Chapter - I

Introduction

Subjectivity, in postmodern socio-cultural discourse is defined as the discerning interpretation of individual experience. It is related with the function of human mind. In the past, subjectivity was considered more a metaphysical phenomenon than a social construct. In the postmodern identity politics, subjectivity is considered as a socio-cultural phenomenon which can be studied and analysed empirically. Subsequently, subjectivity as a personal construct becomes one’s life long process of negotiating one’s way, among the constraints and freedom offered at any given moment in time by the society in which one lives. It is shaped by and shapes the culture into which one is born or gets accustomed to. For the new-historicists, the individual identity which is based on the construction of subjectivity is not merely a product of the society. It is also constructed by one’s cultural milieu. Significantly, individual identity and cultural milieu are mutually constitutive and dynamically unstable. Moreover, subjectivity is related with individual distress shedding light on the struggles and anxieties of the individual mind.

Subjectivity, in the present context, is both philosophical and social because it is related with the individual’s role and the subsequent relationship with the society. Especially in a globalised era, each and every change in any part of the world directly or indirectly affects the individual and one’s identity is therefore constructed, defined and shaped by the vicissitudes of the socio-cultural milieu in the prevailing context.
However, subjectivity differs slightly from identity, although the two terms have often been used interchangeably. Identity is a particular set of traits, beliefs and allegiances which gives one a consistent personality. On the other hand, subjectivity implies a degree of thought and self consciousness about identity. In short, the idea of subjectivity considers the question of how and from where does one’s identity arise. The notions of subjectivity are based on the answers to the questions concerning one’s state of being and becoming.

To the theoreticians of subjectivity, the central concern is how one could change the society through concerted individual action. This is the reason why subjectivity has an unparalleled and enduring importance. Ross Murphin and Supriya Ray in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* define subjectivity as the knowledge of one’s being “that which we would (but may be unable to) know, that which we do (or believe ourselves to) know, and individual and cultural ways of knowing –or of trying to know” (388). In this sense, subjectivity is the overall development of the self in trying situations, making the individual or group to ascertain the rights. Besides the philosophical conceptualisation of subjectivity, it is pertinent to understand subjectivity with its social context. Marxism views the development of one’s self as a consciousness of his role in the society.

Marx, elaborating on the growing awareness of the possibilities for greater freedom on the individual argues in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (21).
Subsequently, Freud’s contribution on subjectivity is the emphasis on the developmental aspects of individual psychology and recognition of the powerful influence of the unconscious on conscious life. Meanwhile, Pamela Thurschwell in accordance with the Freudian concept of subjectivity suggests in her Sigmund Freud that: “Freudian psychoanalysis provides both a theory of the history of the individual mind-its early developments, its frustrations and desires and a set of specific therapeutic techniques for recalling, interpreting and coming to terms with that individual history”(2). Consequently, individual and social lives are always in a series of negotiations between personal and social needs. Moreover, recognition of one’s personality, self-conception, and one’s social interaction with others is a powerful tool that enables to understand subjectivity.

On the other hand, Foucault, a modern cultural theorist rejects the old assumptions of subjectivity. Rather than starting with the Enlightenment ideal of self knowledge, he shifts the focus on to ‘discourse’. In his The Archeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language, Foucault observes that in “every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed” and behind that lies “conflicts, triumphs, injuries, dominations and enslavements” (216). The relationship between power and discourse is the subject matter of Foucault’s subjectivity. To Foucault, it is the formation of the subject that leads to observe, analyse, interpret and recognise oneself as a domain of possible knowledge. Foucault asserts that one can only come to know about oneself through historically specific categories of truth, propriety and normality.
However, modern thinkers like Foucault and other cultural critics observe that historicity and truth as forms of knowledge can never be objective and neutral. Certain establishments which possess power in the society produce knowledge about those who lack power, and construct their selfhood. The dominant groups, by imposing the tailor-made selfhood on the hapless subalterns treat the subjects with the ‘self-other’ dichotomy.

The identity of a person though individualistic in its construction, has its roots in history. One’s being is formulated by the rationalised records of the past- both individual and collective. Therefore, to understand subjectivity, one has to decipher the history of an individual and the circumstances in which one lives.

Subjectivity as an individual entity is programmed by the collective consciousness of the society. The ebb and flow of this consciousness is tangent to the formation of the individual self. Therefore the socio-cultural impact of the society on the individual can be understood by analysing the purview of historicism, which delineates the shaping and reshaping of the individual self.

Subsequently, Historicism emerges in reaction to the practice of deducing from the principle truth about how people are obliged to organise themselves socially and politically. Normally, the natural laws governing human behaviour at all times are formulated. But historicists oppose this tradition and argue that human nature is too various for such legislation to be universally applicable.

In this regard, German historian Friedrich Meinecke in *Historicism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* suggests that, “Historicism is the substitution of a process of
individualising observation for a generalising view of human forces in history” (iv). In order to understand the past, historians should project themselves into the past and interpret the narratives with suitable theories.

In literature, the representation of history with subjective projection results in historiographic metafiction which explores the status and function of narrative as an ideological construct. Historiographic metafiction differs from the use of history in the traditional historical novel, which does not question that history can be represented as it ‘really was’. It deals not so much with historical events, personages and facts as with the reconstruction of the past from the point of view of the present. It reminds the reader that history, while it exists as a continuous collective process is accessible only as a narrative, produced by human beings who remember, interpret and represent events from a particular point of view. Historical representation in historiographic metafiction is intricately linked with moral and ethical concerns. Historical narrative constructs a model system that forbids the narrator to present undocumented ideas. It focuses more on individual minds and stresses the need to rethink. Historical construction of the social narratives of the colonised nations is the cardinal aspect of postcolonial writings.

Postcolonialism as a socio-political movement and ideology advocates the material and cultural reawakening of the colonised nations. Yet, the modern world is a world of inequality and hegemony. Earlier, colonisation was physical and political but now it is economical and commercial. Colonial rule is legitimised by theories which portray the people of the colonised world as inferior, naive, feminine and incapable, requiring the paternal rule of the west. It is based on the concept of race. Moreover, the
West-non-west relation is conceptualised in terms of the conflict between the whites and the non-whites.

Postcolonialism as an intellectual discourse consists of reaction to the cultural legacy of colonialism. It aims at combating the residual effects of colonialism on cultures. It makes an attempt to move the society towards a place of mutual respect. Postcolonial thinkers recognise the fact that many of the assumptions related with colonial identity are still active. This sense of superiority of the colonial identity is still a hurdle to an extent in the path of the subalterns in traversing towards the mainstream. This domination of the colonial mindset over the colonised is clearly evident in the socio-politico-economic conditions of the contemporary society.

As a result, the imperialist countries continue to dominate those countries they earlier ruled as colonies. The cases of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Cuba make it clear that any country that has the courage to resist its former imperial masters does so at its peril. Earlier it was the British, now it is America and the other capitalist imperialist ‘white countries’ who step into the domestic domain of poor countries, especially third world countries and the Arab world. The recent disclosures of Wiki Leaks testify to the fact that American conspiracy plays a major role in destabilising many nations. As a result, the postcolonial theory involves a conceptual reorientation towards the perspectives of knowledge, as well as needs, developed outside the west.

Subsequently, the impact of postcolonialism can be seen in the field of literature also. The notion of oppositionality and resistance to European discursive methodology is the central theme of postcolonial literature. In any discussion of the issues involved in
postcolonial discourse, it is important to consider the issue of language, which is a fundamental site of struggle for post colonial discourse, because colonialism itself is mastery and appropriation.

During the colonial period, the literature of the centre took possession of the margin, also of the imagination of the margin. Now postcolonial literatures are writing themselves back to the centre. In the hands of the colonised, literature becomes a potential tool of self empowerment, for resisting textual containment and subverting dominant representations. The major feature of postcolonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the postcolonial identity comes into being. Beyond the historical and cultural differences concerns with identity and multiculturalism are the common features of postcolonial literature.

To analyse postcolonial discourse, it is essential to understand the theories put forth by postcolonial critics, especially Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha. Said’s exposure of the way in which the ‘Orient’ has emerged as a discursive construction, and how contemporary Islam continues to evolve as an alien construction of the west, lead to the democratisation in the field of discourse. Said’s *Orientalism* makes such an impact on the colonial discourse. His intervention is designed to illustrate the manner in which the representation of Europe’s ‘others’ has been institutionalised for its cultural dominance. The very term ‘Oriental’ shows how the process works, for the word identifies and homogenises, implying the range of knowledge. According to Said, the real problem is the trap of specialisation, a cult of professional expertise that has made the activity marginal to the pressing political concerns of the contemporary societies. In
his *The World, the Text and the Critic*, he observes that “the specialisation and professionalisation, allied with cultural degree, barely sublimated ethnocentrism and nationalism, as well as surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism in transporting the professional and academic critic of literature-most focused and intensely trained” (25). Subsequently, Said points out that the very term ‘Orient’ holds different meaning for different people. Said, puts forth a twofold process of resistance for decolonisation. The first is the recovery of ‘geographical territory’ and the second is the ‘changing of cultural territory’. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said observes that resistance becomes a process “in the rediscovery and repatriation of what had been suppressed in the natives’ past by the process of imperialism” (253). This culture of resistance is explored by Said in terms of the capacity of the colonised to ‘write back’ to empire. This culminates in the move towards human liberation. Said’s emphasis on the impact of the colonial experience on both the colonised and the colonisers has important ramifications for his strategy of resistance.

Edward Said is of the opinion that criticism continually crosses boundaries between professional and public forums. In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Said observes that “Criticism must think of itself as life enhancing and constitutively opposed to very form of tyranny, domination and abuse” (29). Said’s ideology of the culture of resistance is a stimulating factor for the further continuation of postcolonial studies. This idea of resistance is also seen in the postcolonial rendering of Gayatri Spivak.

Gayatri Spivak’s critical interventions encompass a range of theoretical interests, including Marxism, feminism, deconstruction and postcolonial theory. Along with
Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, she challenges the disciplinary conventions of literary criticism and academic philosophy by focusing on the cultural texts of the marginalised people like immigrants, working class, women and post colonial subjects by the dominant western culture. By championing the voices and texts of such minority groups, Spivak challenges the dominant ideas such as the notion that the western world is more civilised, democratic and developed than the non western world. She proposes the word ‘subaltern’ to encompass a range of different subject positions which are not predefined by dominant political discourses. To her, ‘subaltern’ is flexible since it accommodates social identities and the struggle of the voiceless. In an interview in the journal *Polygraph*, Spivak observes:

I like the word ‘subaltern’ for one reason. It is truly situational. ‘Subaltern’ began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was used under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism ‘monism’, and was obliged to call the proletarian ‘subaltern’. That word, used under dures, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn’t fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical vigor. (141)

Spivak, who is committed to articulating the lives and histories of such marginalised groups, presents a methodological challenge to the brutal economic exploitation and political oppression of the imperialist. She is of the view that the experience of social and political oppression in India cut across class, region, languages ethnicity, religion and gender. The historical representation of the various lower class
subaltern groups is framed in terms and in the interest of the ruling classes. According to most of the British imperialists, the lives of the rural peasantry in India are subordinated to the larger project of their governance and social control. Spivak further observes in *Polygraph*:

> Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly refaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for both of which there is ‘evidence’. It is rather, that, both as object of colonial historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. 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. (287)

It is the ideological construction of gender in the canonised archives that makes the subaltern women oppressed by male domination. Subsequently, Spivak proposes a critical strategy which mimics the negative representation of the minority groups such as women, the subaltern or the working class. Spivak challenges the sanctioned ignorance of western academic paradigms towards the third world women. This involves recognising how dominant representations of the world in literature, history and media encourage people to forget about the lives and experiences of disempowered groups. Nevertheless, she argues that the canonised history provides a cultural representation of imperialism as civilised and progressive, an idea which serves to justify the economic and political project of imperialism.
Alluding to the notion of the canonised form of representation, Spivak is increasingly vocal in her criticism of global development policies which focus on women in the ‘Third World’. She emphasises how women living in the southern hemisphere bear the brunt of global exploitation today, yet are not represented in the global theatre of international politics. It is evident that Spivak’s engagement with postcolonial texts is motivated by a desire to challenge the totalising system of colonial discourse by focusing on instances of subaltern agency or resistance. This revolt against the establishment is the lifeline for the construction and formation of the self that tries to free itself from the clutches of the colonial discourse. This revolt is the underlying factor of the narrative of Homi Bhaba.

Homi Bhaba is concerned with the psychoanalytic approach to power, and suggests that colonial discourse seems to be successful in its domination of the colonised. This domination depends on the assertion of difference. The colonised are inferior to the coloniser. In his *Location of Culture*, Bhabha emphasises the need for the hybridity of culture, which means the mixedness of culture. He conveys the idea that culture is not a discreet phenomenon. Cultures are always in contact with one another and this contact leads to cultural mixedness. Bhabha’s view on the discourse of stereotype makes one understand the main objective of colonialism. It is based on the supposed inferiority of the colonised. Through racist jokes, cinematic images, and other forms of representation, the coloniser circulates stereotypes about the laziness or stupidity of the colonised. This stereotype is a form of anxious colonial knowledge and Bhabha’s writings on this anxiety revise traditional studies of colonialism. For Bhabha, this stereotype is a false
representation of a given reality. Bhabha in his *Location of Culture* defines colonial discourse:

It is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a ‘subject people’ through the production of knowledge in terms of which surveillance is exercised and complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its tragedies by the production of knowledge of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish system of administration and instruction. (70)

Bhabha, challenges the ideology of stereotype by conveying that stereotypes function to enable colonial authority providing the justification that the coloniser rules the colonised due to innate superiority. He says that the modern forms of western political and economic institutions coexist with the ideologies of superiority. However, Bhabha suggests that authority is only ever complete if one takes it at its word something that colonised people obviously resisted, and that the postcolonial critic must continue to resist.

Literature as a resistance to the power oriented discourse aims at constructing a world of equity and social justice. In this attempt, writers belonging to various socio-cultural domains have come forward to negotiate the canonised narratives and ideologies.
Writers from the postcolonial nations have taken up writings as a political agenda to dewesternise and decolonise the psyche of the readers. While doing so postcolonial intellectuals are also aware of the fact that living in complete isolation by using all the colonial roots is not possible. Obviously, the colonial supremacy of the West is not completely eradicated in the freed nations. Globalisation, an offshoot of colonisation has extended its capitalist tentacles on the developing nations and has almost devoured many nations.

Consequently, globalisation has rendered the developing nations dependent of their former colonial masters and the people are still discriminated based on individual or national conditions. The racial and socio-cultural differences found in the society and their relative economic dependencies have made people conscious of class. Literature as a tool follows certain social and ideological movements to effect changes and bring in equality at all levels. Based on the ideology of Marxism, many schools of thought have come into being for a classless world. One among them is the Universal Humanist Movement, which promotes non-violence and non-discrimination. It draws inspiration from the creed of New or Universal Humanism that has been developed since 1969 by its founder Mario Rodriguez Cobos, at Argentina. It focuses on the overcoming of pain and suffering at a personal, interpersonal and social level. It defines violence as anything that causes pain and suffering to human beings. In this way, violence is seen to have many different aspects, not just the well known physical form, but also economic, religious, psychological, sexual and ethnic.
Universal Humanism is based on solidarity, which is, treating others the way one would like to be treated, and coherence, which involves thinking, feeling and acting in the same way. The objective of the Universal Humanist Movement is to eradicate war, hunger, economic exploitation, and develop a new system based on the value of human life.

Universal humanism is characterised by an emphasis on the humanist attitude. The humanistic attitude is not a philosophy, but a point of view, a sensibility and a way of living in relationship with other human beings. It maintains that in all cultures, in their most creative moments, the humanist attitude pervades the social environment. In such periods, discrimination, wars and violence in general are repudiated.

This vision of the future is called the Universal Human Nation. New Humanists believe in considering human beings as the central value of concern. Nothing is above the human being and no human being is above another. It also aims at recognising the cultural diversity and condemning economic, racial, ethnic and cultural discrimination. By highlighting these aspects, new humanism affirms the freedom of ideas and beliefs and repudiates violence in all its forms.

This Universal Humanist Movement is the practical expression of the ideal of humanising the Earth and the aspiration of moving towards a Universal Human Nation. It is the seed of a new culture which accepts and values diversity and advocates the idea of equal rights and identical opportunities to all human beings, because of the simple fact of their having been born. The idea of universal humanism is the external manifestation of and analysis of the profound changes occurring in the life which are tragic and
disconcerting. The aim of universal humanism is to create conditions for human beings
to be free, non-violent and live in a multicultural atmosphere. It is possible only when
the individual works for the upliftment of the society in which he/she lives and involves
in social struggle for improving the areas such as education, health and quality of life.
Moreover, universal humanism is possible through multiculturalism or conglomeration of
cultures. The prime aim of multiculturalism is to promote dialogue, so that the cultures
may recognise their own value and through this can recognise the value of others.

Universal human culture is possible by disseminating the ideas of universal
humanism. Universal humanism emphasises both personal and social changes,
recognising that any change will not be possible without corresponding changes in
personal values, beliefs and actions. Universal humanism proposes a dialogue between
cultures that remain neither abstract nor institutional. In an era of globalisation, it is
important to understand the need of multiculturalism. Globalisation is nothing more than
the traditional behaviour launched by imperial centers as has occurred repeatedly in
history. These empires are established, and they make other people revolve around their
imposed norms and customs. Finally, these imperialist structures end up generating
violence and chaos as a product of their abuse and cultural confrontation.

Literature is not created in vacuum and writers do respond to the social crisis
found in the society. The modern writer influenced by certain ideologies assumes the role
of a social analyst and he/she writes with a purpose to redefine the world without any
chaos.
In the recent times, a great body of historical fiction with an objective to present the unexplored part of history has emerged on the literary scene. Many Indian English novelists have turned to the past as much to trace the deepening mood of nationalism as to cherish the memories of the bygone days. A close study of the contemporary novels reveals the writers’ preoccupation with our historic past and the unabated interest of the readers in the novel that depict the past or that treat some event of national importance that has had wide repercussions.

The historical novel represents no surface wave of escapism, but a deep, unconscious movement towards national homogeneity. It is in the historical novel only that the actual day-to-day problems of life can be encountered, examined, exposed, challenged and rectified. The factual and informational values of history illuminate the subject and the reader’s curiosity.

The intellectuals, be they philosophers, historians or literary artists, have traditionally played significant roles in all national revolutions of the world. Not only do they reach the minds of the people through their writing, they also subject every institution of the society to a specific political philosophy, and through that propagate their point of view.

The contemporary Indian English novelists are most responsive to the call of equality, freedom and human rights, for these literary artists have an intrinsic quality and ability to look beyond their time. It is they who hold before the common man a lens, through which he could see what threatens him socially, culturally or politically, and which makes him aware of the precipice that lies ahead. A number of novels are written,
that portray the unjustness of the British rule and the grim fight the people were
determined to give to get rid of it. Politics becomes synonymous with nationalism.

The rapid development in the field of postcolonial studies in the last decade has
resulted in a proliferation of debates around not only the key issues, but also the very
term itself. To many critics in the field, the chief characteristics of postcolonialism are
the strategic subversion of the material and discursive effects of the imperial process and
the dislodgement of metropolitan definitions through citation, reinscription and rerouting
the historical.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the realistic and historical fiction at the turn
of the present century, from the Indian point of view, is the emergence of a new talent. A
number of novelists have produced significant novels, making mark in the literary world.
Shackled to history, the Indian English writers stress the role of the individual that has to
play in the nation’s life. On the verge of losing one’s freedom, and right to dignity, the
writers drive home the need of self-assertion and self-expression. Amitav Ghosh, Salman
Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Rohinton Mistry, Bharathi Mukherjee and
Arundathi Roy bring the relationship of historio-politico-social aspects of the country and
the freedom of the individual to bear upon the quest for truth. Their creative works tend
to look back on the issues relating to the freedom struggle, partition, emergency, Indo-
China war, birth of Bangladesh and other epoch-making events in Indian history. They
have received national and international recognition, fabulous royalties and prestigious
awards. This development has helped the Indian writer in English much more than a
regional Indian writer.
The present study entitled *Subjectivity, Historicism and Universal Humanism as Patterns: A Study of the Works of Amitav Ghosh*, deals with the recurring aspects in the works of Amitav Ghosh. It is an attempt to analyse Amitav Ghosh’s advocacy for the need for a universal humanistic world, based on multiculturalism and transnationalism. To highlight the need for such a world, the analysis is done on the validities of national boundaries and borders imposed by the hegemony of the mighty. As the title suggests, the study is on the imminent necessity for universal humanism.

As a part of analysing some of the impediments on the way to universal humanism, the problems concerned in the past, especially during the colonial times depicted in the works of Ghosh are taken for an indepth study under Historicism. Subsequently, the vicissitudes of the self on such troubled times come for a close scrutiny through the pattern of Subjectivity.

Amitav Ghosh was born on 11th July, 1956 in Calcutta. In 1979, he earned a diploma in Social Anthropology from Oxford University, and Arabic from the Institute Bourguiba de Langues Vivantes in Tunisia. He obtained Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Oxford University in 1982, doing a considerable amount of fieldwork in Egypt.

From 1982 to 1983 Ghosh was a visiting fellow at the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. Between 1983 and 1987 he taught in the Department of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, first as a research associate and then as a lecturer. During this period he was associated with the Subaltern Studies Collective, a university group based on Marxism conducting important research in the history of contributions made by the “subaltern” or underprivileged
sections of society to India’s national culture. Radically departing from the traditional notion of history as a record of the activities of the elite, the group promoted an understanding of history that equally valued the handiwork of millions of nameless people whose influence on the course of events had gone unrecorded because of their perceived social inconsequence.

Ghosh, a leading postcolonial writer in English, is Indian by birth but global in his vision. The central concern of his work is the relationship of the individual to culture and history. Ghosh is known as a postcolonial writer because of his contempt for imperialism and its consequent violence and prejudice. He believes that art has a special role to play in opposing the forces that alienate people and communities. One of the ways of making connections and promoting empathy and understanding is through the act of remembering and narrating stories about human endeavour and suffering. The duty of the artist is to ensure that such stories are not forgotten.

Ghosh’s concern with the recuperation and rendering of individual experiences operates against the kind of the totalising colonial attitude which very often subdues subalternity into oblivion. In the borderline territory between history and fiction, Ghosh manages to develop a mode of writing which repeatedly returns to the individual lives through his foregrounding global experience. The quest of his narrative is the search for self-knowledge and self-identity. Being a writer always on the move, his writings are programmed towards cosmopolitanism.

While analysing Ghosh’s works, it is clearly evident that he is a sociologist who writes academic articles like a story-teller, and a historian, who dwells on the sufferings
of the underprivileged, because of his association with the Subaltern Studies Group based on the ideology of Marxism. His works are characterised by a thematic concern with modernity, globalisation and the violent production of the modern nation-state. They are attentive details on the marginalised while demonstrating their positions in global historic movements. Through his consistent critique of the operation of empire and the legacy of the colonial encounter, Ghosh emphasises the impact of colonialism on shaping the understandings of subjectivity and nationhood. It is evident that Ghosh’s ability to maintain control over the vast historical domain is fused with the rendering of the intimate details on the lives of human longing and desire. Ghosh in his Home Page amitavghosh.com writes: “Writers represent no one but themselves. If they are persuaded of the validity of their views, then they have an absolute duty to voice them. This is, in the most general sense, the single most important obligation that the world at large asks of the writer. If writers do not say what they think then who will? (2-3).”

As a result, Ghosh traces the porous character of national boundaries and the hybrid nature of individual identities. The lives of his characters commonly have all the busy restlessness of airline passengers in a transit lounge. Subsequently, he questions the colonial authority and addresses the issues related with the politics of resistance. Ghosh’s postcolonial consciousness has goaded him time and again to retrieve the events of the past that have been deliberately tucked behind the pages of history, out of human knowledge and vision.
Ghosh has developed a substantial body of work that resonates with the central concerns of postcolonial consciousness. In his works, he mediates upon a core set of issues from a new perspective. They are the troubled legacy of colonial knowledge and discourse on formerly colonised societies, people and ideas. They also deal with the formation of identities in colonial and postcolonial societies and the recovery of the lost and suppressed histories.

Ghosh’s relationship with his native place Calcutta has exerted a powerful influence on his imagination. Its presence is marked by his birth, into what is known as the ‘bhadralok’, the upper and middle class sections of the Bengali society that emerged in the nineteenth century as a consequence of the reorganisation of the Bengal economy under the colonial rule. The most important impact that Calcutta has had on the imagination of Ghosh is through its status as an intellectual and cultural centre. Established by the British as a trading outpost, Calcutta quickly became the richest city in Asia and British India’s capital. Wealth, power and privilege soon helped to establish it as a cultural and intellectual hub. The colonial hangover in the beginning of the post independence period in the collective consciousness of Calcutta prompted Ghosh to have a deep insight into the partition and formation of boundaries, both geographical and psychological.

The writings of Ghosh are a postcolonial rendering of the enmeshed histories of pre independence Burma, Bangladesh, India and Malaysia under the British rule. The socio-historical milieu of Asia and the Arab world has been explored culturally, socially
and politically by Ghosh. He establishes himself as an activist against Western Imperialism and argues in favour of a multicultural identity.

Ghosh's writings can further be termed as docufiction. They discuss the significant historical moments and search for vibrant concerns, which are essential to the survival of a society. Being a chronicler, Ghosh eulogises the socio-historical condition of pre-independence India. He depicts the problems, caused by the Indo-Pakistan partition and ridicules the sudden dislocation of history and geography and the national borders. He is peripatetic in nature and has lived in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, England, Egypt, Cambodia and the U.S. at different times. He often asserts that regionalism and extreme nationalism induce unrest, and transnationalism helps one overcome such ambivalences.

The present study tries to locate, identify, define and illustrate the need for a socio-political identity of a man with transnational and universal humanist features. The researcher has studied all the works of Amitav Ghosh, both fiction and non-fiction. Ghosh's writings are self expressive and they form, construct and maintain his transnational subjectivity. In this regard, the first chapter of the present study *Ontogenesis of the Self* traces the various aspects of the self as propounded by various theorists down the centuries and seeks to relate them to the peripatetic self of the author. The cross cultural conflicts-personal, cultural and religious are dealt with utmost importance. The characters that undergo the subaltern crisis finally emerge neither as victims nor as heroes, but as human beings, freeing themselves from geographical and cultural boundaries. Representations of the new humanist tendencies depicted in the writings of Ghosh affirm his views on racial, cultural, social and political identity.
The next chapter, *Reclaiming History* focuses on colonisation and its impact on the underprivileged. The socio-political scenario, during the 1940s in South Asia as presented in Ghosh’s works reclaims the history of the downtrodden. The burning Dhaka of the post partition period and the Calcutta riots are revisited to express the hegemony of the British Imperialism. By presenting the anti Sikh riots after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in his essay, “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” in *Imam* and the political life of Burma from the fraught years of World War II to the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi in *Palace*, Ghosh condemns the political and religious intolerance prevalent in the society.

The conflict between the Imperial and the Oriental which has been an evolutionary necessity since the pre-independence days results in a post colonial persona with mobility. Subsequently, one becomes transnational. Ghosh believes that one must be culturally accommodative by maintaining a balance between cultures. Further, this chapter examines Ghosh’s writing against parochialism and his preference to cosmopolitanism and deals with the author's concern for the environment and biodiversity.

The chapter, *Multiculturalism and Universal Humanism* analyses Ghosh's aspiration for a pluralistic society with social equity, justice and religious tolerance. To stress the need for multiculturalism, he underscores the past glory of the ‘unarmed nature’ of Indian trade and commerce before the advent of Vasco-de-Gama. He brings to focus a forgotten history of India's free, liberal and humane trade. Through the Tunisian Jewish merchant and his Indian helper Bomma, Ghosh suggests that acceptance of multiculturalism will eradicate the socio-cultural ambivalence of the modern society.
Ghosh asserts that the erasing of the shadow lines both in the mind of the people and the national borders maintains multiculturalism. To him, the culture inherited should be used for a broad based development to avoid parochialism. By echoing the views of Edward Said, Ghosh advocates the need for harmony between new economic and socio-political dislocations and configurations of man made national borders. Ghosh is of the view that mutual understanding between nations and cultures, and individuals are the need of the hour.

By emphasising the need for cultural conglomeration, Ghosh's writings which are both Indian and global in perception and treatment represent a fresh trend in today's postcolonial literature. The study reveals that the collective universal consciousness is inevitable to create a "nation without walls" and subsequently the “citizen of the world”.


Reason is about the migration of the Indian self to the Middle East. In this immigrant journey, the protagonist Alu travels through various cultures and customs. While returning to the native, he becomes a transnational being as the result of multiculturalism and universal humanism and emerges as a ‘man without borders’. 
Lines is about the movement of the people across national borders and of travel. The characters in the novel look for a world without boundaries. Ghosh addresses the problems related with the victims of history due to partition. It examines the movement of the colonised, away from the point of ‘fixity’. The novel is full of memories, and hence the story often shifts between England and India.

Land is a brilliant hybrid, subversive history in the guise of a traveller’s tale. It tells the story of two Indians in Egypt. The first is a twelfth century slave and the second is Amitav Ghosh himself. It is about the details of the trade without boundaries during the twelfth century. Ghosh addresses the odd question regarding India, its culture and religion. Moreover he sheds light on the changing scenario of postcolonial Egypt. It provides a comparative study of the two oldest culture and civilisations of the world, that of India and Egypt. It also explores some basic traits of human character and some fundamental human feelings and attitudes that persist through the ages despite socio-political upheavals and geographical changes. It is a strange mixture of memory and real life, history and imagination. The narrative is in the form of a travelogue in which a Ghosh persona engages in anthropological research in Egypt and reiterates the need for universal humanism.

Chromo interweaves and traces accounts from the history of malaria research and the possibility of an alternative subaltern history through the indigenous cult of malarial research in India. It is about the shadowy story of the discovery of the malaria parasite by a British physician in colonial India, Dr. Ronald Ross and the occult experiences behind the scientific invention.
*Palace* is a historical novel set in Burma, India and Malay, and spans a century from the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Burma through the Second World War to the house arrest of Aung San Su Kyi. It explores a broad range of issues, ranging from the changing of economic landscape of Burma and India to pertinent questions about what constitutes a nation and how these changes happen because of the tide of modernity. It is about the disruptiveness of the strong arm political struggles in South East Asia. It also tells the saga of Rajkumar, an orphan boy, who is caught in the political and social tumult and creates an empire in the Burmese teak forest. The novel spans vast temporal and spatial dimensions in which people shape and are shaped by larger forces without abandoning the thread of personal ambition, struggle and love.

In *Tide*, Ghosh highlights the pitiable conditions of the neglected lot in the Sundarbans. He exposes the lethargic attitude of the government in providing safe settlements for the sufferers. Ghosh, through Nirmal and Kusum brings out the need for resistance against the highhandedness of the establishments. Apart from this, Ghosh narrates the need for religious amity and tolerance through the Bon Bibi episode in which a Muslim deity is worshipped through Hindu rituals.

*Poppies* is the first part of a projected trilogy which unfolds in the Gangetic plains and the Bay of Bengal in 1838 on the eve of the British attack on the Chinese ports known as the first opium war. Ghosh here assembles from different corners of the world sailors, mariners and passengers for the *Ibis* ship which is converted to transport coolies and opium. It is a tale of migration and displacement of Indians with the rise of British power. With the East India Company’s policies that enforce opium cultivation and the
destruction of indigenous agriculture and trade which spells havoc in Indian villages, Ghosh brings out the horrors of imperialism. The novel is imbued by a deep commitment for human values. Ghosh’s underlying philosophy of struggle and the evolution of human society in reclaiming heterogeneous culture are valuable and ultimately indispensable.

*Dancing* is the rendering of complex responses of a researcher of the agonising process of the evolving of a nation of two South Asian countries, Cambodia and Burma in their postcolonial phase. Ghosh conveys the harsh realities of political, socio-cultural, economical and ethnic problems that these countries confront in the postcolonial phase. Inclusiveness, harmony and tolerance are the lessons of history that Ghosh imparts through this travelogue.

*Count* is Ghosh’s rejoinder to the nuclearisation of the Indian sub-continent. He conveys the idea that high emotions on nuclearisation will lead to catastrophe. It narrates the politics of weapon, which is a triggering factor in the already religiously polarised world. A world devoid of nuclear weapon will no doubt contribute to the idea of universal humanism, according to Ghosh. The narrative brings out the various opinions of politics across the subcontinent.

*Imam*, a collection of essays, is an account of blending cultures when people from different backgrounds are suddenly brought together. The narrative is about the migration and cultural encounters that affect people. Ghosh conveys the idea that there is confusion and tension when people from different cultures interact.
The present study is based on the multicultural aspects of cultural theory, taking into consideration the need for universal humanism in the present world, which is already deep-rooted in religious fanaticism and colonising mentality. A heterogeneous culture could alone solve the ill will and hatred found in the society. Further the study tries to illustrate the need for a transnational identity that will help usher in a universal humanistic world, devoid of religious and political parochialism. Based on the above said entities of universal humanism, the researcher after a careful reading of the texts formulates the following hypotheses.

- Ghosh, as a post colonial intellect posits his works as an antagonistic response against the western Imperialism and constructs the multicultural identity of an individual.

- Ghosh in his works claims that one's cultural options should be broadened and enhanced to preserve one's own identity.

- Ghosh understands the conflicts of the modern world and recommends transnational perceptions to avert the cultural ambivalences.

- Ghosh prefers transnational cultures to regionalism, which is reflected in his "mobile self".

- Ghosh believes that without glib sensationalism or excessive moralising one can be racial and ethnic. At the same time, one has to accommodate other cultures too.

- Ghosh establishes himself more as a global citizen than a writer of docufiction.

- Ghosh asserts that an eclectic outlook and mutual trust alone will help in building a vibrant multicultural society.
• Ghosh aspires for an alternative dialogue between nations, cultures and, of course individuals.

In short, the present thesis *Subjectivity, Historicism and Universal Humanism as Patterns: A Study of the Works of Amitav Ghosh* is an attempt to read Amitav Ghosh in the backdrop of post modern subjectivity, new historical perspectives of the past and the universal humanist ideologies.