CHAPTER-II

Post-colonial Indian English Fiction at a Glance
The term ‘post-colonialism’ is certainly one of the most actively debated terms in the contemporary literary criticism and socio-political studies. It does not primarily refer to the conditions of the once colonized territories of the world after the official termination of colonialism there except when it finds the forces of colonization extending into the present. ‘Post-colonialism’ refers broadly to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture and human identity itself are represented in the modern era, after many colonized countries gained their independence. It also refers to a set of critical attitudes taken towards colonialism. It is region-specific and employs Western as well as native modes of expression.

The Australian critics, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define ‘post-colonial’ “to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because
there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process
initiated by European imperial aggression."

Significantly, the meaning of this term is two-fold. It is used both as:

(a) a temporal marker to suggest the age or period
after colonization, specifically the decolonized
states. It therefore functions as a historical
category that suggests a chronology – from the
colonized to the decolonized or post-colonial;

(b) a specific reading or analytical practice. Here it
refers to the intellectual or theoretical practices
that emerged in the academics where colonial
texts were re-read for colonial ideologies
embedded in them. In this sense, post-colonial
refers to an oppositional analytic procedure.²

Post-colonialism as a theoretical literary movement originated in the mid-
twentieth century texts of Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963; *A
Dying Colonialism*, 1965 and *Black Skins, White Masks*, 1967), Aime
Cesaire (*Discourse on Colonialism*, 1972) and Albert Memmi (*The Coloniser
and the Colonised*, 1965). However, it is with Edward Said’s monumental
*Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcroft et al.’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989)
that it gains momentum and becomes “an institutional ‘enterprise’."³

Post-colonialism involves many issues – language, men’s and women’s
roles, nationalism, contestation and hybridism. It is a continuing process of
resistance and reconstruction. Today, the field has become wider and covers a
vast area. Some consider the United States itself a post-colonial country
because of its former status as a territory of Great Britain, but it is generally
studied for its colonizing rather than its colonized attributes. Bill Ashcroft et al. substantiate post-colonial theory in the following lines:

Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: 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. None of these is 'essentially' post-colonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field.4

The term 'post-colonial literature', therefore, not only refers to a phase in the history of a country and the literature belonging to that phase but also to some distinct body of literature having shared feature even though it be from several decolonized countries. It is a term of collectivity for the literatures emanating from the Third World countries which share certain formal and discursive features of their own specific to the social, cultural and historical conditions. They demonstrate 'resistance' and 'subversion' of the imperial 'centre' (the 'colonizer', the 'dominant' or the 'hegemonic' power). All the post-colonial literatures will have concerns with freedom struggles, rejection of imperial culture and so on. So, the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. They emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them
distinctively post-colonial. Some of the major voices and works of post-colonial literature include Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992), Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988), Isabella Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* (1982), J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* (1990), Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* (1990). They try to assert in their works the dignity of their culture and the nation, cultural conflict, the dominating and dominated national values, the resistance and recuperative and reconstructive social, political, and historical aspects rooted in the national and regional consciousness. There is a re-visioning and reconstruction of history and the historical process with a view to highlighting and portraying realistically the inherent differences of the native culture from the culture of the imperial power. Hence, post-colonial literature is an attempt to restore the lost dignity of their nation and give due consideration, and then to proceed with the facts of cultural assimilation and convergence taking place during the post-colonial period. Bill Ashcroft et al. identify three common features of all post-colonial writings:

The silencing and marginalizing of the post-colonial voice of the imperial centre; the abrogation of this imperial centre within the text; and the active appropriation of the language and culture of that centre.5

They have shown how “A ‘privileging norm’ was enthroned at the heart of English studies as a template for the denial of the value of the ‘peripheral’, the ‘marginal’, the ‘uncanonized’ regarding the hegemony of English literature. Literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as the
monarchy was to its political formation." In fact, the post-colonial literature writes back to contest the sovereignty of British tastes and values.

The post-colonial writer contends with a strange self-directed suspicion, a disabling doubt about the authenticity of his or her own relationship to the culture so long described and defined from the outside, by outsiders. The mirror provided by the other culture affords self-reflection, but it also threatens to cut into and expose the alien sinews of one's colonial identity. In the post-colonial discourse, place and self always go together. In this regard Bill Ashcroft et al. write:

A major feature of post-colonial literature is the concern with the place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. . . . The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created or a process of settlement, intervention or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English.

Post-colonial literary theory is an attempt to dismantle the entire historical process and the European hegemony and assumptions of the writings of the post-colonial societies as marginal and sub-ordinate. One of the most insistent concerns of post-colonial societies is the use of language as a tool against the oppressor to defeat them. Thus, the English language is appropriated in their hands with local and regional varieties, native
experiences and rhythms of life and idioms. Ashcroft et al. suggest that "English is essentially hostile to the post-colonial experience and is fundamentally a form of epistemic violence. Every predicate they apply to English repeats the tale – it intervenes, invades, intrudes, seize, subverts, demands, asserts, dominates, disfigures, violates, etc." A central assumption is that "language is a material practice and as such is determined by a complex weave of social conditions and experiences." The 'linguistic turn' in cultural poetics and post-colonial politics is central to Ashcroft’s insightful survey of the retaliative discourse through which ‘the empire writes back’ to the centre:

... the power structures of English grammar (are)
... themselves metonymic of the hegemonic controls exercised by the British on Black people throughout Caribbean and African history.

The post-colonial literature is born out of the tension between the abrogation of the received English which speaks from the centre and the act of appropriation promoted by a vernacular tongue with the complexity of its speech habits and strange nuances. Raja Rao refers to this tension to "convey one’s own cultural experience in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own."

Indian writing in English is an integral part of, and a significant contribution to post-colonial literature. Though it has its own distinctive stamp of Indianness, it displays some of the features of post-colonial literatures. It draws attention to issues of cultural difference in literary texts including issues of gender, class and of sexual orientation. It is ideally national literature. So, the writers are obliged to define new sets of literary
conventions and new literary traditions. They have to draw on the rich cultural heritage of India and at the same time explore its contemporary relevance. Indian writers, like their post-colonial counterparts, 'adopted' the European model since they too assumed, at least initially that it had universal validity. They ‘adapted’ the form to suit Indian themes and perceptions. Then, the post-colonial writer came into his/her own and there was a declaration of cultural independence in unequivocal terms.

Two hundred years of colonial rule were, indeed, the darkest phase of Indian history, but the internal colonialism that exists even after fifty years of India’s independence is no less dangerous than the former. It has not only pushed the majority of the masses to the margins of decision making but has also led to their estrangement and alienation from the ‘mainstream.’ They become exiled from the national ‘mainstream’ as frustratingly as they were kept invisible during the colonial regime; and in this regard, Mohan Thampi writes:

The divisive tendencies are exploited by unscrupulous groups in such a way that the masses are manipulated to perpetuate the economic and political unity and dignity. . . . Despite having achieved the political unity we have not been able to cement the unified sensibility of the different linguistic and cultural groups in the country.12

However, the Indian novelists attempted to break away from a slavish imitation of Western and colonial writings. They are not a part of English literature – not a colonizer’s tool or force – but a part of literature in English, as much a proof of native genius as writings in other Indian languages are.
The concept of a colonized writing back, answering ‘Orientalism’, a process of becoming, finding one’s identity as a literature – all these and much more have guided and inspired the writers of the last fifty years. In many of the novels written in the last decade, a new sensibility is revealed. In spite of breaking away from the Eurocentric world or because of it, a richer world view is presented. Viney Kirpal clearly points out the difference between the Euro-American post-modern English novels and the Indian English ones in the following words:

In the former, as meaning is deferred endlessly the texts become wordy language games; their politics is textual. In the latter, there is an eclectic, limited engagement with certain deconstructive practices used to dismantle power structures in Indian society.\(^{13}\)

One of the chief features of imperial oppression is the control over language. There is insurmountable problem of expressing in an alien language one’s own social and cultural heritage, of subduing one’s native experience to a foreign language. Raja Rao had evinced profound wisdom when he remarked:

We cannot write like the English, we should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as a part of us. Our method of expression, therefore, has to be a dialect which someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American.\(^{14}\)

Even so, the Indian writers adopted English as a tool and employed it in diverse ways to express widely differing cultural experiences. They use it as a
dynamic medium to explore the complex Indian reality — native scenes and sentiments, rites and rituals, cultures and customs. They have succeeded in registering the shift from the English literary use of metaphor to local range and variety through the literary history of post-colonial Indian societies. Indian English, in the process, has expressions bringing with them the flavours of the regional languages. These regional languages exercise imperceptible influences on their use of English. Thus the Indian writers of English have contributed to the plurality of Indian English literature under the rubric of a wide variety of English. They have nativized and acculturated the English language. As Salman Rushdie says:

... the language, like much in the newly independent societies, needs to be decolonized, to be made in the other image, if those who use it from positions outside Anglo-Saxon cultures are to be more than artistic Uncle Toms. And it is this endeavour that gives the new literatures of Africa, the Caribbean and India much of their present vitality and excitement.  

Rushdie says that English has ceased to be the sole possession of the English quite some time ago. He further remarks:

What seem to me to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it — assisted by the English language’s enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.
Some other recent writers have made equally daring experiments. Upamanyu Chatterjee's language, for instance, hints at the possibility of evolving a distinctive Indian English:

Amazing mix, the English we speak. Hazar fucked. Urdu and America... I am sure nowhere else could language be mixed and spoken with such ease.... When I say our accents, I, of course, exclude you which is unique with fucked mongrelness.17

There is also a cultural side to the writing by Indians. Supporting this view Vikram Seth says:

The English language has been taken over, or taken to heart... by people whose original language historically it was not.18

Recently, Amit Chaudhuri has said that living in India for him as a writer means being caught in a “confrontation between two complex languages.” The one he calls “living in India”, and the other “English.” He sums up the role and predicament of the post-colonial writer as follows:

What makes [him] new is the paradoxical confluence, within him, of two cultures, creating a unique persona and sensibility. This new sensibility is not an individual talent or gift; it is not the outcome of creative genius, but the result and unwitting by-product of colonialism and history. The post-colonial writer is strange and unique not, primarily, because of his gift, but [because of] his peculiar historical condition, and it is his first creative, or writerly, function to recognize and be conscious of that function.19
He further says that we have all been "loosened from history" because of modernity and consequent mobility. English, he adds, is "losing its reliable centre" and the post-colonial writer "decentres" the canons of English literature. Questions concerning language and culture are interrelated. It would be incorrect to say that the post-colonial writer is bereft of a culture; he is, in fact, in the process of creating for himself a new culture, though it is not easy to define its precise nature at the moment. This involves issues such as alienation, quest for identity, rootlessness, emigration, exile and so on.

The theme of alienation has been taken up by Manohar Malgonkar in his *Combat of Shadows*. The novel is about a Eurasian young woman who sought to up-climb and become a member of the White English community. She lingers between the two worlds – Indian and Western, and finds herself a stranger to both. Both of them suffer from loneliness. The theme of alienation has been dealt with more persistently and unflinchingly by Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi. Nayantara Sahgal’s first novel, *A Time to be Happy*, projects the predicament of Sanad Shivpal, whose problems originate from his upbringing in an Anglicized atmosphere. He is fully aware of his dilemma of being rootless. While talking to McLvor, he gives expression to his sense of isolation in precise terms:

... it is a strange feeling to be midway between two worlds, not completely belonging to either. I don’t belong entirely to India. I can’t. My education, my upbringing, and my sense of values have all combined to make me un-Indian. What do I have in common with most of my countrymen?
In Anita Desai’s novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, we have in Maya’s self-examination an exploration of the alienated human psyche. Hers is the story of a young, sensitive girl obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, whose extreme sensibility is rendered in terms of immeasurable human loneliness. Her rootlessness culminates in a kind of schizophrenia – “a body without a heart, a heart without a body.”\textsuperscript{22} Her rootlessness keeps on increasing everyday. When her brother, Arjun writes to her, “Without root, one cannot grow to any height”\textsuperscript{23} her rootless condition lands her into utter desolation:

\begin{quote}
All order is gone out of my life, no peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar, everyday living and doing that becomes those whom God means to live on earth. Thoughts come, incidents occur, then they are scattered, and disappear. Past, Present, Future. Truth and Untruth. They shuttle back and forth, a shifting chiaroscuro of light and shade . . . Those are no longer my eyes, nor this my mouth . . . The pattern for an order of lines and designs, a symmetry . . . has deserted my own life . . . Strangers surround me.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

This is the typical condition of an alienated person. Thus alienation or rootlessness occupies a particularly important place in the works of Indian English novelists. Some amount of alienation has affected, directly or indirectly almost the whole generation of Indian writers of the present century. But the rootlessness of Indian English novelists is “an extreme case of the general predicament of the Indian writer” and he is “the most vulnerable of all.”\textsuperscript{25}

The problem of alienation is intimately related to the loss of and quest for one’s identity. Donald Oken rightly suggests that “it is the loss of identity
that results in alienation." The dispossessed personality's search for identity is a commonplace theme in modern fiction, but it "has a peculiarly Indian immediacy." Most Indians' alienation and loss of identity are a result of the historical and cultural dislocation suffered by modern India. As Harrex points out, "the phenomenon of cultural schizophrenia — of the writer or his protagonist, alienated from society — is a literary commonplace today, but it is a malady to which Indians, for reasons of history, have been especially prone." The Indian English novelists' quest for identity is more socially oriented and less personal. It coalesces with the identity of the nation and "the individual quest becomes a microcosm for the national identity crisis." The rootlessness of Indian English novelists tends to threaten their creative talents and force their works to follow a more or less fixed pattern, giving at times the impression of superficiality and stereotypedness. Their role should be to fulfil themselves in writing by sticking to their roots and seeking their identity and, without being parochial or narrow minded, contributing thereby to the development of an Indian consciousness.

The Indian novelists resort to subversion, a tendency which is typical of post-colonial fiction. They not only challenge the hegemony of imperial 'centre' but also question the Eurocentric ideology. The post-colonial writer writes back to the 'centre' thus restructuring European realities in terms of the victims of colonialism. The concept of subversion is not merely used as an effective literary strategy; it becomes a means of self-assertion in the post-colonial context. The newly liberated writers evoke the colonial past in an effort to dismantle Eurocentric nations of history and to demystify colonial heroes. Manohar Malgonkar's novel, *The Devil's Wind* attempts to decolonize history by choosing the first national struggle for freedom as his
subject and presenting it purely from the Indian perspective. According to Frantz Fanon,

Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men
... the thing which has become colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.30

The strategy adopted by the novelist is that of shattering the icons of imperial power and replacing them by the condemned leaders of the once-occupied country. Malgonkar's *The Devil's Wind* assumes special significance as a post-colonial venture to make visible events that have been pushed to the peripheries and silenced by British historians and novelists. This novel rewrites the story of the Mutiny of 1857 from the Indian perspective, redeeming it from the aura of the contempt with which the British dismissed it as the 'Sepoy Mutiny' or 'The Devil's Wind' and glorifying it as the first war of Indian independence. The novelist assumes the role of decolonizer and performs the tremendous task of refashioning history by destroying European monoliths, rejecting colonial illusions and values and replacing them by national images of glory.

In the post-colonial, the most urgent need of the society is to repossess its own past and take control of its own reality. The writer-artists in the post-colonial situation write with an informed awareness so as to redefine themselves and their identity in the contexts of their roots, to evaluate and reposition their past and to assert the images of identity, of community, of myths, of history, of culture. The Indian English writer had to struggle with a complex situation in which indigenous elements come in conflict with the
imported material. The conflict arising out of the binary opposites produces aesthetic tension, offering a critique of the post-colonial angst, not only of the protagonists, but of the nation as a whole. The protagonists of Arun Joshi’s novels — *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1973), *The Apprentice* (1974) and *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), are torn by the tension arising out of the rhetoric of the plot and their mimetic portrayal by the author, also by the Western conventional view which the writer cannot shake off and the traditional Indian concept to which he is instinctively drawn. Arun Joshi produces heroes who are suspended between the colonial versus the post-colonial ego-ideals, the material versus the spiritual, and the modern versus the ethnocentric self-image. Rattan Rathore (*The Apprentice*), Sindi Oberoi (*The Foreigner*), Billy Biswas (*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*) and Som Bhasker (*The Last Labyrinth*) are all modern Indian men, rich, Western educated and well equipped with Western notions to discard the Indian world-view; but deep down their psyche each has an urge to go back to the splendid past. Arun Joshi shifts his attention from individual existential anxiety to the angst of the entire culture in his last work *The City and the River*. It is post-colonial, post-independence India – an arena of intrigues, nepotism, ostracism and violence. The political ideology presented in it decolonizes the concept of the ruler and the ruled and the elites and the common people of the city. The civilization torn by mega-wars of mega-technology is destroyed by its own life-giving river. The Great Yogeshwara in the end assures his disciple that self-destruction of a complete civilization is imminent and is bound to recur till there is final ‘purification.’

In these novels, Arun Joshi suggests that it is wrong to blame the historical forces and pin the responsibility of our degradation of character and
value system to colonialism. We must recognize the psychological damage colonial period has and liberate ourselves from those invisible strands. The heroic attempt to transcend the system lies in the defeat and failure of his heroes. He does not create any neo-romantic ideology of spiritual, mythic Indian – India. We cannot reverse the historical process. So, an assimilation and synthesis of cultures is irrevocable. But we can certainly reach out for our past even though it produces anxiety. This biculturalism was recognized by Mahatma Gandhi when he said:

Everyone of the Indians who has achieved anything worth mentioning in any direction is the fruit, directly or indirectly, of western education. At the same time, whatever reaction for the better he may have had upon the people at large was due to the extent of his eastern culture.\(^3\)

In post-colonial literatures, the concept of exile involves the idea of a separation or distancing from literal homeland or a cultural or ethnic origin. Many Indian writers are expatriates for whom dislocation is a painful part of the diasporic consciousness. The diasporic or expatriate writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, V. S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Mistry, and many others have emerged as significant contributors to Indian literature. The long novel by Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* seems to say that arranged marriages still occupy an important place in Indian way of life in spite of the waves of protest against such marriages. Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children* reveals urges of the youth of the post-War period with the same intensity as found in the American novel, *Look Home Towards Angel*. Three short stories in Rohinton Mistry's *Tales From Firosha Baag*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* and Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Black Bird*
deal with the impact of dislocation on the immigrant. Significantly, there is a conscious rejection of cultural formulations of the white man by the colonized. Viney Kirpal observes:

The dilemma of whether to opt for tradition, custom, or to be untraditional, is quite common in expatriate fiction. A reverse Manichaeism is in evidence here with the declared superiority of black/brown values and culture over white ones.32

Thus, the expatriate writers, like Bharati Mukherjee, portray the exiles as the 'Other', always against cultural denigration by the colonizer.

The chief concern in the works of feminist writers especially of post-colonial period is oppression of women. They attempt to subvert the patriarchal order. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the 'subaltern' cannot speak. For her, the 'subaltern' is not just a classy word for the oppressed. She clarifies:

. . . everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference. Now who would say that’s just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It’s not subaltern.33

Thus, feminists oppose sexism and attempt to raise and 'transform' consciousness. Anita Desai’s fiction and Shashi Deshpande’s novels deal with 'sexual politics' whereas Bapsi Sidhwa questions the subservience of women in *The Pakistani Bride*. These novelists protest against 'false consciousness' in the Indian society.
For the post-colonial writers, the narrativization of history becomes a political act energized by parodic inversions of the dominant ideology. Post-colonial historical fiction has come to share common concerns about representation with post-colonial historiographic metafiction. In order to narrativize the post-colonial history of India, it is to Indian traditions and texts that Salman Rushdie, I. Allan Sealy and Shashi Tharoor turn. In *Midnight’s Children*, the ancient pattern of the traditional oral story helps Rushdie in evoking Indian national life and in “hinting at the infinite possibilities of the country.”34 In it, history provides an able medium for his quest for roots and adds a rich human dimension to history. Similarly, Tharoor chooses a form suitable to the retelling of “the political history of 20th century India through a fictional recasting of events, episodes, and characters from the *Mahabharata*”,35 and to explore “the kinds of stories a society tells about itself . . . [and] the forces and events that have made India, and nearly unmade it.”36 At the same time, he responds “as a novelist, to British attempts to depict the same period in fiction – the Empire striking back, as it were, as its portrayals . . . reclaim[ing] the story of India for Indians.”37

According to Bill Ashcroft et al. “received history is tempered with, rewritten and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive progress.”38 In Bpasi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man*, the perspective changes to that of the ‘Other.’ This narrative sets out to disrupt English notion of ‘Partition’ and the ordering of time. Arundhati Roy’s conception of history, as evidenced in the following passage from *The God of Small Things*, is highly imaginative:

Perhaps it’s true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few
Thus, in Arundhati Roy’s narrative even ‘little events’ and ordinary things are significant, for they become the “bleached bones of a story.” The post-colonial writers question the bases of European thought and challenge the world view that can polarize centre and periphery. Naipaul, Achebe, Rushdie and Sidhwa write with a view to restructure the imperial ‘realities’ in post-colonial terms. They do not merely reverse the hierarchical order but interrogate the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based. They place themselves in the position of Caliban and question the authority of Prospero, who symbolizes ‘centre.’

Against the backdrop of these post-colonial writers, the emerging writer, Amitav Ghosh has succeeded in carving a niche for himself in the sphere of post-colonial literature. His sense of native history and time is inseparable from the long years of dominion, and the multinational hybrid whose acculturation allows effortless identification with the world of the colonizer. He is a ‘first-world’ writer who considers the world to be a ‘global village’, where men and women of different nationalities should be trying to reach towards one another, irrespective of their culture and race. He seeks to approach the term ‘postcoloniality’ from a new perspective that does not privilege the colonizer by accepting the Manichean definition of West and East. Instead, as John Skinner writes, Ghosh’s concern is “not only with colonizer and colonized, but with both historical and contemporary relations
between different colonized groups." Ghosh told Rahul Sagar in an interview in December 2001 for *The Hindu*:

For me the most important lessons of the anti-colonial struggle are those that emphasise responsibility . . . I think we Indians owe a great deal of gratitude to our leaders of the early twentieth century, for their emphasis was as much on building a society as it was on expelling the colonialist.

Ghosh’s novels occupy a unique position in the arena of post-colonial literature that explores and sometimes uncritically celebrate the hybridity of post-colonial nationality and migration. His novels refer to both globalization and post-colonial nationalism by depicting the experiences of those in transition in-between nation-states and of those going back and forth as travellers and migrants in search of lost homes and better lives. Accordingly, Kavita Daiya says that Ghosh suggests three things:

(a) Community, like memory, is transnational.

(b) The liminality of inter-national migrants can also be testimonies to the material objection and psychic violence of celebratory discourses.

(c) The transitional and translational space occupied by migrants is a transnational one too: not globalized, not between nation-states, but outside them, linking communities across borders through its desires and discourses of material and emotional belonging.

Amitav Ghosh writes out of a conceptual specializing of the world that is consistently informed by place, space and movement across areas mapped out
in geography and time. In his first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, a teacher of weaving builds the linguistic space of his craft for a trainee, constructing a world of terminology meaningful only in its immediate technical context. *The Circle of Reason* combines a critique of the repressive aspects of post-colonial societies with a qualified hopefulness about the possibilities of post-colonial modernity. It imagines ways of superseding a repressive post-colonial modernity by presenting an account of alternative utopian projects. This sense of possibility is conveyed by the figure of weaving. The novel also explores the phenomenon of migration, seeing in the experience of the nomad an escape for the repressive elements of modern rationalities and social forms. In *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator draws a circle on a map and suddenly sees all the random places around its circumference as connected; his fourth novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, narrates the world as lived experience and as virtual computer reality cross-imaging past and present. Nevertheless, Ghosh is not guilty of "delinking of distress from dislocation"44 by entering the banal or trendy space of post modern globalized intellectual and overlooking differences of class and wealth and conflicts of ethnicity, region and nation. His book, *In an Antique Land* offers us alternate histories and does so, in part, by challenging not only the boundaries of travel writing, but those of fiction, anthropology, and academic history writing. Indeed, Ghosh's travels across geographical space and chronological time offer a counter point to his travels across the borders and boundaries of disciplines. He thereby poses a post-colonial challenge to the already slippery categories of travel writing, anthropology, and history.

Amitav Ghosh offers a vision of living across the problematic space of post-coloniality in contemporary life – a kaleidoscopic set of interacting sites:
village, city, province, nation, trade, zone, global network — and points very clearly to the post-colonial space as the ongoing project of analyzing and combating unequal power structures, both at a lived and a theoretical level, and in whatever intersections we can find between the intellectual and the subaltern. There are commonalities between several of his major interests and the concerns of postcolonial theorists who take a constructive view of culture. Like Edward Said, Ghosh draws attention to the artificiality of the East-West binaries of Orientalism. Like Homi K. Bhabha, he demonstrates the hybrid, interstitial nature of cultures, as articulated through language. Like Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies scholars, he endeavours to recuperate the silenced voices of those occluded from the historical record. His novel, *The Glass Palace* as a post-colonial rendering of the enmeshed histories of Burma, Malaysia and India under the British dominion, provokes the question about the nature of deployment of its historical sources to design the desirable aesthetic response. Ghosh’s rendering of British colonialism and its aftermath in the three countries is an inter-play of fact and fiction in an illusory place of imagination to create an awareness of the experiential reality of the post-colonial worlds.

Ghosh tells us that, in theory, there is no post-colonial space as such; but there are always, in practice, space of post-coloniality shadowed into being by the differentials of history, race, gender, nation, wealth, discourse. In this regard Novy Kapadia rightly puts the following words:

> We are condemned and liberated by having to theorise them in order to understand and to move constantly through and across these contending sites and through and across our own theories in endless
search for meaning, fragile community and terrifying freedom. The drive to freedom — personal, ethnic minority class, national — is accompanied by violence of state repression and tactical rebellion and by terror of alienation.\textsuperscript{45}

But, it is something all characters experience as an unavoidable part of their lives. The space of their quest is no space before or after; rather, an ongoing dynamics of decolonization, located in specifics of time and place, but looking always beyond, infected incurably with the necessary germ of indeterminate knowledge and human hope.
Notes:


38. Bill Ashcroft et al., *op cit.*, p. 34.


