CHAPTER ONE

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All boundaries are artificial: there is no such thing as a 'natural' nation, which has journeyed through history with its boundaries and ethnic composition intact.

(Ghosh, Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma 100)

The aim of the thesis is to explore the reconstruction of history and the representation of cross-cultural matrix in the novels of Amitav Ghosh, focusing on the process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The thesis attempts to establish the fact that history serves as an excellent backdrop in Ghosh's novels, which describe the individual's search for identity vis-à-vis the cross-cultural matrix. The theoretical framework stems from the concepts promoted by postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most significant postcolonial thinkers who have their roots in India. His works embody the entire panorama of postcolonial themes and concerns, reflecting the depths of the colonised mind. The struggle in recreating the identity of the once colonised or marginalised native involves the reworking of all discourses such as history, culture, social structure, values and arts that have been influenced by colonialism. Ghosh, with his depth of experience and wealth of learning, essays through his works, the predicament of the subaltern, so as to recreate the identities of the
marginalised. He is at once a steadfast chronicler of the big times of various societies and their human beings in the tricontinent. His worldview catalysed by individual genius makes a broad sweep. Like Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth, he narrates the story, using a big canvas with a large gallery of characters. As a creative artist, he holds various responsibilities: anthropologist, sociologist, novelist, travel-writer, essayist and teacher. His imagination is diasporic as well as postcolonial in its sweep.

The anthropological and historical knowledge of Ghosh helps him deal with the crippling and debilitating influence of colonialism upon the political, economical, social, cultural, emotional and epistemological domains of human identity. While *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* promulgate the undermining of the native epistemology by monopolizing of the knowledge domain by the West, *The Glass Palace*, *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* evolve and annunciate the role of colonialism in the disintegration of culture and life in India, Burma and China. *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide* resonate with the roots of identity, human or otherwise against the background of the historic as well as the political fields. The recurrent themes of Ghosh's novels are closely related to the concepts promoted by postcolonial theorists.

The postcolonial perspective, with its implication of economic supremacy and its focus on the predicament of the subaltern, becomes relevant in the new millennium because marginalization and several other problems discussed by postcolonial theorists continue in different dimensions. At any point of history, one may identify issues like migration, economic and political
exploitation, slavery, oppression and difference prevalent in the societies. People belonging to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe categories in India, the Inuit in Canada, the Afro-Americans in the Unites States of America, the Maoris and Bushmen in Australia, and the Tamils in Sri Lanka are subordinated within the same country. There is also the huge prevalence of cross border terrorism and commercial and political exploitation. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies* effectively portray this kind of subordination. The concerns are many and varied, but they can be effectively analysed in the light of postcolonial theory because the basic premise for all these manifestations is power.

In his novels, Ghosh reconstructs history by tracing the course of common man’s life at specific historic predicaments. Along the characters’ quest for identity, Ghosh gathers the lost fragments of history and reconstructs it as a complex form of truth. To Ghosh, history is of consequence only because it offers the space for the development of individual identity. In his interview to John C. Hawley, Ghosh states: “My fundamental interest is in people—in individuals and their specific predicaments. If history is of interest to me, it is because it provides instances of unusual and extraordinary predicament” (6). He opens a new perspective that unifies individual predicament with historical happening wherein each contributes to the other.

Postcolonial studies emerged as a discipline, much later than the perspectives connected to it. Explaining that postcolonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin focus on
the complex fabric of postcolonial theory, which includes discussion on "migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being" (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader 2*).

The evolution of postcolonial studies as a separate discipline owes much to the contribution of the trio – Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha. However, they were not the first to foreground the influence of colonialism on the affected societies. Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe and George Lamming are some of the pioneering thinkers in the field. Though there is a long line of postcolonial thinkers, this thesis examines the concepts of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha in detail because Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1962) is the origin of postcolonial aesthetics, Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is the origin of postcolonial theory, Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak” underlines the theme of subaltern silence and Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994) is the origin of postcolonial concept of hybridity.

Aimé Césaire, a West Indian poet, novelist and politician, is one of the founders of the negritude movement in Francophone literature. He is among the earliest, to make profound observations about colonialism. His phenomenal work, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), as Robin D. G. Kelley says, is “a polemic against the old order” (7). Césaire focuses his attention on the
coloniser in order to understand the process of colonisation in a better manner. Through a systematic selection and an analysis of events from world history he busts the myth of colonialism as a mission of “evangelization” or “philanthropic enterprise” (32). He identifies the colonisers as “the decisive actors” who are “the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force. . .” (33).

Establishing the colonial process of dehumanisation in the background of the violence staged in the colonies and the occlusion of reality, Césaire coined a new term “thingification” to refer to the process of colonization. Interestingly he examines the process by which the coloniser is decivilized and brutalized while treating the colonized as animals and shows how it boomerangs turning the colonizer into an animal. Another significant contribution of Césaire is the concept of “negritude,” a celebration of indigenous identity. He further identifies the colonizer undermining the social system of the colonized and portraying them as an inferior object corresponding to their projected superiority through various discourses. This idea of creation of knowledge about the colonized constitutes the crux of Said’s Orientalism.

Frantz Fanon, being a student of Aimé Césaire, was deeply influenced by the concept of negritude. Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks (1952), The Wretched of the Earth (1961) and A Dying Colonialism (1965) are pioneering studies which deal with the social and psychological aspects of postcolonialism. In Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon explains how the native is
objectified and annihilated by the colonial authority and shows how the black man wears the white mask as a symbol of imitation and schizophrenia. He indicates the problem of identity that arises because of an unwilling confluence between native roots and colonial Eurocentric cultural breeding. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon calls for a cultural and national liberation. Describing the colonial situation as a Manichean world of binaries, Fanon shows how the colonial discourse, based on racial discrimination creates conflicts in the people living in the colonized environment.

Though Fanon is sympathetic to the project of Negritude, he does not resonate with the nostalgic celebration of the mythic African past. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon states: “We must not therefore be content with delving into the past of a people . . . We must work and fight with the same rhythm as the people to construct the future and to prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already springing up. A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature” (188). Fanon perceives national culture pulsating at the very heart of people’s existence as in the fight for liberation. He defines a national culture as “the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, praise and justify the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence” (188). *A Dying Colonialism* describes the schizophrenia of the native who cannot talk to the western doctor except answering questions in monosyllables. Fanon insists on the liberation of the black man from the schizophrenic identity.
In the 1980s, creative writers attempted to write back to the centre in order to subvert the ideology found in the colonial discourses. While the Manichean binarism articulated by Edward Rochester in his description of Jamaican environment in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) was vehemently opposed by Jean Rhys, who rewrote *Jane Eyre* in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), other postcolonial writers such as Jamaica Kincaid, who condemned the neo-colonial aspects of contemporary global situation in her non-fictional work, *A Small Place* (1988), and J. M. Coetzee, who rewrote Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) in his novel *Foe* (1986), expressed their views from the postcolonial perspective. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiang’o stressed the need for recreating national identity in their works.

Focusing on the enormous transformation in the literary world of the 1970s, Rivkin and Ryan explain how the scholars explored “the fact that many great works of English literature promoted beliefs and assumptions regarding other geographic regions and other ethnic groups—from Shakespeare’s Caliban to Bronte’s Bertha Mason—that created the cultural preconditions for and no doubt enabled the work of empire” (853). The postcolonial critics felt that the promotion of Eurocentrism in colonial discourses was not an isolated process but a part of the larger and discursive scheme of construction.

Chinua Achebe’s focus is on the disintegration of native culture, heritage, religion and other social values. His concern is for the multitude of indigenous tribes of Africa milled under the homogenising influence of
organized religion and Eurocentric ideals of culture. Achebe, in his novels, shows serious commitment to his nativity. He expresses righteous anger about the enforced homogenization of cultures and is contemptuous towards the resultant ape like identity. With Africa as with many others there had been deep and wide discrediting of indigenous values and heritage by colonial agency. The damage that the native culture incurred seems irrevocable.

Edward Said, a Christian Palestinian Arab, critic, cultural theorist and political commentator, construes himself as a dislocated exile. Influenced by Michel Foucault's idea of discourse as power, Said provides the definition of Orientalism from the postcolonial perspective. Said's concept of Orientalism was developed in his works such as Beginnings (1975), Orientalism (1978), The Question of Palestine (1979), Covering Islam (1981), The World, the Text and the Critic (1983), and Culture and Imperialism (1993).

Said's Orientalism as Michael Ryan observes, is "an important diagnosis of how imperialism worked in the realm of intellectual and cultural discourse" (196). Said's Orientalism is divided into three major parts. Each major part is subdivided into four small sections. The first part, "The Scope of Orientalism," discusses the emergence of orientalism as a body of knowledge to be used by the coloniser to dominate the East. The second part, "Orientalist Structures and Restructures," focuses on the imperialistic paradigms which constitute the structures in the formation of Orientalism. The last part, "Orientalism Now," describes the new forms of Orientalism in the postcolonial period.
Said is concerned with the term "Orientalism" as the prejudiced construction of the East as a differential inferior by the West in contrast to the dominant superior image of itself. In the West’s discourse about the world, the East becomes "the other." He scrutinizes Western discourses about the orient and identifies at the base a set of Manichean binaries: the Orient versus the Occident with contrasting qualities attributed to both. Said examines the West's representation of the Orient and states that the corpus of knowledge developed deliberately in colonial discourses helped the coloniser gain more power and legitimacy. Said points out that the growth of orientalism created "a library or archive of information" (Orientalism 41) which served as a powerful source for the coloniser's attempt to disseminate the concept of Manichean binarism during the nineteenth century. Said underlines the Western perception of the Orient, "... the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West" (Orientalism 41).

Influenced by Foucault's views on discourse, power and knowledge, Said presents the idea of discursive formation to foreground the various dimensions of representation in colonial discourses. According to Foucault, discourse fundamentally captures both power and knowledge in a discursive state. He states that discourse is ontologically incapable of promoting objectivity and inclusiveness: "The production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to certain number of procedures" (The Archaeology of Knowledge 216). Foucault's argument is that
discourse cannot produce any objective knowledge because it is conditioned and formulated by power. Similarly, knowledge cannot claim objectivity because it is only a mechanism of power. Foucault explains that knowledge is essentially exclusive and selective:

Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory. (Power/Knowledge 69)

Foucault questions the narrative dialectics of history, focusing on the historical dimensions of discursive change which facilitated the emergence of different discourses in the eighteenth century. His notion of discourse opened the way for postcolonial theorists like Said, who made an academic study of the Orient.

Analysing the issues and theoretical ramifications in Said's Orientalism, Bharat Bhusan Mohanty identifies three specific perspectives in Said's critiquing of the modern Western culture: intellectual or theoretical, political or ideological, and ethical or human and says that Said has combined these three perspectives in order to produce "a unified perspective so that the reading and understanding of culture will be complex and comprehensive" (96). Mohanty also observes that the influence of Antonio Gramsci and Raymond
Williams upon Said's notion of culture is immense (98). The two types of domination—“domination by consent” and “domination by force”—identified by Antonio Gramsci are of utmost importance to Edward Said. Raymond Williams' rejection of the idealist, abstract and elitist notion of culture influenced Said.

In Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, Said explores the relationship between author and culture, a concept developed by Raymond Williams. Said analyses the works of Flaubert, Dante, Dickens, Austen and Conrad, and show that these writers show their indirect participation in the imperialistic culture of the West. Said's concept of the “worldliness of the text” shows the influence of Raymond Williams' emphasis on authentic historical analysis. Said observes: “Williams teaches us to read in a different way and to remember that for every poem or novel in the canon there is a social fact being requisitioned for the page” (The World, the Text, and the Critic 23). Said makes use of Williams' views on the complexity of culture, in order to emphasise the worldliness of the text.

According to M. A. R. Habib, Said's thinking has embraced three broad imperatives: firstly, “to articulate the cultural position and task of the intellectual and literary critic,” secondly, “to examine the historical production and motivations of Western discourses about the Orient in general and Islam in particular,” and thirdly “to bring to light and clarify the Palestinian struggle to regain a homeland” (164). All through his works, Said has tried to evolve a comprehensive critique on culture.
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, having been a scholar under Paul de Man, has her critical roots in deconstruction. Postcolonial perspective of thought merges with feminist inquiry in her writings. Spivak uses Marxism to analyse the power structures in the society and delves into the foundations of differences of class, gender and others. She finds no commonality between the dimensions of consciousness of women from different socioeconomic backgrounds in spite of the prevalent patriarchal contexts. Spivak champions the cause of the marginalized Third World Women. She focuses her attention upon the texts of the subaltern and raises her phenomenal question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” This essay, as Mahendra Singh says in his seminal work *Postcolonialism*, signals a departure from the historical experiences of the Subaltern Studies group:

‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ has been read as illustrating Spivak’s own position as a postcolonial intellectual, who is concerned to excavate the disempowered and silenced voices of the past from the material and political context of the present. Unlike Spivak’s reading of the Subaltern Studies historical work, this essay combines Spivak’s political re-formulation of Western post-structuralist methodologies with a re-reading of the nineteenth century colonial archives in India. (104)

Spivak focuses more on the colonized female subject. In a colonial context the women are doubly marginalized, first, within their patriarchal society and second, as colonized. But her contribution to the field of
postcolonialism through her research and observations about the subaltern’s ability or inability to talk is immense. Spivak argues that more times than not a subaltern’s plight is “represented” as by a politician or “re-presented” as in art. But when a subaltern independently voices her predicament and anxiety, she is not heard. The woman who hanged herself in her father’s apartment during the freedom struggle in India, whose suicide Spivak identifies as a subaltern text, is Spivak’s grand aunt. Here Spivak passionately declares that when the subaltern speaks, there is not enough infrastructure for people to identify it as resistance speech: “She could not speak because she did speak but was not heard” \((The \ Hindu \ Literary \ Review \ 1)\). The double marginalisation under colonialism and patriarchy rendered the female subaltern inarticulate. There is no place for the female subaltern to speak. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* portray the predicament of the female subaltern, subjected to double marginalisation.

Gayatri Spivak’s focus is on heterogeneity viewed from the subaltern perspective. A postcolonial theorist with a fully feminist agenda, Spivak describes the predicament of the doubly marginalized female subaltern: “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 28).

Spivak’s most important contribution to postcolonialism is her analysis of the rhetorical and political aspects of postcolonial literary texts. While Said focuses on the historical context of dominant literary texts from the European
literary tradition, Spivak demonstrates the various manifestations of counter-discourse. Spivak's analysis of the rhetorical agency of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and her comment that Rhys's rewriting of *Jane Eyre* foregrounds "the epistemic violence of imperialism" ("Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" 251) found in Bronte's novel, reveal the complexity added by Spivak to postcolonial criticism.

Spivak's comment on the analysis of Jane Eyre's character by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their work, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*, is significant. According to Gilbert and Gubar, Bertha Mason is Jane Eyre's "truest and darkest double" (360). Spivak points out that this kind of analysis, which considers Bertha always in relation to Jane, glorifies Jane as a symbol of women empowerment but fails to identify the cruelty extended to Bertha, who "must play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, set fre to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction" ("Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" 270). Spivak's analysis of *Jane Eyre* insists on the need for evolving new methods of reading colonial texts because the Western mode of criticism is indifferent to the dehumanising portrayal of Bertha Mason: "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane hid its head and face" (*Jane Eyre* 281).
In the novel, Bertha is presented as a Gothic beast. Christel R. Devadawson comments: “The text brutalises Bertha. She is not presented here as a mad woman so much as a caged beast of prey guarded by her keeper. Not even the vestiges of human dignity are accorded her” (Introduction to Jane Eyre xxxi). Thus, the conventional feminist study, which has its focus on Jane Eyre in the context of the nineteenth century England, ignores the sufferings of Bertha Mason, a creole woman, who experiences triple marginalisation. Rama Kundu rightly says that the identity of the creole woman becomes extremely complex because she belongs neither to the centre nor to the periphery: “The case of the Creole woman represents an even deeper alienation and effacement. It seems to be tripled otherness; she is marginalised thrice over, being the other of the other of the other” (69).

Jean Rhys responds to the delineation of the character of Bertha Mason in the form of Wide Sargasso Sea, which becomes a contrapuntal reading of Jane Eyre. Jean Rhys reconstructs the text from the point of view of Bertha Mason. The important aspect is the contrast between Edward Rochester’s unchallenged dominating position in Jane Eyre and the confrontation he has to face in Wide Sargasso Sea. For example, Antoinette argues with him about the manner of Christophine when Rochester says that Christophine’s coffee is “delicious but her language is horrible” (Wide Sargasso Sea 71). Antoinette replies: “You don’t understand at all. They don’t care about getting a dress dirty because it shows it isn’t the only dress they have” (Wide Sargasso Sea 71). John McLeod makes a pertinent remark in this context: “Rhys’s novel both
‘engages with’ and ‘refuses’ *Jane Eyre* as an authoritative source” (162). *Wide Sargasso Sea* thus becomes a counter-discourse to *Jane Eyre*, foregrounding the dialectic between hegemony and subversion. Helen Carr rightly says that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is “a groundbreaking analysis of the imperialism at the heart of British culture” (20).

In the 1980s, attention turned, as Rivkin and Ryan put it, “to the complex interface between colonizer and colonized, an interface that Bhabha found characterized as much by a subversive work of parody and mimicry as by straightforward domination” (“English without Shadows, Literature on a World Scale” 853). Homi K. Bhabha, one of the triumvirs of postcolonial criticism, merges post-structuralism and psychoanalysis to interpret the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He discerns a state of anxiety that should have existed in the colonizer as his conception of difference between the colonised and the colonizer clashed with the reality of sameness. Bhabha further identifies colonial agency in this situation of tension.

Bhabha traces the presence of cultural contact and interaction along with resistance all along the process of colonial domination. He calls it the cultural negotiation proposing the true nature of culture. Bhabha agrees with Said about the colonizer’s Orientalist discourses. But, he refrains from and is against attributing moral judgement to the parties concerned, for he does not perceive them as homogenous polarised groups. Bhabha also demonstrates the existence of hybridity and diaspora in the colonial milieu. Like Said, he avers that the stereotype of the West as superior to the Orient was promoted in
colonial discourses as a blueprint. Nevertheless, he deviates from Said in his emphasis on ambivalence.

Bhabha's view is that the repetition of the colonial stereotype in various forms shows that it is never fully met. He argues for the reading of the stereotype in terms of fetishism. In *The Location of Culture*, he points out that the conflict of "pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence has a fundamental significance in colonial discourse" (107). While Said's theory of Orientalism is unidirectional in nature, Bhabha's concept of hybridity has its focus on the emergence of the "Third Space."

Influenced by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Bhabha presents his ideas from psychoanalytic point of view. He states that the relation between the migrant culture and the dominant culture is not merely antagonistic. It is neither synthesis nor negation. It is the state of "in-between." Bhabha's argument is that identity in the postcolonial world is a liminal reality, which constantly moves between positions, being a constant subject of displacement: "What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" ("Narrating the Nation" 4).

The most important contribution made by postcolonial theorists to criticism is the method of contrapuntal reading of literary texts. Postcolonial approach, as John McLeod says, gains its importance from the following fact: it serves as a constant reminder of the historical contexts of both oppression and resistance which inform literature in the colonial
period and its aftermath; it provides us with a challenging, innovative set of concepts which we can bring to bear in our reading practices, perhaps making us change some habits of mind” (258).

In the pre-colonial era, India was geographically a subcontinent, but politically a huge cluster of kingdoms of continually varying dimensions. The paradox about the shaping force, colonialism, is how it had affected and left beyond recognition the identity of each individual and community it had touched. In the present global scenario, the countries termed as postcolonial understand the situation of colonialism as one of the forces that have influenced them the most.

Quoting Milan Kundera, Rushdie writes, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (“Imaginary Homelands” 14). Novelists like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh questioned the validity of the modernist view of history as objective and scientific discipline. History, the canonised record of the past, is unveiled to be a meta-narrative, dictated by power. It fails to record the life of the ordinary man, hence rendering him marginalised. To sketch human identity in its entirety and complexity, many contemporary writers of Indian origin turn their attention towards history, seeking redress for the silences and wrongs in the past that have lasting repercussions in the present.

Peter Barry traces the evolution of postcolonial literature in his *Beginning Theory* through three phases in transition— adopt phase, adapt phase
and adept phase. During the period between the two World Wars, three major novelists—Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan—emerged in the Indian literary scene and laid the foundation for the contemporary Indian English novel, setting the trends which influenced later Indian English literature. The important contribution of these writers was the creative adaption of English to Indian environment with emphasis on Indian culture and identity.

Mulk Raj Anand’s literary career was launched by personal tragedy, instigated by the orthodox caste system. His first essay was a response to the suicide of an aunt, who had been excommunicated by his family for sharing a meal with a Muslim. Anand, the champion of the downtrodden and derelicts, gives a realistic picture of the predicament of the poor in his fiction. While his first novel Untouchable (1935) deals with the evils of caste system, his second novel Coolie (1936) criticises class system and communalism. The greatness of these two novels is the selection of the subaltern as protagonist, which shows Anand’s faith in the dignity of man. As A. S. Dasan observes, the postcolonial novel “should start with Mulk Raj Anand because he was the pioneer who promoted freedom from hegemonic, oppressive and exploitative power as the first and foremost goal of all his writings which constitute a collective pointer towards foregrounding the human centre in terms of expressive realism, existential humanism and triumph of human spirit” (2). Anand was a creative writer with a strong social commitment and intense humanism.
While Mulk Raj Anand portrayed the predicament of the subaltern from sociological and psychological perspectives, Raja Rao envisaged the creative process as transcendental experience. Creative writing, according to Raja Rao, involves the ability to go beyond mere artistry: “Unless the author becomes a upasaka and enjoys himself in himself (which is Rasa), the eternity of the word becomes mantra, no writer is a writer, and no reader a reader . . . Thus we give back sound undivided” (360-61). For both Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan, the literary text is an aesthetic work which not only provides sensuous gratification to the reader but also deals with the eternal nature of things in the universe. Raja Rao’s Kanthapura, which chronicles the formation of national identity, consists of postcolonial aspects. Kanthapura becomes a kind of a microcosm of India, endowed with a rich sthalapurana, which provides identity to its people. R. K. Narayan’s prolific output emerged from the folk tradition as well as the realist-satirist tradition.

The greatest achievement of the trio—m Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan— is that they put the Indian English novel firmly in the realm of fiction at the international level. Besides these creative writers, critics like K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, C. D. Narasimhaiah and M. K. Naik helped in establishing the Indianness of creative writing with Indian thematic as the core of literature.

The adept phase in Indian literature began in the 1980s. Moulting off the title of Commonwealth in the process of decolonising itself, Indian literature evolved as a self-conscious postcolonial literature. The 1980s saw a
great revival especially in the field of Indian English Fiction. The publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981 marked a renaissance in Indian Writing in English and gave an impetus to the Indian English novel, announcing the arrival of a new generation of sub-continental novelists whose imagination facilitated innovations in content and form. Rushdie, with his vigorous dismantling of history, recreation of myth and revised style of narrative, was more a sign of the age rather than a pioneer. *Midnight's Children* is remarkable because it marked a movement away from the novels of the triumvirate—Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan—and aimed at the subversion of received historiography.

The multi-generation epic form is the essential similarity identified in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*. In all the three novels the non-linear narrative provides a complex history of a family from the postcolonial perspective. Making allusions to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and referring to the idea of "paradise within," *Midnight's Children* questions the concept of the nation and refuses to write nationality in terms of essentialism. Saleem's mixed ancestry, displayed by his physical features, indicates the heterogeneous characteristic of the nation. Saleem has "eyes as blue as Kashmiri sky—which were also eyes as blue as Methwold's—and a nose as dramatic as a Kashmiri Grandfather's—which was also the nose of a grandmother from France" (130). Saleem's physical appearance is a combination of Eastern and European features. Saleem, as a representative of the nation, reveals not its natural
wholeness but its inherent heterogeneity. In the initial phase of the novel, Saleem attempts to provide fixity to the nation but in the course of time discovers that Indianness is constructed or imagined. He ends up undermining the national concreteness which he initially attempted to portray. Saleem and his son Aadam represent two different approaches to the concept of the nation. Born on the stroke of midnight of independence, Saleem puts his identity alongside the nation’s identity. But the downfall shows that the concept of the nation is problematic. Aadam, though tied to the nation like his father, believes in the idea of “paradise within,” negotiating meaning within the heterogeneous circumstances in India. Aadam symbolises a renewed sense of national identity.

*Midnight's Children* presents the transformation in Saleem's character. For Saleem, the "nearly thirty-one-year-old myth of freedom is no longer what it was. New myths are needed" (527). Rushdie leaves his novel deliberately open-ended and uncertain. Throughout the novel, interstitiality questions the validity of monolithic identity. Characters like Aadam, the Rani and Saleem, with their interstitial identities, challenge the concept of a homogeneous nation. *Midnight's Children* is a novel that questions the validity not only of colonial narratives but also of postcolonial nationalist agenda.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, like Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*, reconstructs history by narrating the story that spreads over a hundred years. While *One Hundred Years of Solitude* describes the revolutionary wars and the banana-strike massacre, *The Glass Palace* portrays
the British invasion of Burma and its effects. While Marquez’s novel presents Macondo, an isolated town founded by Jose Arcadio Buendia, as a micro image, Ghosh’s novel portrays the incidents which happen in different countries. However, both the novels attempt to destroy the Western constructions of the Other as primitive and irrational in nature. In all the three novels—Midnight’s Children, One Hundred Years of Solitude and The Glass Palace—the family story becomes the history of a people.

K. Chellappan’s comparative study of Midnight’s Children and One Hundred Years of Solitude is worth quoting here:

> Time seems to be flying with a winged chariot in both Midnight’s Children and One Hundred Years of Solitude, but it also stops, so that we can hear its silent march . . . In Rushdie we see self which is a centreless centre embedded in a fabricated history which is real and unreal, purposeful and accidental. In Marquez, Malcondo is the still centre suggesting a deeper centre of history out of which all the characters emerge inextricably interlinked . . . There is more sorrow and solitude in Marquez and more laughter and parody in Rushdie . . . The novels are verbal enactments of fiction’s tryst with destiny and myth’s dialogue with modernity.

(10)

K. Chellappan’s observation is applicable to The Glass Palace also. All the three novels are stories of individuals as well as of nations in a specific historical
context. The predicament portrayed in these novels is not simply personal but political and cultural.

The post-Rushdie generation of Indian English novelists write back to the West, transcending the limits of nationalism. Their emphasis is on the multiplicity of the cultures and hybridity. Their true merit lies in the attempt to subvert the Englishness of English fiction by introducing Indian English idiom. Besides Amitav Ghosh’s fiction, some of the novels which have provided Indian English fiction an international status are Vikram Seth’s epic novel, *A Suitable Boy*, Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey*, Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*, Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *The Mamaries of the Welfare State*, Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, Amit Chaudhuri’s *Afternoon Raag*, Alan Seally’s *The Trotter-Nama*, Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking through Glass* and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*.

The post-Rushdie era has also witnessed the emergence of women novelists who have explored multifaceted themes with commitment and skill. Some of the novels which deserve a special mention here are Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*, Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, Gita Mehta’s *A River Sutra*, Githa Harihara’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusions*, Jaishree Mishra’s *Ancient Promises*, Sunetra Gupta’s *A Sin of Colour*, Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, Anita Nair’s *Ladies’ Coupe* and Meena Alexander’s *Nampally Road*. 
Writers of the Indian diaspora attempt to strike a balance between the homeland and the host nation, displaying a state of ambivalence. Their creative writing shows the urge to substitute reality by the illusory realm of fiction. Rushdie aptly says: "Our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will in short create fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of the mind" (Imaginary Homelands 10).

Diasporic consciousness creates not only physical but also psychological complexities which find expression in the works of diaspora writers, who try to negotiate between the private and the public, home and abroad. As Femke Stoke says, the act of remembering is always "contextual, a continuous process of recalling, interpreting and reconstructing the past in terms of the present and in the light of an anticipated future" (24). The process of remembering home makes writers of Indian diaspora select Indian themes and characters. What they describe in their fiction is a record of their understanding of the Indian way of life. A sense of feeling and involvement brings these writers to India whenever they find opportunities to visit their homeland. Gayatri Spivak spends her vacation with the marginalised children in Kolkata; Bharati Mukherjee visits the temples at Kolkata; Amitav Ghosh undertakes fieldwork in the Sundarbans to write about Orcaella.

The horizontal movement across borders has helped writers of Indian diaspora regard boundaries as shadow lines. Bill Ashcroft argues that the
horizontal dimensions of home are most clearly realised in the diasporic communities. In his opinion, horizontality is not the abandonment of the local, and the cultural, but its redemption and its reinscription. Focusing on the significance of horizontality, Ashcroft observes:

Diasporic writing is a pre-eminent demonstration of the postcolonial tendency to problematize imperial and global boundaries. It is in horizontality that the true force of transformation becomes realized, for whereas the boundary is about constriction, history, the regulation of imperial space, the horizon is about extension, possibility, fulfilment, the imagining of post-colonial place . . . Place, like subjectivity, is not subsumed, but located more clearly in the horizon. In that horizon every subject is liminal, every subject is global. (12-13)

Writers of the Indian diaspora have registered in their works the significance of the liminal because it exists in the Third Space. Their aim is to go beyond nationalist view so as to include a wide range of themes in the texture of their fiction. Speaking to CNN-IBN’s Deputy Editor Sagarika Ghose in an interview held on September 15, 2013, Amitav Ghosh states that “pluralism is crucial” and that “India's pluralism is key to survival.” He is against transforming “faith into politics.”

Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956. His father was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the army and so he had to spend his childhood in Sri Lanka, Iran and East Pakistan. He studied at Doon School in Dehra Dun and pursued his
higher education at St. Stephen's College in New Delhi. In 1978 he obtained M. A. Sociology from Delhi University. Then he went to St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, to do postgraduate work and obtained a Diploma on Social Anthropology in 1979. He also learnt Arabic during that period. In 1980 he visited Egypt to do fieldwork for his doctoral research under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria. He was awarded his Oxford D. Phil. in Social Anthropology for his thesis on “Kinship in Relation to the Economic and Social Organization of an Egyptian Village Community” in 1981. He has held academic positions at a number of universities, including Delhi University, Columbia University and the University of New York. He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India in 2007 and honorary doctorates by Queens College, New York, and the University of Sorbonne, Paris, in 2010. Along with Margaret Atwood, he was also a joint winner of Dan David Award for 2010. In 2011 he was awarded the International Grand Prix of the Blue Metropolis Festival in Montreal. He lives with his wife Deborah Baker and his children Leela and Nayan in New York.

Ghosh talks to Chitra Sankaran in an interview held in Singapore on 21st September 2005 about his position as a diasporic writer:

I think it’s possible to be a Bengali diasporic within India. In Delhi I could be a Bengali diasporic. I would feel a diasporic there much more intimately than I would feel a part of the Indian diaspora because I’m not actually a part of the Indian diaspora. I
think of myself as an Indian expatriate, who will quite soon, I hope, be able to live in India again. ("Diasporic Predicaments" 10)

Ghosh avers that the diaspora have a significant role in shaping the contemporary Indian culture. He believes that the Indian diasporic writers have more opportunities to present a universal vision than the writers of the West who are contained within a sense of being which is very particular: “What we offer to the reader is a much greater dimension of experience; a much greater dimension of history; a much greater vision of the plurality of the world” ("Diasporic Predicaments" 8).

Ghosh considers the interconnection between Bengali literature and English literature as a source of strength and richness. In his view, modern Bengali literature is the outcome of the encounter between Bengali and English. The fundamental grammatical structure and syntax of Bengali language have been altered by English. This is the reason why the earliest Bengali writing was bilingual. Ghosh points out that there was no prose in Bengali until Bengali came into contact with English: “Bankim Chandra wrote his first novel in English; Mahasweta Devi was a teacher of English; Sunil Ganguly’s great inspiration came from Allen Ginsberg” ("Diasporic Predicaments" 7). Ghosh rejects the idea that there is difference between Bengali forms of expression and English forms of expression. He asserts that there is a deep interconnection between Bengali and English. This hybridisation leads to richness in the quality of literature.
Ghosh's first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, was published in 1986. It won the *Prix Medicis Etranger*, one of France's top literary awards. It deals with the geographical and ideological journey of Alu, a young weaver from a small village in Bengal. After being falsely accused of terrorist activity, he flees westwards to Calcutta, Goa, the fictional Gulf state of Al-Ghazira and finally to Algeria. Alu is the protagonist of the novel though for large sections of the narrative he remains more a kind of a silent centre, providing a link for the various events described in the novel. Ghosh mixes the past, the present and the future in this novel, and examines the philosophy of reason, juxtaposing the oriental and the occidental and focusing on their running into each other which becomes indivisible and indistinct. It shows the influence of Salman Rushdie's mode of magic realism. Analysing the character of modernity in India, Ghosh explores the relationship between Enlightenment rationality and police. When he traces the police activity of the post-Independence era with its imagined political threats, he describes the presence of colonial legacy based on order and control.

Shubha Tiwari comments on the significance of *The Circle of Reason* in the post-Rushdie Indian English era:

*The Circle of Reason* is remarkable for many reasons. Its theme is different from traditional concerns of Indian English Fiction. It challenges a direct and simple appreciation. The book itself is sort of a paradox. It exudes restlessness with extreme control and poise. The new thrust and lift that came to Indian English Fiction
Salman Rushdie's influence is seen in Ghosh's use of postmodern techniques in *The Circle of Reason*.

The concept of reason as conceived in Western modernity is the central theme running through all the three parts of *The Circle of Reason* which portrays several contexts in which hybridised versions of reason are sketched. Reason is linked in the narrative with the idea of the purity of the poles in the Western binary constructions. The first part features Alu with his uncle and foster father, Balaram, in the village of Lalpukur. Balaram, who is the teacher in the village school, is devoted to a transnational idea of reason and science. He is a devoted practitioner of phrenology, which he sees as a way of combining the outside and inside, body and soul, of people. Balaram is also inspired by the work of Louis Pasteur, and launches a campaign towards germs and superstition in the village to win the inhabitants over to his idiosyncratic vision of the purity of reason and sciences.

The second part of *The Circle of Reason* describes Alu’s preaching of reason and forming a mock-socialist group which aims to get rid of both germs and the personal ownership of money among the motley crowd of the inhabitants of the Souq, an ancient multicultural trading area in Al-Ghazira. Magic realist elements dominate the second part of the novel, which portrays
the events taking place in Al-Ghazira. As John Thieme observes, the “extraordinary events that reflect the collision of traditional and modern value-systems are sometimes reminiscent of happenings in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s Macondo” (254).

The third part of the novel, with Saharan Algeria as its setting, shows how the original inspiration for purity and reason in the novel, that is, Balaram’s copy of Life of Pasteur, is cremated with the body of one of the characters in a scene, which calls for the adaptation of ancient rituals to the demands of the practical present. Reason, as the title of the novel suggests, is circular. Analysing Ghosh’s presentation of the encounter of colonial, pre-colonial and ‘para-colonial’ aspects of knowledge within a colonial and post-colonial milieu, Anshuman A. Mondal states that The Circle of Reason demonstrates:

\[\ldots\ \text{how the formation of colonial power/knowledge complexes is both reproduced and ironically subverted by its reception in colonised societies; how ‘subaltern’ peoples, in the form of illegal immigrants in a fictionalised Gulf emirate, both elude and fall victim to the ‘logic’ of the modern state; how diasporic connections increasingly traverse and transgress the boundaries imposed by such raison d’état.} \ldots (8).\]

Ghosh not only deals with political and social issues but also combines historical and mythological elements in The Circle of Reason. The end of the novel describes the enacting of Tagore’s Chitrangada, a dance drama based on
an episode in the *Mahabharata*. There is also an affirmative note, which indicates hope and positive outlook on life. Like any Indian epic, *The Circle of Reason* begins with Reason, travels through Passion and ends in Death.

*The Shadow Lines*, published in 1988, won the Sahitya Akademi Award 1989 and the Ananda Puraskar. It questions the identity of a country defined by geographical and political boundaries. Identity in the realm of Indian English fiction is always related to alienation but Ghosh deviates from this line of thought and portrays the complexities of human behaviour with history as backdrop. He attempts to prove that boundaries that are taken for granted are mere shadow lines. Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as an “imagined political community” forms the basis of *The Shadow Lines*, which raises the question whether a piece of line drawn on the map by people with political motive in a particular period can divide the culture into two. This novel is not simply a *bildungsroman*. It effectively portrays the individual’s predicament caused by national trauma. As Nivedita Bagchi says, *The Shadow Lines* is “a manifestation of the desire to validate the postcolonial experience and to attempt a reconstruction of ‘public’ history through a reconstruction of ‘private’ history” (83). Ghosh effectively reconstructs history through the interaction of space and time.

In *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh uses a large canvas to portray the interaction of characters. The novel encompasses the story of three generations of Indian and British families spread over Calcutta, Dhaka and London. It begins in 1939, the year when the Second World War began, and ends in 1964 when the
eruption of violence stormed Calcutta and Dhaka. There are two parts in the novel. The first part, “Going Away,” begins with a direct and plain statement “In 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father’s aunt, Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son, Tridib” (SL 3) and end with Ila’s marriage and her going on honeymoon. The second part, “Coming Home,” begins with Tha’mma’s retirement and ends with the unfolding of the truth of Tridib’s death. Before partition, Tha’mma “came” home to Dhaka, which was her birthplace; after partition, she “went” to Dhaka, a place which is no longer her home.

The first part, which consists of sixteen sections, portrays the characters moving away from a point of fixity. The second part, with its fifteen sections, deals with the theme of quest for identity, focusing on Tha’mma’s concept of home. Though she has lived in Calcutta for many years in a comfortable house, she considers Dhaka her home because she and her sister were brought up there, everyone living and eating together. Tha’mma’s words provide a powerful image of home which is constructed through years by different generations: “It was a very odd house. It had evolved slowly, growing like a honeycomb, with every generation of Boses adding layers and extensions, until it was like a huge, lop-sided step-pyramid, inhabited by so many branches of the family . . .” (SL 121). The house has become a symbol of identity with all its complexities and even the most knowledgeable member of the family could not define the time of construction of rooms in the house.
The Shadow Lines brings out the absurdity of borders when the narrator attempts to draw a circle on the tattered Bartholomew’s Atlas in which Tridib used to point out places to him in the past. When the narrator draws a circle with Khulna at the centre and Srinagar on the circumference, he finds an amazing circle:

Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi is; that Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is. Yet, I had never heard of those places until I drew my circle, and I cannot remember a time when I was so young that I had not heard of Delhi or Srinagar. It showed me that Hanoi and Chungking are nearer Khulna than Srinagar, and yet, did the people of Khulna care at all about the fate of mosques in Vietnam and South China? (SL 232)

The narrator draws another circle with Milan as its centre. He is surprised to see that any event that occurs in Stockholm, Dublin, Casablanca, Alexandria, Istanbul and Kiev will bring “the people of Milan pouring into the streets” (SL 232). Ghosh introduces the image of the looking-glass border to foreground the fact that each city is “inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry” (SL 233) and endorses Benedict Anderson’s notion of the constructedness of nation and its borders.

The literal and metaphorical crossing of borders and the consequences constitute the theme of The Shadow Lines. John Thieme observes that Ghosh’s narrative technique makes The Shadow Lines a brilliant allegory “just as a
classic Western allegory such as *Pilgrim’s Progress* achieves its effects through vividly realized circumstantial detail and a supposedly realistic work such as *Robinson Crusoe* moves in the opposite direction to provoke allegorical readings" (259).

*In an Antique Land*, published in 1992, is a model of ethnography. It was selected as the New York Times Notable Book of the Year, 1993. It is a typical work by an anthropologist and historian. It traces the history of a civilization. The central character is a slave named Bomma, who symbolises the subaltern conscience. *In an Antique Land* opens with the words, “The slave of MS H.6 first stepped upon the stage of modern history in 1942” (13). It pursues the journey of culture across the globe from the east towards the west. In the beginning of *In an Antique Land* Ghosh’s visit to Lataifa and Nashawy and the life of Bomma seem to be two different stories. But these two narratives complement each other as the story develops further, dissolving the boundaries of physical truth and spiritual consciousness. Though Ghosh could not maintain regular correspondence with the people in Lataifa and Nashawy, a “brilliantly floodlit corner” of his memory motivated him to visit the antique land (*In an Antique Land* 110).

While *In an Antique Land* shows a pattern devised by Ghosh from his experiences in Lataifa and Nashawy, focusing on the twelfth century setting with a Jewish merchant and his slave, *The Calcutta Chromosome* indicates Ghosh’s intention of deliberate inversion. However, the convergence between
In an Antique Land and The Calcutta Chromosome is that both the works deal with the discovery of the marginalised figures lost in time.

The Calcutta Chromosome, published in 1996, won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1997. The novel has three connected story lines taking place at three distinct time settings. One narrative is about the Nobel Prize winning scientist, Sir Ronald Ross, who achieved a breakthrough in malaria research in 1898. Another narrative is about Murugan who tries to detect a mystery behind malaria research. Much of the novel is about his tracking the life of Sir Ronald Ross. Murugan's investigation of old documents throws light on the underground mystical movement which consisted of disciples who could transfer their chromosomes into another. The third narrative deals with Antar and his super computer trying to find out what happened to Murugan, who had mysteriously disappeared during his adventure. Mangala is a demi-god who is in disguise as a cleaning woman in Doctor Cunningham's laboratory. She discovers the means of treating syphilis with the malaria parasite. The novel combines science fiction and detective plot, and describes a series of interrelated moments wherein each character is engaged in a kind of quest for knowledge. The two worlds of science and counter-science are brought together against the setting of Calcutta's busy streets and structures.

Time plays a significant role in The Calcutta Chromosome. As in The Circle of Reason, history is described as a collective memory in The Calcutta Chromosome. Both the novels deal with the symbiotic relationship between the
past and the present. In both, there is the movement from the present to the past and from the past to the present. In both the novels, no event operates in a totally autonomous context. Analysing the narrative technique employed in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Shubha Tiwari explains how Ghosh questions the fixity of history:

Ghosh compresses or expands according to his convenience the actual time period of an event. This highlights the parallels between two events that took place at two different periods of time. This technique also constructs contrasts between two events of different periods. Apart from this, we can visually cement the gap between seemingly distant actions. (53)

The novel remains open-ended, leaving the decision to the imagination of the reader who is forced to reflect on the mystery of silence, which is an important theme of the novel. The methodology of the group of people functioning against the hegemony of the West is based on Emmanuel Levinas' views on communication through silence. The novel shows that Sir Ronald Ross did not discover malaria parasite but a group of underground native practitioners representing counter-science helped Sir Ronald Ross achieve his findings. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a postcolonial interpretation of the scientific mechanism during the colonial period.

*Dancing in Cambodia and At Large in Burma* is a collection of essays, published in 1998. The essays deal with a variety of topics. *Countdown*, which
was published in 1999, is a travelogue cum ethnography. Ghosh captures his experiences and the information that he gathered from his visit to Pokharan, where India’s nuclear tests were conducted. He reports the opinions of the people and discusses the politics and motives behind the tests.

*The Glass Palace*, published in 2000, won the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards in 2001. It also won the New York Times Notable Book Award 2001. It has been translated into twenty-five languages. Nay Win Myint translated the novel into Burmese language and published in Burma’s leading magazine *Shwe Amyutay*. It won the Myanmar National Literature Award in 2012. Ghosh says that he took five years to write *The Glass Palace* because he had to read “hundreds of books, memoirs, travelogues, gazetteers, articles and notebooks,” and travel “thousands of miles to visit the settings and locations” described in the novel (*GP* 549). One of the sources of *The Glass Palace* was the account of the war given by Ghosh’s father, Shailendra Chandra Ghosh, whom the novel is dedicated to. In his interview to Tim Teeman, Ghosh refers to his father’s experience in the British-Indian Army in Burma in the Second World War: “He was an officer and was once called a ‘nigger’ by a white South African officer. My father got very angry and hit him with his belt. The colonel summoned my father, who thought he would be court-martialled, but the colonel said he shouldn’t have done what he did and sent him back to his post” (Web).
The incident reminded Ghosh of the destructive aspects of racism in the 1940s. The Indian officers were discriminated and were not all allowed into the same social clubs as their white counterparts. Ghosh derived his material from the experience of his uncle, Jagat Chandra Dutta, a timber-merchant in Burma. Ghosh states in the concluding “Author’s Notes” in The Glass Palace: “The seed of this book was brought to India long before my own lifetime by my father and my uncle. But neither my father nor my uncle would have recognised the crop that I have harvested” (GP 549). The novel portrays the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Burma, the consequences the Second World War and the changing landscape of India and Burma.

Comparing Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe and Ghosh’s The Glass Palace, Rukmini Bhaya Nair says: “Walter Scott’s classic was based on a popular understanding of Europe’s crusades and involved the most minimal investigation of original sources. Not so Ghosh’s novel, which is very much in keeping with both the spirit of Postcoloniality and his own anthropological training” (167-68). According to her, The Glass Palace is “a formidably researched presentation of the less-known theatres of World War II, yet no less horrific than Dunkirk or Stalingrad . . . It strikes me that many Ph. D. theses are not half as diligently worked out as Ghosh’s book” (168).

The Glass Palace was shortlisted for Eurasia Regional Winner for the 2001 Commonwealth Writer’s Prize, but Ghosh withdrew his nomination because he felt that the idea of categorizing the novel as part of Commonwealth Literature was contrary to the spirit of the novel. In his letter
addressed to Sandra Vince, Prizes Manager, Commonwealth Foundation, dated March 18, 2001, Ghosh states:

I was not aware that my book had been submitted for the Commonwealth Prize . . . I have on many occasions publicly stated my objections to the classification of books such as mine under the term "Commonwealth Literature." Principal among these is that this phrase anchors an area of contemporary writing not within the realities of the present day, nor within the possibilities of the future, but rather within a disputed aspect of the past. The issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of The Glass Palace and I feel that I would be betraying the spirit of my book if I were to allow it to be incorporated within that particular memorialisation of Empire that passes under the rubric of the Commonwealth. (Web)

The fact is that the publishers had followed the usual practice of submitting the book to Commonwealth Foundation without consulting the author.

The Glass Palace essentially deals with two sets of characters, one exclusively from history and the other fictional. Thebaw, the last king of Burma, Queen Supayalat and the three princesses are historical characters and all the events to do with them are drawn from history. While the other set of characters that are the major characters in the novel, Rajkumar, Dolly, Saya John and others are fictional. The lives of the fictional characters are
intertwined with the lives of the historical characters. Rajkumar plays a pivotal role in the novel. In the first few chapters, he climbs the socio-economic ladder and ends up marrying his first love, Dolly. The major part of the novel thereafter is about the relationship and transaction among three families in three different countries -- India, Burma and Malaysia -- during a critical period in history. *The Glass Palace* describes not only Rajkumar’s growth and decline in terms of wealth but also Dolly’s internal exploration.

*The Glass Palace* is a powerful portrayal of Ghosh’s postcolonial vision that emerges from his humanism. The novel describes the effects of forced migration caused by the selfish motives of the colonisers. On his way to exile in India, King Thebaw ponders the fate of thousands of Indians who were brought to Rangoon by the British “to work in the docks and mills, to pull rickshaws and empty the latrines” (*GP* 49). After five days on the Irrawaddy King Thebaw goes up on deck, varying a pair of gilded binoculars. He raises his glasses to his eyes and spots several Indian faces. He thinks about the pathetic plight of the people who are scattered to different parts of the world by the colonisers: “What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another – emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement – people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile?” (*GP* 50). Anshuman A. Mondal rightly considers *The Glass Palace* the “most humanist of Ghosh’s novels” (113). Rukmini Bhaya Nair emphasizes that the novel’s signal postcolonial virtue is its emphasis on the need to
“radically reconfigure our dimly remembered past in order to understand their effects on our chaotically disturbed present” (174).

There are many significant convergences between Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* and Allan Sealy’s *The Trotter-Nama*. Published in 1988, *The Trotter-Nama* describes the history of the Anglo-Indian Trotter family. The narrator is the seventh Trotter, Eugene. The pattern of narration is similar to that of *The Glass Palace*. In both the novels, the views and fortunes of the characters change with the tides of Indian history. Both describe the downward progress of royal families. In both the novels, the most beautiful structures once celebrated for their grandeur are converted to commonplace buildings or ruins. In *The Trotter-Nama* the Sans Souci, which was once the palace of the Trotters, is turned into a crumbling hotel so as to help the impoverished Trotters; in *The Glass Palace* much of the fort is destroyed by artillery fire and the magnificent pavilions of King Thebaw’s glass palace at Mandalay are burnt to the ground. In both the novels, the good fortunes of one generation are diluted by subsequent generation of lesser talents.

*The Imam and the Indian*, a collection of eighteen prose pieces of various lengths, was published in 2002. The essays were written over a couple of decades. The themes range from a personal narrative to the violence in Colombo. These essays are closely related to the issues found in Ghosh’s novels.
The Hungry Tide, published in 2004, won the Hutch Crossword Book Prize in 2006. Ghosh deals with the central image of the tsunami. The novel abounds in local myths and describes an American cetologist Piyali Roy’s search for dolphins. The novel is set in the Sunderbans, a tide country. The Sundarbans is an archipelago of various large and small islands. Ghosh points out that the ephemeral landscape of Bengal is just the opposite of the landscape of Europe because the former shows perennial transformation while the latter consists of sharply drawn lines and clearly demarcated borders:

Bengal, where I was born, is a vast delta where thousands of creeks and rivers flow into each other to form a landscape that is mapped upon a grid of interlocking waterways. Here a confluence of rivers is both a seam and a separation -- it joins many shores even as it holds them apart. The Bengali word for confluence is mohana which reflects this ambiguity while also adding to it an element of beguilement that evokes, in my mind, the image of the ‘crossroads’ - a metaphor that is almost universally identified with riddles and paradoxes, confusion and crisis . . . In an imaginative sense it is the opposite of the landscape of Europe, which has come to be powerfully identified with certainty and solidity. (“Confluence and Crossroads” 1)

The Hungry Tide shows Ghosh’s interest in taxonomic sciences like Geology and Botany.
The borderless Sundarbans provides the answer to Heidegger's concept of *unheimlichkeit* (unhomeliness), focusing on human predicament arising out of various psychological and social aspects. Heidegger, a metaphysician, avows that man is thrown into the world. He considers the experience of death a very important factor because it individualizes man. His main argument is that the “Being” of the human being lies in his movement through the world. The refugees in Morichjhapi experience *unheimlichkeit* caused by political decisions. The Sundarbans provides an opportunity to the refugees to establish an identity without conventional borders. Sajal Kumar Bhattacharya aptly says: “The Sundarbans are borderless; where one’s familiar markers for identity are constantly shifting. It was impossible to tell who’s who and what their castes and religions were. What can be a better place to reinvent one’s home!” (134).

Ghosh’s concern for the marginalised people is strongly established in *The Hungry Tide*. In his essay “Folly in the Sundarbans” Ghosh launches an attack on the Left Front Government of West Bengal which evicted thousands of refugee settlers, mainly Dalits, from the island of Morichjhapi in 1979: “The cost in lives is still unaccounted, but it is likely that thousands were killed . . . It is scarcely conceivable that a government run by the same Left Front is now thinking of handing over a substantial part of the Sundarbans to an industrial house like the Sahara Parivar. It runs contrary to every tenet of the Front’s professed ideology” (Web). In this essay Ghosh condemns the policy of the Government of West Bengal and the materialistic attitude of Sahara India
Pariwar which submitted an ambitious plan, proposing the creation of an enormous new tourism complex, which would destroy the ecosystem of the Sundarbans. Ghosh felt that the Sahara Parivar's project would turn large stretches of the Sundarbans into a playground for the affluent.

*Sea of Poppies*, the first book of the *Ibis Trilogy*, was published in 2008. It won the Crossword Book Award for Best Novel of the Year in 2009, the Indiaplaza Golden Quill Award for Best Novel in 2009, and the Tagore Literature Award in 2012. It was also short-listed for the Booker Prize in 2008. The novel, divided into three sections of “Land,” “River” and “Sea,” portrays the fictional lives of a diverse group of Indian, British, American, French, Arakan and Chinese characters. The first section ends with the beginning of a new life of Deeti, the second section ends with the beginning of a new life of Neel Rattan and the third section shows the interconnectedness of all the characters.

The novel has at its centre the Ibis, a schooner that was formerly a slave carrier between Africa and America and now is used to transport indentured labourers from colonized countries to new colonies. The Ibis consists of a unique assortment of people varied by class, country, creed, culture, profession and taste, bound on an epic journey. In the Ibis, they form a kinship, cutting across boundaries, overlooking differences, representing a multi-cultural society. The ship symbolizes the diasporic or globalised world. The novel describes the effects of political, economic, judicial and religious forms of
hegemony. Though the characters appear as prototypes of the victimized natives at the beginning of the novel, they attain a sense of individuality as the story progresses. Most of the characters transcend borders, whether by their own choice or by force.

Deeti is the most important character in *Sea of Poppies*. She has a kind of mystical element in her. It is Deeti who, at the beginning of the novel, imagines that the arrival of the Ibis is for her. The opening words of the novel testify to this fact: “The vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean, came to Deeti on an otherwise ordinary day, but she knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny for she had never seen such a vessel before, not even in a dream” (SP 3). Though she has never seen such a schooner like the Ibis, which is like “a great bird, with sails like wings and a long beak,” she somehow knows that it is coming for her. It is again Deeti who, lying one night on the deck of the Ibis, holds a poppy seed between her fingers, inviting Kalua to taste it because it is the star that took them from their homes and put them on the ship. The poppy is the planet that rules their destiny.

The pathetic plight of indentured labourers who were sent to British plantations throughout the world during the colonial period is the central idea of *Sea of Poppies*. The cruelty extended to them in prison was such that the British Government had to send Sir George Grierson, a linguist, in 1883 to look into the alleged abuses in the recruitment of indentured labourers from India.
In the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* dated 28\(^{\text{th}}\) November 2008, Gaiutra Bahadur refers to Grierson’s diary in which Grierson mentions his encounter with the father of one female coolie in a village along the Ganges. The father could not remember his daughter. The historical record provides only a trace of this woman: a name, a processing number, a year of emigration. This tragic situation is mainly because the journey from India was often a one-way process. For Gaiutra Bahadur it was a personal association because what she wrote was inspired by her great-grandmother, who left Calcutta on a ship of indentured labourers.

*Sea of Poppies* shows Ghosh’s skill in filling the blanks left in the pages of history by employing a suitable language to suit his theme. Regarding Ghosh’s use of language in *Sea of Poppies*, Cathleen Schine says: “Ghosh has taken all of his considerable historical knowledge and passion and funnelled it into the language of his characters . . . *Sea of Poppies* is a celebration of language—its idiosyncrasies, its prejudices, its humour, cruelty, freedom, and, finally, its generous, open-armed invitation to escape” (Web).

In *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh transforms his narrative of colonialism into a mythical pattern. The sea and the river provide the setting, which symbolises both the destructive force and the constructive power, like Shelley’s *West Wind*. Water serves as a regenerative force as well as a destructive power. Both the novels place the marginalised subaltern in centre of the narrative.
River of Smoke, the second instalment of the Ibis Trilogy, was published in 2011. Works of three Indian writers—Rahul Bhattacharya’s The Sly Company of People Who Care, Ghosh’s River of Smoke and Jahnavi Barua’s Rebirth—were shortlisted for the 2011 Man Asian Literary Prize. River of Smoke was also shortlisted for the Hindu Best Fiction Award 2011 and the Economist Crossword Book Award. While Sea of Poppies follows the opium trade down the Ganges to Calcutta and towards Mauritius, River of Smoke portrays the Canton trade system. Nevertheless, the pace of Sea of Poppies is different from that of River of Smoke. While Sea of Poppies is full of adventures and unexpected turn of events moving with speed, River of Smoke seems to be static with its gallery of characters. Ghosh talks to Angiola Codacci in an interview about these two novels: “The books are indeed quite different; the principal continuities between them are of time and certain characters. Even though the books are part of a trilogy they were never intended to be direct continuations of each other. Each of the novels in the trilogy will have its own themes, settings, characters and therefore, unavoidably, its own form” (Web).

The lexicon of River of Smoke makes use of a hybridity of languages more than that of Sea of Poppies. The confluence of English, Chinese, Hindi, Bengali, Parsi, Gujarati and Pidgin shows a remarkable feat of research done by Ghosh. Chandrahas Choudhury comments on the significance of River of Smoke: “The force of Ghosh’s ideas and the beauty of his tableaus of Canton are two of the book's achievements; the semantic ripples of the variety of
dialects he folds into the narration are a third. It is both a stirring portrayal of
the past and a prescient beacon for the future” (19).

River of Smoke explores the causes of the Opium War. Before 1840
China was completely closed and isolated from the rest of the world, except
for the limited foreign trade in the city of Canton. The Western merchants
were forbidden to have any contact with the Chinese except in trade and they
had to live within a specific district in the city. Despite strict government
regulations, foreign trade in China expanded during the late 18th century and
early 19th century. In the 1830s, opium had become a vice in China. It
affected all classes of people, from rich merchants to Taoists. The entire army
was addicted.

In the 1835-1836 fiscal year alone, China exported 4.5 million Spanish
dollars worth of silver. The drain of silver greatly weakened the Chinese
government. Therefore, in 1839 the Emperor of China issued 39 articles which
imposed extremely severe punishments, including death, for smoking and
trading opium. Special Commissioner Lin Zexu made 1,600 arrests and
confiscated 11,000 pounds of opium in two months. In June 1839 Lin Zexu
forced foreign merchants to hand over 20,000 chests of opium. He burned the
opium in a public demonstration and scattered the ashes across the sea. When
Lin Zexu gave the order that Canton should be completely closed to foreign
trade, the British opened hostilities and started the Opium War. As Shashi
Tharoor says in his article, “Amitav Ghosh's River of Smoke: A History
Reclaimed,” the colonisers “who conquered or imposed their will on foreign
lands, subjugated and displaced their peoples, replaced their agriculture with cash-crops that caused addiction and death, thrust addictive poisons on them for profit and enforced all this with the power of the gun masked by a rhetoric of civilisation and divine purpose” (4). River of Smoke portrays how the Western countries that wanted to penetrate the huge Chinese market used the opium incident to wage the Opium War.

The Opium War exposed the weaknesses of the Chinese feudal system. The cost of the war fell on the shoulders of the farmers. The Manchu government could no longer protect and govern its people. As China's economy collapsed, poverty was wide spread; insurrection sprang up all over the country. If the lifestyle of the Chinese was affected in this manner, the Indian agriculture was destroyed by the profit motive of the colonisers. Instead of producing edible crops, the Indian farmers were forced to grow poppies for manufacturing of opium. By the end of the eighteenth century, huge quantities of opium grown in North India were sent to China, where addiction had reached epidemic proportions. As Chitralekha Basu says, River of Smoke is “an overwhelmingly tragic story in which there are no winners. It is as if anybody whose life has been touched by the Opium War, must suffer— a life of slavery, exploitation and slander— even if they didn't eventually die of it. The Indians coerced into growing and processing opium as indentured labourers suffered some of the grossest instances of human rights abuse” (2). The theme of the centre versus margin, focusing on Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism, is effectively presented in River of Smoke.
One of the most important arguments of this thesis is that Ghosh's presentation of history is not an elitist historiography. His fiction shows his intense humanism, focusing on the predicament of the subaltern. He neither imitates colonialist elitism nor follows bourgeois-nationalist elitism. He rejects these two kinds of elitism, which, as Ranajit Guha says, "share the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness—nationalism—which informed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements" ("On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" 37). Guha points out that in the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies the making of India has been credited to British colonial rulers and Indian elite personalities.

Among the creative artists who have projected postcolonial literature to the broad daylight of worldwide readership, Ghosh's role is significant. Though he has not explicitly revealed his postcolonial standpoint because of his intention of not being restricted to any particular circle, his postcolonial vision pervades his fiction from *The Circle of Reason* to *River of Smoke*. In the email sent to the writer of this thesis on 16th September 2011, Ghosh says: "... so far as questions are concerned, my rule is to answer factual queries but not those that concern matters of interpretation. I am sure you will understand that this is necessary because many researchers seem to want an authorised interpretation-- and of course there is none." Being a socially as well as artistically committed artist, he has attributed new dimensions to postcolonial literature by constructing a mosaic of cultures and histories in their plurality.
The second chapter shows how Ghosh portrays the predicament of an individual in a complex historical *milieu* from postcolonial perspective. The focus of the second chapter is on the theme of centre versus margin presented in *The Circle of Reason, The Calcutta Chromosome, The Glass Palace, Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke.*