of India’s fabric, the ragged fringe of her Sari, the achol that follows her, half wetted by the sea” (6). The narrator further tells:

At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain’s hostility to their presence” because “every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, are killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles. Those that survive face not only frequent cyclones but the sight of ebb tides that becomes the source of the birth to a forest every day, before swallowing it again. (8)

Besides providing a pictorial idea of the Sundarbans, this novel also deals with history as a recurring theme as Brinda Bose has argued: “Ghosh’s fiction takes upon itself the responsibility of re-assessing its troubled antecedents, using history as a tool by which we can begin to make sense of – or at least come to terms with—our troubling present” (qtd. in Paranjape 235). However, the
narrative continues through an intensified tension between the global and the local, urbane and rural, India and the outside world. The global here is represented by the American Piya with her hi tech GPS device, and the local is symbolised by Fokir and Delhite Kanai, shifting uncertainly somewhere in-between. It is mentionable that once again Ghosh makes the Partition during India’s independence the starting point to discuss the plight of the divided communities. Moreover, the idea of an Indian crowd in an Indian city scape is explicit in this line: “Here (in Sundarbans) there are places that are as crowded as any Kolkata Bazaar” (HT 17).

Mainly written in the form of a travelogue, this novella *Countdown* is based on Ghosh’s experiences of the grief and sorrows and the horror caused by the nuclear explosion in the mind of the people after his visit to Pokhran, Pakistan and Siachen. This novella can be further seen as a satire on the state policies which care little for the peace and prosperity of the common people. This book opens with the aftermath of the nuclear explosion on 11th May, 1998 at Pokhran, which the author visits three months later. In many ways, it is a critique of India’s nuclear policies, as the narrator states: “India’s nuclear programme is status-driven, not threat driven” (106). Ghosh in fact satirizes the celebratory mood of the BJP politicians, their handing out sweet meats after the successful nuclear tests. Ironically the dust from the test site was also sent around the country ‘so that the whole nation could partake in the glow of the blasts’. Some were even said to have thought about building a sacred monument at the test site to be visited by pilgrims. For the then Prime Minister of India it could be deemed as the crowning achievement of his life. But, contrary to all these, the people living around the test site looked sad and gloomy. They had never heard of cancer in that area. But now they are afraid that they will begin to get cancer in that area just like it happened after similar tests in 1974 when the first blast was conducted. So, a great sense of fear engulfed the minds of the village people of Khetoloi, mostly known as the ‘Bishnois’ six kms away from the blast site. The
people of the village, who felt threatened and terrorized by the blast very pathetically told the author about their plight. As the author observes: "The only people who benefit from these tests are the politicians...They bring no benefits to anyone else in this country" (10) as Ghosh was told by the local young man.

*TSP* (2008) is the first book of Ghosh’s projected IBIS trilogy and is based on the Opium War one of the most crucial events in world history. Once again this novel confirms Ghosh’s art of storytelling in the form of history. This novel highlights many of the previous concerns of Ghosh as a novelist—such as the movement of people from one place to the other, crossing of geographical boundaries, impact of economic pressures on the common lives of the people, questioning the past and so on. Such preoccupation justifies his links with the “Subaltern Studies” group again and again. India in this novel emerges in terms of Indian history in a particular period of the early 19th century. But the historical background not only helps one to consider Ghosh’s storytelling techniques but also to examine certain important facets of history. Because, during the late 18th century, Afghanistan was the main producer and supplier of opium to Europe. But soon the British turned the fertile banks of the river Ganga into poppy grower. Many factories were set up on the bank and workers were transported from the nearby places labourers. Despite the Chinese restrictions, the Britishers continued their opium trade to extract more and more money out of this lucrative business. Subsequently, the denouncing of Chinese free trade, led England to wage war with China. However, this background of War is beautifully used through a discussion of the history of Opium trade in Indian by Ghosh to discuss the impacts it had on the lives of the common Indians. The setting of the novel is mainly Ghazipur, fifty miles towards the East of Bengal, although references to different Indian locations like Bihar and Bengal are also explicit in the novel. *TRS* (2011), the second part of Ghosh’s IBIS trilogy, begins from where the previous novel ended. From the details of the changing lives of Indian migrants in Mauritius, the novel traces the fate of other characters from IBIS and describes
the opium trade in China. It is set in Fanqui town, a famous place for the local Chinese traders, a year before the first Opium War.

A product of the Bengal Renaissance, Amitav Ghosh’s fictions are marked by a rational explanation of established notions of society which is quite apparent in the early novels. But Ghosh also makes historical consciousness a part of his career as a writer. His later novels are characterised by strong themes that may be roughly identified with postcolonialism but could also be labelled as historical novels. In a sense, Ghosh is writing ‘metanarratives’ against history’s ‘grand narratives’ to use Lyotard’s terms. As Novy Kapadia states that the major influences on him were the stories of his father, the World War II (1939-1945), and the Indians in British Indian army fighting against the Germans or the Japanese. From his father, Ghosh learnt that the Indian officers and soldiers had ambivalent feelings about serving the colonial army. Many of them even realised that without the support of the Indians the British would not have been able to rule the subcontinent. This aspect of historical reality fascinated Ghosh, and it helped him construct the concept of freedom and its different connotations in the modern world as reflected in a novel like TSL (10). The departures and arrivals of the characters should necessarily influence their identity and history in most of Ghosh’s fictions. Incidentally, the far-East like Combodia and Burma, have always been an obsession with Ghosh because of some personal reference points (16). Central to Ghosh’s works is also the idea that the ‘non porous nature of modern borders which is brought to the forefront when contrasted with the inclusiveness of older communities where no concept of nationality with all its modern trappings of passports and visas existed.

However, a substantial amount of non-fictional prose writing by both Rushdie and Ghosh are also available. Many of such writings serve the purpose of enlightening the readers about what the two writers have to say directly or indirectly about their interest in India, and their use of Indianness as part of their narrative strategies. For instance, while analyzing his novels, we cannot but refer
to his nonfictional works. Because, it is in these works that Ghosh explains many of the elements that went into the making of the novels. For example, the book *TITI* (2002) is a collection of eighteen essays written at various phases of his career which according to the author “are arranged instead in accordance with the circumstances of their writing” (vii). *TITI* is even more interesting as it has helped in reading his novels in a more systematic manner, as he claimed, his nonfictional works signalled the ‘gestation’ of the novels. This can be verified by yet another self-proclamation which reads like this: “Readers who persevere with these pieces will discover that despite the differences in form and diction, they share with my fictions certain characteristic subjects and concerns, most notably my patterns of work” (x). Similarly, his other non-fictional work *Dancing In Combodia and Other Essays* that comprises five essays, deals with a variety of issues which Ghosh the anthropologist-turn-novelist brings alive more formidably. Mainly a study of different societies, this book presents a compelling account of the people in those societies. For example, his novel *TGP* can be supplemented with a reading of the essay “At Large in Burma” available in this collection.

Similarly, Rushdie too has penned a number of non-fictional works the most prominent among which are *East, West* (1995), *IHL* (1991), *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002* (2002). The various essays included in such works clearly reflect on the Rushdie’s main concerns as a writer. Essays written over a long duration of ten years like “Imaginary Homelands”, “The Assassination of Indira Gandhi” “Outside the Whale”, “Commonwealth Literature’ Does not Exist”, “In God We Trust” speak for Rushdie’s lineages, influences, commitment as an Indian English writer and most importantly, his political engagements. While “Errata’: Or Unreliable Narration in Midnight’s Children” celebrates his narrative technique in *MC*, essays like “In Good Faith”, “Is Nothing sacred” can be cited as his defence of *TSV*. His *East, West* is “organised into three parts: narratives about the East, narratives about the ‘West’,
and hybridised fictions that explore the meaning of the two. The tripartite nature of this collection, as Rushdie points out, is reflected in the title, which contains 'East' and 'West' but also links them with a comma" (Teverson 99). Rushdie also co-edited anthologies with Elizabeth West—Mirrorwork: 50 years of Indian Writing 1947-1997 (1997), and The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947-1997 which bear their mark as two very informative and selective collection of Indian English writing.

The twin narratives of the novel and the Indian nation-state have, in the fictional works of Rushdie and Ghosh, enabled readers to understand the fact that they are charting out an imaginative cartography about India. Hence, it is both the 'textualized' as well as the 'lived' version of India with which both of them seem to be engaged with. Memories of growing up in Indian cities like Bombay and Calcutta, as well as a graphic description of the Indian localities with their people and milieu, run as constant throughout all of their fictional works. In some cases however, they also function as the original impulse behind the birth of their novels. The fictional and non-fictional works of both Rushdie and Ghosh are the brainchildren of their groping with half a century of post-independence or post-liberation Indian English Writing. Thus, India or Indianness in their works can be studied in terms of both 'roots' and 'routs' as have been assertively argued by the authors themselves in their non-fictional works. Although the English language has no such strong regional base within India, the idea of CIWE explained by both resident and non-resident Indian authors, have categorically come to stay. However, the works of non-resident authors like Rushdie and Ghosh beautifully assert that the Indian self-hood is so capacious and flexible that it has easily accommodated all kinds of differences within the 'cultural mosaic' that they tend to emphatically call India.
End Notes:

1 However, the short entries on each of the novels by Rushdie and Ghosh in this chapter should not be taken as summary of the novels. Discussion of the novels here is done only to find out the different aspects of Indian culture, history, politics, and society as explicit in the novels.

2 *G* foreshadows many of his fictional concerns available in Rushdie's later novels. During the publication, this highly allusive and fantastic novel was poorly received, but it influenced the publication of his next novel *MC* in 1980.

3 The *Shahnameh* is a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between 977 – 1010 AD. It is also considered a national epic of Iran (Persia). Consisting of around 50,000 verses, the *Shahnameh* tells the mythical and historical background of the Persian Empire from the creation of the world till the Islamic conquest of Persia in the 7th century. See A. G. Warner and Edmond Warner's *The Shahnama of Firdaus*.

4 Applied popularly to Salman Rushdie's Booker prize winning novel *MC* (1981), *TSV* (1988), and a number of works by other novelists which combine elements of fantasy, this term originates in the discussions of the Latin American novels. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) is one of the pioneering attempts at using this technique for fiction.

5 *MC* is an important novel as it emphasizes the role of an 'Indian individual' who has to 'rewrite' India's cultural and political history to suit the present, and thereby expose the problematics of certain politically defined notions of the Indian nation. Rushdie's *MC* seemed to break all mental and psychological barriers of the Indian authors writing in English. In this novel, Rushdie invented almost a new form of language, an English language that was also an Indian language with words borrowed from the street corners, cinemas, and bazaars of India. In one sense *MC* represents the plurality and multiplicity within India in its fullest sense.

6 *S* won France's *Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger* (Best Foreign Book) and was a runner-up for the Booker Prize. This novel is marked by magic realism and the immigrant outlook that Rushdie is very conscious of as a member of the Indian diaspora.

7 However, Rushdie is believed to have got the inspiration of writing *S* from a newspaper report on a Pakistani father in England who killed his own daughter for dishonouring the family's reputation by having an affair with a white boy. Like Saleem's 'multiple fathers' in *MC*, Omar Khayyam Shakil, the protagonist of the novel, has 'multiple mothers'. In this novel, Rushdie also posits a vehement critique of Islam and the rigid censorship norms of the Pakistani politics.
Katha Sarit Sagar or "Ocean of the Streams of Stories" is a famous 11th century Sanskrit collection of Indian legends, fairy tales, and folk tales believed to have been told by a Saivite Brahmin named Somadeva. It consists of 18 books of 124 chapters. The principal tale is the narrative of the adventures of Naravahana Datta, the son of the legendary king Udayana. A large number of tales are built around this central story, making it the largest existing collection of Indian tales. This also reminds of the Arabian Nights. See N. M. Penzer's The Ocean of Story Being CH Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's Katha Sarit Sagara.

The Panchatantra is an ancient Indian collection of interrelated animal fables in verse and prose written in Sanskrit in a frame story format. It is one of the most frequently translated literary works of India and is widely known in the world.

The issue concerning the freedom of speech against rigid censorship is best reflected in what the character named Butt asks Horoun: "But butbut what is the point of giving persons Freedom of Speech, if then you say they must not utilize the same? And is not the Power of Speech the greatest power of all? Then surely it must be exercised to the full?" (119).

These positions are taken up by the Moor's father, Abraham, and by Raman Fielding, a Hindu fundamentalist respectively. The character of Fielding is based on the late Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray.

In Greek mythology, Orpheus was a legendary musician and poet. The story centers mostly on his ability to charm all living things and even stones with his music, his attempt to retrieve his wife Eurydice from the underworld, and his death at the hands of those who could not hear his divine music. He is an example of the inspired singer in classical mythology in Western culture.


It is a dramatic form based on mythological stories that incorporate contemporary social satire within its practical theme. The Kashmiri village of Akingam is the birthplace of the community of Bhands, the traditional performers of the valley. These nomadic people have an extensive repertoire of dramatic art. The secular outlook of Bhands is reflected in their dynamic folk form incorporating many elements from the classical Sanskrit theatre as well as other traditional folk forms of India. The plays of the Bhands are called pather, a word that seems to have derived from patra, dramatic character. Bhand comes from the bhaana, a satirical and realistic drama, generally a monologue that is mentioned in Bharata's Natya Shastra. Bhand Pather is a social


16 Satwa, Rajas, and Tamas are the three Gunas or qualities that govern human mind. For example, Brahma’s consciousness is marked by Rajas which is indispensable for his creative activities. Satwa is ethical virtue, Rajas is the quality of activity and dynamism, and Tamas is the quality of inertia.

17 The ‘Rationalist’ Balaram argues in the novel in this manner: “What could it be but weaving. Man at the loom is the finest example of Mechanical man, a creature who makes his own world as no other can, with his mind. The machine is man’s curse and his salvation, and no machine has created man as much as the loom. It has created not separate worlds but one, for it has never permitted the division of the world. The loom recognizes no continent no countries. It has tied the world together with its bloody ironies from the beginning of human time.” (55-57).

18 This novel is stylistically quite different. Written more than a decade after the actual dissertation on which the book is based, *IAAL* defies easy description and has been called "generically indefinable". It could equally be labelled as narrative, travel book, autobiographical piece, and historical account.

19 In this novel, we find an interesting parallelism between the loom (*TCR*) and the computer which are used as metaphors to dismantle East West binaries and to establish the Indian origins of a supposedly European technology. As the narrator in *TCR* states: “And the weaving changed mechanical man again with the computer.” (57).

20 Amitav Ghosh’s sensitivity towards issues of political and cultural significance, can be seen in his rejection of the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize in 2001 for his fifth novel *TCP* (2000). Because, as the author tells, this had happened without his knowledge. And-promptly he withdrew the novel from the competition mainly on the grounds that it was based on a disputed aspect of the past instead of the realities of the present day. His view was that the term “Commonwealth” was not an appropriate attribute to a cultural and literary group that included many other languages and realities beside those represented through the English language.

21 Ghosh’s own father Lieutenant Colonel Shailendra Chandra Ghosh was a civil servant who fought in World War II and took part in the Burma campaign in 1945. Ghosh reiterates how this novel is ‘deeply rooted in his father’s experience, his reflections on the war, and his self-questioning. In this novel, Ghosh recollects all those Indian civil servants—the Indian cadre of officials who administered Britain’s Indian possessions. So, the events related to how his family
was divided by the Partition of India and Pakistan and also by the Japanese conquest of Burma in 1942, the crowds and foreigners who assembled in the public places of Burma, Mandalay and Rangoon, and which included Englishmen, Cooringhees, Tamils, Americans, Malays, Benaglis and Chinese, were to influence the writing of this novel. (49)

22 The idea of an orphan and the subsequent homelessness is used as a metaphor in many of Ghosh’s novels. Ghosh uses an apt word for this: “Dhobi Ka Kuttana Ghar Ka Na Ghat Ka” in the novel. Saya John is an orphan so is Rajkumar. He told Rajkumar: “you don’t belong anywhere, either by the water or by the land” (10). Rajkumar was an orphan, the girls attending the Queen Supayalat were also orphans. They had nowhere else to go, no families, and no other means of support. For these orphans, home and homelessness did not make any difference. As stated by the orphan Dolly—wherever she stays becomes home.

23 In his essay “The March of the Novel through History” Ghosh stated that a novel must always be set somewhere. It must have its setting, and within the evolution of the narrative this setting must, classically play an important role. Most interestingly, this is the first of Ghosh’s novels in which the ‘lived’ sense of place becomes very prominent.

24 IBIS has a symbolic role to play. As the narrator tells, the IBIS had been built to serve as a ‘blackbirder’ for transporting slaves. However, with the abolition of slave trade such ships were used for patrolling in the West African coasts by the British and American naval officers. Because she was not swift enough to perform the proposed duty, she was sold to its present owner, who instead used it for exporting opium (11). This story of the IBIS also unfolds many other stories. And this was also the ship that Deeti saw while taking bath in the holy Ganges at the beginning of the novel.

Works Cited:

Bose, Brinda. “Footing History: The Diasporic Imagination of Amitav Ghosh”. 


