CHAPTER – I

MAKING OF THE NOVELLIST
English Fiction in India has a long history but it gained acclaim globally with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *The Midnight Children*. In the year 1993 Indian English novel came to be associated with big monies. It started with Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy*. His novel was the high watermark of the Indian Literary scene of the early nineties. The novel registered a tremendous sale and fired the imagination of many aspiring fiction writers in the country.

1960 was the year when the Indian English novelists shifted their attention to the individual’s quest for personal meaning and his existential problems in the context of social relationships. Women writers like Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are the exception to the general trend where novelists began to concern themselves with issues that mattered in social life and their impact on private lives. In the 1980’s a further discernable change was noticed. The novelists looked back at the issues like the freedom struggle, Independence, Partition, Emergency, India-China war, the birth of Bangladesh, the massacre of Sikhs in 1984 etc. Even Amitav Ghosh is of the view that ‘India abound in stories and the more they are told the better’.

In 1997, when *The New Yorker* made literary headlines with a special fiction issue that showcased the ‘best’ of Indian novelists in English, Ghosh of course, was featured prominently. In his editorial comment Bill Buford wrote:

> It is worth recalling that the United States, like India, was a colony of the British Empire. In America, English was something that had to be appropriated from the British and made new again. It is possible that we are witnessing a similar thing now, among Indian writers, fifty years after India’s Independence a new kind of English
is finding a voice, a distinctly Indian English, one that is at once global and international, of its culture and of the nation.

(The New Yorker 8)

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956. He spent his childhood days in Calcutta, Dhaka and Colombo. He worked for the Indian Express News paper for a short period during the Emergency. Later he joined the Delhi School of Economics as a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology and earned his Doctorate from Oxford before he wrote his first novel.

Amitav Ghosh has the brilliance of academic career with marvelous variations. Amitav Ghosh has a master degree in Sociology from Delhi University in 1978 and a Diploma in Social Anthropology in 1979 from Oxford University as well as a Diploma in Arabic in 1979 from Institute Bousguiba des Langues Vivantes, Tunis, Tunisia. He has worked as a Research Associate in the Department of Sociology, Delhi University for four years from 1983 to 1987. He taught in several Universities worldwide as a Visiting professor. He taught at Centre for Social Sciences, Trivendrum, Kerala for the session 1982-83, University of Virginia, Charlottesvilley in the Departments of Literature and Anthropology, South Asia Centre, Columbia University, Spring semester. 1989, taught in the Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, Fall semester. 1989, as a distinguished visiting professor. American University in Cairo, December 1994, Department of English, Harvard University, Spring 2004 and other places. Presently he is teaching in the Department of Anthropology in Columbia University.
Ghosh has lived in Egypt and the other Arab countries during his scholarly days and has currently stationed himself in Brooklyn, New York, where he lives with his wife, Deborah Baker and their two children, Lila and Nayan.

In an interview when asked about the personal experience that he felt had been most important to his writing, Ghosh replied: “The most important thing, I suppose is my childhood which was spent in various parts of the subcontinent, especially Calcutta; it’s a kind of constant that runs through all my books” (Kunapipi 171). The statement made by Ghosh clearly shows, as a native how deeply he is rooted and attached with its culture, which proliferates, even spills over all his works.

It is Ghosh’s keen interest in research, which made him a celebrated novelist. As an academician of a first order he stands head and shoulder above Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth. After his college studies, Ghosh started working as a journalist with The Indian Express in Delhi, and was for a time, a rookie reporter covering the city beat. In an interview with The Telegraph he says: “I consider myself fortunate that I was working with The Indian Express during the Emergency. It was an exciting time but eventually I realized that I wasn’t cut out to be a journalist.” (The Telegraph 8)

Satyajit Ray, no doubt, can be called Ghosh’s mentor. Ghosh’s adoration of Ray, the man and the artist, is not just the ordinary Bengali’s adulation for one of the cultures outstanding icons. It is closer to one artist’s veneration for another who has shaped his thoughts and his artistic being. Ghosh has said about his mentor, Ray that “one of his greatest strengths was his ability to resolve
enormously complex plots and themes into deceptively simple narrative structures.” (Amitav Ghosh A Critical Companion 7)

The present study on Amitav Ghosh is based on an eclectic approach to his novels. The word ‘eclectic’ is derived from the Greek word Eklektikos. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English, eclectic means “not following one style or set of ideas but choosing from or using a wide variety”. The Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary also simplifies the term used in the present research work, which says “deriving ideas or style from or using a wide range of sources”.

It will be in the fitness of the things if a brief introduction to his works is presented here. Amitav Ghosh published his first novel The Circle of Reason in 1986 when he was teaching at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. This novel has been translated into many European languages. Ghosh was awarded the New York Times Notable Book Award in 1987 and its French edition received the Prix Medicis - Estrangere, a prestigious literary award in France in 1990. The ‘Circle’ is a skillfully constructed novel with the folk tale charm of Arabian Nights. Stretching from a remote village in Bengal to the shores of the Mediterranean, this is a neatly sculpted work of a master craftsman. By showing life as a journey larger than death, the ‘Circle’ makes death find its identity in the horror and sadness which embalms this process.

The year 1984 was in some ways a turning point in the writing career of Amitav Ghosh. Certain events that took place that year had a deep impact on his mind. In an article that appeared in The Guardian in 1995, Ghosh admits:
Nowhere else in the world did the year 1984 fulfil its apocalyptic portents as it did in India. Separatist violence in Punjab, the military attack on the great Sikh temple of Amritsar; the assassinations of the Prime Minister, the gas disaster in Bhopal – the events followed relentlessly on each other. There were days in 1984 when it took courage to open the Delhi papers in the morning.

(The Imam and the Indian 46)

Within a few months, Ghosh started his new novel which he eventually called *The Shadow Lines*, a book that led him backward in time to earlier memories of riots once witnessed in childhood. Ghosh’s opinion about *The Shadow Lines* is as following: *The Shadow Lines* is a book not about one event, but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the Individuals who live through them. The novel is not only about partition and immigration but it also explores man’s eternal quest for freedom. *(The Imam and the Indian 60)*

In the first section of the book, called ‘Going Away’ the narrator concentrates on London on the eve of and during, the war. His knowledge of war was not gained from books but from the experience of his uncle who exercised the greatest influence upon the adolescent narrator. In the subsequent sections the author uses the same method to exercise his historical imagination.

The second section of the book is named ‘Coming Home’. In ‘Coming Home’ Ghosh comes back to the Indian subcontinent to Calcutta and Dhaka where he tries to find out the meaning of political freedom. Indian nationalism, which was the chief weapon of the freedom fighters in their struggle against foreign rulers could not even ensure the territorial integrity of the country. There are
several points of view from which Independence, communal riots and partition are covered in the novel.

The Shadow Lines won the prestigious Annual Award of the Sahitya Academy (India Academy of Literature) and the Ananda Puraskar (Calutta) in 1990. The Shadow Lines is one of the most appreciated and celebrated Indian English Novels, which in the opinion of the present researcher is a memory novel and a history novel too. The Second World War, our Independence and the Partition of the country have provided Amitav Ghosh with vivid raw material against which he studies the historical truths, the meaning of nationalism and political freedom in the modern world.


In an Antique Land reveals Ghosh’s research abilities and interest in anthropology. As a post-colonial writer cultural heritage and identity have become important facets of Ghosh’s personality. The keen ability for deep research which is seen in the novel is a quality generally not associated with Indian writers writing in English. History is easily interwoven into the narrative framework and Ghosh attempts a comparative study of Asian and African, Indian and Egyptian, Jewish and Islamic cultures. Using the autobiographical traveller’s tale to study the past, Ghosh’s canvas here is wider than that of his other novels and his brush strokes wider. Character delineation has been handled expertly by Ghosh in most of his
novels and the three dimensional characters - Abu Ali, Musa Mustafa Jabir, Sabry et al... bring life and colour to his fiction. In an Antique Land can also be called a study of mythological pattern-cum-history-cum-fiction on Egypt.

In his next novel entitled The Calcutta Chromosome (1996) Ghosh makes a unique experiment by combining various themes and techniques. The novel is divided into two sections “August 20, Mosquito Day” and “The Day After”. Ghosh won the Arthur C. Clark Award for the novel in 1996. This novel is about the quest for the cure of Malaria. The Story of the novel moves through the closing years of the nineteenth century into the whole of the twentieth century and then passes on to the early years of the twenty first century. Apparently, it covers the colonial and the post-colonial years of Indian history. The novel opens in the early years of the twenty-first century when Antar, an Egyptian Computer Programmer and system - analyst in New - York suddenly finds the ID card of one Murugan, an old colleague and researcher, flashed on his computer screen. He discovers that Murugan had mysteriously disappeared on 21st August 1995, better known as the World Mosquito Day, from Calcutta. Murugan himself deeply interested in malaria research and was very curious about Ronald Ross, a British scientist posted in the Indian army in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Ross was ultimately awarded the Nobel prize for identifying the Malaria parasite. Murugan firmly believed that there was an ‘other mind’ behind this entire operation of research and discovery. He has uncovered that there is a rural woman named Mangala who with her handy - man Lutchman / Laxman /Laakhan / Lachman was carrying out the experiment through an indigenous method. Ghosh through the storyline subverts the superiority of the western scientific investigation
and proves that not only were they far behind the scientific progress made by India but here, it had been spear headed by an ignoramous woman from countryside. The search for ‘immortality’ is carried on by Mangala and Laakhan. Ghosh has granted them great liberty and decolonized the member of the lowest social strata – the sweeper and the scavenger class.

Ghosh’s next book is a collection of essays Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma (1998) consists of three prose pieces by Amitav Ghosh. The first, ‘Dancing in Cambodia’, begins with a deft evocation of the first ever visit to Europe by a troupe of Cambodian dancers, in 1906. The second asoteric piece, ‘Stories in Stones’, focuses on Angkor Wat and what it means to, and symbolized for, Cambodians and indeed, others. The author visited Burma twice in 1995 – 96 and the third and the last piece in this volume, ‘At Large in Burma’, brings alive the recent history of that country, from the death of Aung San in 1947 to his daughter Suu Kyi’s current struggle for the restoration of democracy in Burma. Apart from interviewing Suu Kyi more than once, the author travelled to the jungle camps of the Karenni insurgents and provides a rare picture of their life.

In 1993 Amitav Ghosh visited Cambodia, a land ravaged by the ‘Pol Pot Years’ from 1975 to 1978 and which has been in almost ceaseless turmoil thereafter. Amongst other things, he met member’s of Pol Pot’s family and travelled to the village where he was born. Amitav Ghosh’s insights into Pol Pot’s regime, and the importance of dance in Cambodia even when the country was reduced to near destitution, provide us an illuminating and deeply moving account.

Amitav Ghosh’s next book is a travelogue named Countdown (1999) which deals with a panorama of things – the author’s visit to Pokharan, Pakistan and
Siachin and conversation with many people in India – their grief and sorrow, their horrendous and horrifying experience regarding the nuclear explosion and a mild satire on the arrogance and dominance of politics which seldom cares for the peace and prosperity of the people.

The book opens with the apocalyptic vision of the nuclear explosion tested at the Pokharan site on 11 May 1998 where the author Amitav Ghosh, travelled some three months later. Ghosh has freely expressed his views about the tests and the behaviour of the ruling party and has very minutely observed the visit of the Honourable Prime Minister who attended a public function. He describes the worries of the locals and has closely watched the after effects of the blast. Ghosh has sometimes used irony to describe the feelings of the villagers who were threatened and terrorised by the blasts.

The book also describes realistically the picture of the soldiers deployed at the embattled state of Kashmir, in several places like Siachin glacier, Leh, Laddakh and Suron Kut where an “escalation of hostilities along the border” can be felt. Ghosh observes that the soldiers of both the sides are more afraid of the natural calamities than of the bullets. Ghosh has presented the views of many leaders of India and Pakistan through his interviews to bring out the clear picture of the political conditions and social problems in India and Pakistan. Ghosh received the Nomination for “American Society of Magazine Award” for reporting in 1990 for Countdown.

Amitav Ghosh’s next novel The Glass Palace (2000) is a magnificent historical fiction of dramatic nature. The Glass Palace earned him four awards for Ghosh in the year 2001. He received the New York Times and the Los Angeles...
Times Notable Book Award, The Chicago Tribune favourite Book of 2001 and the
Grand prize for fiction (Frankfurt e Book Award) in the same year. The Glass
Palace is an epic story of three generations of Indo – Burmese and Malaysian
families, beginning with the fall of Mandalay to the British and ending with a
powerful but a rather simplistic image of Aung San Suu Kyi as a symbol of hope
for future Burma. The Glass Palace is loosely based on the military career of the
writer’s father and also of an uncle’s life as a trader in Burma; both inspired the
author to set a novel in various British possessions in West Asia.

There are various issues, events and people involved in gallores in the run
of the mill description. The story spans more than a century in the subcontinent,
people get involved in unexpected relationships across countries and cultures,
wars are fought, rebellions quelled, political and ethical issues are debated,
fortunes are made and lost. The actual protagonists in this novel are not kings and
queens but riffraff’s – some of them orphaned or displaced – buffeted around by
forces greater than themselves. The story of the novel centers on the life and times
of Rajkumar, his wife Dolly, their children and grandchildren and various life long
friends. Starting with the fall of the Burmese capital Mandalay to a British
expeditionary army, it depicts the exile of Thebaw, the last king of Burma, with a
small entourage of courtiers. Considered one of the most dramatic events in
Burma’s recent history, we witness the episode through the eyes of two orphans.
One is Rajkumar, a Bengali deckhand turned dishwasher, the other Dolly a 10-
year-old Burmese girl serving as a maid to queen Supayalat, the wife of the
deposed monarch. British colonial power is at its apogee and the very extent of
British supremacy gives these impoverished children some unexpected opportunities.

It is at Ratnagiri that lives of Dolly and Rajkumar become intertwined with that of a prominent family from Calcutta. Dolly’s friendship with Uma, the politically active widow of one of the first native Indians to serve the British Government is portrayed very beautifully by Ghosh. Through the career of Uma Roy, initially a fierce nationalist politician but later a more gentle supporter of Mahatma Gandhi, Ghosh finds a vehicle to expound his own political views, which are sometimes a bit moralistic. In the end of the novel Ghosh leaves us in Burma of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Ghosh’s aesthetics is a fictional embracing of historical / political subtexts, and an intellectual exploration of both the major, as well as the marginalized, contexts of modern history: nationalism / internationalism, migrancy, memory / nostalgia, violence and communalism. He is constantly looking for ways in which he can render history into fiction: in a certain sense he is also seeking to pit fiction against history, to challenge the latter’s implacability with the former’s potentially more humane qualities. Ghosh defends his choice of fiction over history in the following words:

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

(Amitav Ghosh's eighth book, *The Imam and the Indian* (2002) follows upon four novels and three books of non-fiction. We find 18 prose pieces written over 20 years in the book and material from three of these pieces was later incorporated into *In an Antique Land* but these three pieces are different in form as compared to *In an Antique Land*.

Ghosh through *The Imam and the Indian* makes us travel to Egypt, Iraq, the Gulf, the United States, Kashmir, Srilanka, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Cambodia. Ghosh’s curiosity is not focused on discrete countries, but rather on the connections he can make between them. There is no other Indian writer like Ghosh who has so consistently looked to his neighbours the better to understand himself. The title piece of this collection is a fine example of his method. The young Ghosh, doing fieldwork in Egypt, gets into an argument with an intolerant village Imam. The argument degenerates into a chauvinist exchange where each argues his country’s cause by invoking its ownership of western armament.

Seven of the pieces in this book testify to Ghosh’s intimacy with the Arab World. His interest in South-East Asia is less well represented. His writings on Burma and Cambodia, published previously as a book aren’t included here. Two brilliant yet somber pieces remember and reflect upon pogrom and terror in South Asia. The Sikh pogrom that followed upon the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi was a formative event for Ghosh and he returns to it in both “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” and “The Greatest Sorrow”. The profound impact that the massacre had
on his second novel The Shadow Lines is reflected and clearly evident in these prose - pieces.

Many of the pieces in this book attend to violence and terror and tragedy in Srilanka, Kashmir, Delhi, Ayodhya, Tibet and New York. Characteristically, through these prose pieces Ghosh warns us against treating violence as literary material.

Amitav Ghosh has written seventeen essays on various topics related to nuclear tests made by India and Pakistan, The 1984 riots, on Sunderbans, on the death of R.K. Narayan and G.V. Desani etc. These essays reveal Ghosh's view on different situations and his thinking. The essays show him as a person who is aware of the contemporary time and is worried for the betterment of the mankind. The essays are present on his website www.AmitavGhosh.com, about two third of the essays are compiled in the Imam and the Indian.

Ghosh's most celebrated essay; The "Testimony of my Grandfather's Bookcase" takes us into the past of the writer where as a child he comes closer to the world of books. This is his most famous essay for which he was awarded the Pushkart prize in 1999.

The essay provides us a very fine description of Ghosh's grandfather's bookcase. Ghosh admits that for me, to this day, book. and a proper book. is and always will be the kind of book that was on those bookshelves. He tells that there were books such as the collected works of Sigmund Freud, Marx and Malinowski's books etc. The books that were prominently displayed had some of those titles which can still be seen on bookshelves everywhere: Joyce, Faulkner and so on.
Ghosh's next essay is named “Tsunami of December 2004” which is about the relief camps in Port Blair, the island's capital city. He writes that Tsunami not only did it destroy the survivor's homes and decimate their families; it also robbed them of all the evidentiary traces of their place in the world.

In his essay “The Anglophone Empire” Ghosh writes about three English speaking countries America, Britain and Australia whose allegiances are rooted not just in a shared culture and common institutions but also in a shared history of territorial expansion. Seen in this light the alignment is only the newest phase in the evolution named “The Anglophone Empire.” In his essay “Folly in Sundarbans” Ghosh has expressed his worry about the natural environment of Sundarbans. Ghosh also mentions about the letters sent to the Chief Minister of West Bengal asking him to re-examine the project in the essay.

In his next essay “Naipaul and the Nobel” Ghosh talks about the books of Naipaul. In his youth he used to read Naipaul's essays and books. It was Naipaul who first made it possible for Ghosh to think himself as a writer, working in English. He read him with attention and through his formative years, in India. Naipaul summoned in him an intensity and absorption that no other writer could evoke. Ghosh read everything he wrote, with a close and often combative attention.

In his next essay named “On R.K. Narayan” Ghosh writes that Narayan has a substantial part of the credit for creating a worldwide readership for contemporary Indian writing and his death was an incalculable loss, not just for India, but for the readers everywhere.
In his short essay named "Regarding G.V. Desani" Ghosh recognises him as a true literary pioneer who was not just a literary genius but also, in the purest sense, a hero. His essay "After the World Trade Centre" is about the attacks made by the terrorists on Sep. 11, 2001. In his another short essay named "On Arthur C. Clarke" Ghosh tells the readers how he travelled to Sri Lanka to meet Arthur C. Clarke when he received the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1996 for his novel *The Calcula Chromosome*.

In his another essay "Love and War in Afghanistan and Central Asia: The Life of the Emperor Babur" Ghosh talks about the life of Babur and the Mughal Period in India. He points out that in his early days he was a great drinker but was a true believer who prayed five times a day without fail. Ghosh also writes that he used excessive violence but had no knowledge of Portuguese presence in Western India. Ghosh has dealt with history in this essay.

Ghosh's next essay is named "The Man behind the Mosque" which is related to Mughal Emperor Babur. Ghosh describes that in December 1992, the 16th century mosque built by the Mughal Emperor Babur was demolished by the Hindu fanatics. reminding us that India, which would like to be a secular state, has always been a religious battleground. It was the most publicized victory for the new ware of Hindu fundamentalism and history made way for myths old and new. Ghosh has a fresh look on Babur, a poet, warrior and founder of the Mughal dynasty beyond the mundane realm of praise and blame. The *Baburnama*, the autobiography of India's first Mughal emperor, Zahiruddin Mohammad Babur (1483 - 1530) is one of the true marvels of the medieval world in the view of
Ghosh. Ghosh in this essay has also discussed about Timur Lang, the ancestor of Babur.

Ghosh’s next essay is named “The Ghost’s of Mrs. Gandhi” in which he describes about his life in Delhi especially about those days when the assassination of Indira Gandhi took place. Ghosh admits that Mrs. Gandhi’s death had an effect on his life and when he looks back he sees that the experiences of that period were profoundly important for his development as a writer.

Ghosh describes all those traumatic events in this essay. He was twenty eight at that time in Delhi when he returned to India after completing his doctorate at Oxford and recently found a teaching job at Delhi University. He was not an uncritical admirer of Mrs. Gandhi. Her brief dictatorial rule in the mid seventies was still alive in Ghosh’s memory but her sudden murder was a reminder of the very real qualities of Mrs. Gandhi. In this way Ghosh’s next novel was bound to be influenced by his experiences, but he could see no way of writing directly about those events without recreating them as a panorama of violence. Within a few months, Ghosh started his novel The Shadow Lines. Ghosh also tells that this was the novel in which he also describes about his earlier memories of riots once witnessed in childhood.

Ghosh’s next essay is named “Countdown in South Asia” which is written in the context of the Indian and Pakistani nuclear test in the same year. Ghosh’s personal views on India’s nuclear program have remained essentially unchanged since 1974 when Indira Gandhi conducted the country’s first nuclear test. Ghosh believes that the unseen costs of nuclear energy are such as to make it unsustainable, even in its supposedly incarnation. nuclear weapons are evil in all
their forms. Ghosh also expresses his view that for India the decision to go nuclear was a misjudgement in every sense, may be political, ecological, strategic or diplomatic.

Amitav Ghosh's intention in writing *Countdown* was not merely to provide a glimpse of his ideas which are remained unchanged for well over two decades but to make an attempt to understand the nuclear situation in South Asia. In this process he visited too many places – Kathmandu, Lahore, Islamabad, New Delhi, Bombay and to the Glaciers. He interviewed a great many people such as activists, journalists, soldiers, generals, thinkers, diplomats, experts, politicians, physicists and of course, many bystanders and citizens. Ghosh’s interviews are conducted with the people who are known almost in the world and are experts in their fields such as Asma Jahangir (Lawyer and Human right activist, Lahore) and George Fernandes (India’s Defence Minister in the N.D.A. Government) etc.

Amitav Ghosh's next essay is named “Imperial Temptation” where he expresses the idea of empire, once so effectively used by Ronald Reagan to discredit the Soviet Union has recently undergone a strange rehabilitation in the United States. This process, which started some years ago, has accelerated markedly since September 11. Ghosh indicates that this may be a good time to remind us of some of the reasons imperialism fell into discredit in the first place. Ghosh also talks about Japan and Germany who wanted empires as proof of their success.

In his essay entitled “In the Reign of the Headless Horse” Ghosh discusses about the violence in Gujarat and the failure of Government in stopping it. In Ghosh’s opinion the recent carnage in Gujarat is not just a fresh chapter in the
subcontinent’s annals of horror, it may well prove to be the prologue to horrors yet undreamt of.

Ghosh is of the view that the action of the Gujarat denies the government of India’s claim to sovereignty as well as the BJP - led Government and Prime Minister himself failed to take appropriate actions. In Ghosh’s view there was no presence of law and order but the appropriate response to all this at Godhra were responsible actions and most extreme punishments legally available to the persons who were behind the mob-violence.

In his essay “Nana Sahib and The Texas Detour” Ghosh discusses about the subject ‘New Empire’ where he deals about Iraq war and the three English speaking countries America, Britain and Australia. Ghosh also suggests that it is important to recognise that Indians also have a long tradition of struggle against the British Empire. Ghosh lives in New York now and for him the September 11 attack and their aftermath were filled with disquieting historical resonances. Ghosh was vividly reminded of the uprising of 1857 , that year in Kanpur, a busy trading junction behind the Ganges, several hundred defenceless British civilians, including women and children, were cut down by Nana Sahib’s followers in an orgy of bloodlust.

Ghosh observes that a similar process is clearly underway in today’s Middle East, where Islamist fundamentalism has inflamed some Arabs while alienating others. Ghosh also talks about the phrase ‘Shock and awe’, used by the United States military to describe the initial air attack on Baghdad which provided him another reminder of the 1857 uprising.
Ghosh essay named "Satyajit Ray" provides us a fine example of "Ghosh's feeling about Satyajit Ray who inspired him and had influence on his novels. Ghosh describes him as immensely tall; and in his view he was probably the tallest Indian he had ever met and he was obviously a King, but he was an approachable king. Ghosh discloses that they were friends all his life as long as he lived. Ghosh remembers that Ray's film were been shown in the Moscow Film Festival but the Russians didn't like them but Ghosh suggests that he might have got a different reception in the west if he had pursued it there. It was released there around fifteen years ago in Paris and it was a tremendous success – ran for a year or something.

Ghosh considers Pather Panchali as the greatest of Ray's films. Ghosh admits that when he looks back now, he is more than ever aware of the part that Ray played in shaping the imaginary universe of his childhood and youth. Ghosh's one of the favourite Ray films to this day remains Paras Pathar, a neglected masterpiece that deserves a place of honour in the canon of surrealist cinema. When Ghosh saw Agantuk, in which the main character is an anthropologist, he began to wonder that his interest in anthropology too was developing. Ray was something even rarer: an artist who had crafted his life so that it could serve as an example to others. In a world where people in the arts are often expected, even encouraged, to be unmindful of those around them, he was exemplary in his dealings with people and this was according to Ghosh one of the reasons why Ray was able to sustain his creative energies for as long as he did: because he refused to make fetish of himself. In 1989 and 1990 Ghosh had several telephone conversations with Ray and in one of them Ray told Ghosh he had greatly enjoyed
his first novel, *The Circle of Reason*. When Ray died Ghosh felt that an era has ended and with it, Kolkata’s claim to primacy in the arts.

Ghosh’s novels are organized by exploring connections, distinctions and possibilities, rather than putting everything together in a symmetrical design. Everything in his novels is seen in relationship, both internally and with other areas, being dependent finally on the way he looks at life. His novels also create a new style, one which is less lyricized, more responsive to the specifying and multifacetedness of experience while evincing a constant intellectual curiosity about the life it unfolds.

Amitav Ghosh in an interview to readersvoice.com expressed his feelings regarding the literature he liked:

He said he enjoyed the works of Anthony Trollope and C.P. Snow and the way they described political machinations. He said Balzac’s novels were full of details of daily life in France, like eating habits, and Balzac’s work was a great influence on his own novels. Also he liked Proust and *The Shadow Lines* was very influenced by Proust and Michael Ondaatje’s novel *The English Patient* was a very big influence on his own *The Glass Palace*.

(www.readersvoice.com)

Amitav Ghosh today cheerfully bears numerous mantles of responsibility in the world of books. He is not only a novelist but has also mastered the art of non-fiction writing. Italo Calvino, in an essay titled ‘Whom Do We Write For?’ Puts a question in front of the readers as well as the novelists. The question voiced his qualms about the death of the novel:
In literature the writer is now aware of a bookshelf on which pride of place is held by the disciplines capable of breaking down the fact of literature into its primary elements and motivations, the disciplines of analysis and dissection (linguistics, information theory, analytical philosophy, sociology, anthropology, a new use of psychoanalysis, a new use of Marxism)... literature today survives above all by denying itself. Therefore, to the question passed at the beginning, the answer becomes: we will write novels for a reader who has finally understood that he no longer has to read novels.

(The Literature Machine: Essays 84)

Amitav Ghosh holds a place of singular distinction in contemporary Indian fiction in English. A profound historical sense, a strong humanitarian drift that defies geo-cultural boundaries and moves towards cosmopolitanism, a witty but compassionate insight into man and his society, an attempt at interlacing the time past and the time present in the crucible of memory are the essentials of Amitav Ghosh's fiction. These together with his brilliant art of construction that weaves together private lives and public events and balances complex sets of issues with a rare deftness, his ingeniously structured web of history and mythology, politics and philosophy and above all, his evocative use of an indefatigable prose that stands out for its transparent clarity have established him as a significant new voice among the recent Indian authors crafting fiction in English.
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