CHAPTER- I

INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION AFTER 1980
Introduction

“No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists; you cannot value him alone; you must set him for contrast and comparison, among the dead” (Eliot 294). This statement underscores the importance of Time: past, present and future, their interconnectedness, and acquainting with the past. The above statement reiterates the fact that the seeds of the present and future are sown in the past. Therefore for better understanding of any Indian author, a survey of Indian English fiction is a pre-requisite. This serves mainly two purposes; firstly, it serves as an introduction, background and reference to the exploration of “Thematic Concerns and Narrative Strategies in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh”. Secondly, it helps in placing Amitav Ghosh. Keeping in view the developments and shifts in themes and techniques, the Indian English fiction may be broadly studied under three phases. The first one is Indian English Fiction from the beginning to 1930, the second one is from 1930 to 1980 and the third one is after 1980. A brief survey of these phases with more focus on the last phase is as follows.

Indian English Fiction from the Beginning to 1930

One of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction, though India was probably the fountain head of storytelling, the novel as we know the form today was an importation from the West. The earliest specimens of Indian English fiction were tales rather than novels proper, but their use of fantasy (though on a limited scale) shows their links with the ancient Indian tradition, in spite of the fact their subject-matter is contemporary. The Indian English novels from the beginning to the 1930 depict the greatness of India’s past, superiority of Indian civilization in relation to Europe, ambivalence about western civilization
on the one hand as a liberating and on the other as threat to Hindu Identity.

Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864) is considered as the first Indian English novel proper and it is also viewed as the first birth of the Indian English fiction. This novel shows the awareness of the contemporary social scene. Its overt didacticism also has its roots in the Sanskrit tradition of the didactic tale or Dharma Katha, though this was religious and social in orientation. The urge for social reform was of course, a significant aspect of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century; it therefore naturally became an important theme in some early Indian English Fiction. The questions that engaged the minds of some of these novelists were the position of women, the plight of peasants and the decay of old aristocracy. Shevantibai M Nikambe’s *Ratanbai: A sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife* (1895), R C Dutt’s *The Lake of Palms: A story of Indian Domestic Life* (1902), Lal Bahari Day’s *Govinda Somanta* or *The History of a Bengal Raiyat or Bengal Peasant life* (1908) Sirdar Jogendra Singh’s *Nasrin, An Indian Medley* (1911) are some of the novels which depict such themes.

One distinguished name to be mentioned here is that of Rabindranath Tagore, a prolific writer with at least two hundred songs, several plays and numerous novels to his credit. Tagore, who hailed from an aristocratic and affluent Bengali family, wrote most of his works originally in Bengali, but some of his novels have since been rendered into English – *The Home and the World* (1919), *The Wreck* (1921) and *Gora* (1923), all of which are socially relevant and thought provoking. Through these novels, Tagore has conjured up the vision of a modern India. The second novel is a social story highlighting in unequivocal terms the vexed problem of marriage.
The political theme is hardly to the fore in the fiction of this phase. Nevertheless – Sarat Kumar Ghose’s *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna* (1909) is an interesting early attempt to deal with it. The novel propounds for the union of the best of the West and the East. The novel ends with a fervent hope for a strong bond between Britain and India. Tagore’s *The Home and the world* (1919) depicts the story of Nikhil, his wife Bimala and his close friend Sandip, having the undercurrents of psychological portrayal and political consciousness. *Gora* (1923) is a patriotic novel, a political novel articulating vigorously the hopes and aspirations of the resurgent India. *Gora* is definitely one of the most-liked, finished products of Tagore and adds to his literary immortality like his celebrated *Gitanjali* (1913).

The religious life forms the chief motif in two prominent novels. B.R.Rajan Iyer’s unfinished novel, *True Greatness or Vasudeva Sastri* offers an idealized portrait of a hero who has attained the stature of the Sthita Prajna of the *Gita*. Madhavaiah’s *Thillai Govindan* (1916) is an absorbing account probably autobiographical, of the mental development of a contemporary south Indian Brahmin youth, who loses his faith temporarily under the impact of Western education but regains peace after his rediscovery of the *Gita*.

Historical romance made a fairly early appearance in this phase of Indian Fiction in English. Prominent examples are; Mirza Moorad Alee Beg’s *Lalun the Beragun*, or *The Battle of Panipat* (1884), T Ramakrishna’s *Padmini* (1903) and *A Dive for Death* (1911), Jogendra Singh’s *Nur Jahani: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909) and Svarna Kumari Ghosal’s *The Fatal Garland* (1915). The historical periods covered vary from Tamil times to Maratha history. While the locale ranges from the south to the north to fifteenth century Bengal.
Autobiographical fiction made its appearance palpable in this phase. Some of the early novels are true to the saying that there is material for at least one novel in the life of every person. As already mentioned, in both Madhavaiah’s *Thillai Govindan* and Nikambe’s *Ratnabai*, the autobiographical element is extremely thinly disguised. Krupabai Satthianadhan’s *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1895) and *Suguna: A Story of Native Christian life* (1895) are frankly autobiographies in fiction form.

Regarding the narrative technique the early Indian writers in English took care to align with the best in various ingenious ways. Epigraphs from Byron, Scott, Copper, Shakespeare, and Coleridge were common practice and quotations and references were generously woven into the narrative, whether the context called for them or not. Echoes of canonical English novels are often perceptible in the texts.

Regarding the originality of narrative techniques K.S.Ramamurthi observes that the early Indian English novelists “were by no means imitators but conscious experimenters who adopted an alien form and medium to socio-cultural situation and sensibility which were specifically Indian” (Naik 12). But Dr. M. K. Naik does not agree with this and remarks that “the strong element of fantasy in some of this fiction establishes its links with the ancient Sanskrit fictional tradition, but there are clear indications of its debts to Scott, Bulwar-Lytton and also G.W.M Reynolds”. He further remarks: “the sentimental romances of Henry Wood and of such other writers have influenced early Indian English social novelists” (12).

The poor technical values indicate lack of conscious creative experimentation. The only possible evidence of experimentation in this early fiction is to be found in *Rajmohan’s Wife* which uses Indian words
liberally in the descriptive passages. But it is pertinent to note that Chatterjee’s use of Indianism is generally limited to the employment of Indian words denoting objects (eg: ‘Sari’, ‘Dhoti’, ‘Pan’, ‘Mahal’, ‘Supari’, ‘Kacheri’) alone and unlike, Mulk Raj Anand later, he makes no concerted effort to import a specifically Indian colouring to his style by literally translating into English colorful expletives, proverbs and expressions etc from an Indian language.

**Indian English Fiction from 1930 to 1980**

The period spanning the 1930 and 1980 was momentous both in the history of Indian nationalism and the Indian novel in English. Until this period Indian English fiction had not produced a single novelist with substantial output. During this phase there is a sudden flowering of Indian English fiction. So, this period is considered as the ‘second coming’ for the Indian English fiction. So, it demands discussion of sources or bases that led to the flowering the Indian English fiction.

The first important event is the national movement for freedom struggle and entry of great personalities like Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru. Mahatma Gandhi took the leadership of the national movement and gave call for the non-cooperation with the British Government. As he was the embodiment of self sacrifice and preached what he practiced attracted the mass across the country. Forgetting their religious, caste, regional, cultural diversities people followed Mahatma Gandhiji and involved in the national movement not only for gaining freedom to the county but also for the amelioration of the village economy, backward class people, untouchables, and women.

Mahatma Gandhi propagated and communicated his ideas and vision through his writings. So, his works influenced many writers. Anand showed the script of his *Untouchable* to Mahatma and it reflects
his influence. Rao’s writing implicitly reflects the influence of Gandhi’s autobiography. Several of his contemporaries directly acknowledged their debt to this text. For instance, Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *Gandhi the Writer* (1919) celebrates. “*My Experiments with Truth* as an indispensable model for the novel forms and praises Gandhi as a ‘writer of writers’ and claims that the best writing in the subcontinent bears his counter signature”(quoted in Mehrotra 172).

In a sense the 1930s and 1940s were also Nehru’s decades. During this period Nehru entered into the most radical and Marxist phase of his political career, as early as 1933, he articulated “that the true civic idea is the socialist ideal”. Nehru characterized himself as “a queer-mixture of the East and West, out of place everywhere at home nowhere” (quoted in Mehrotra 171). Thus, there was a consequent rift between Nehru and Gandhi ideals and it had provided the source for contemporary fiction.

In Europe things were not so good. Inflected by the events of two World Wars, these decades sounded, the pessimistic note of civilization crisis and intellectual cosmopolitanism. So, many European intellectuals and writers being dissatisfied with the main stream Europe and its cultural baggage began to seek their creative resources both within popular culture as also in the wider non-western world. Native and foreign influences achieved a productive synthesis. For instance, Yeats and Eliot under took the study of *Upanishads* and Forster unearthed an enormous narrative resource in India. In this milieu, the expatriate Indian novelists were guided by the prevailing European fashion to ‘return to Indian culture and scriptures’. At this juncture, modernism reached the peak point. It proved to be an ambiguous inheritance. It was increasingly under attack for its elitism and self serving engagement with other cultures. Several Marxist critics and writers raised cry against the
abstruse verbosity and solipsism of modern writing and began a campaign for a more simple and accessible prose style. Faced with this new and curious bridge between East and West several expatriate Indian writers submitted to a gradual process of disengagement with the modernist creed. As a result of this, Anand rejected the intellectualism of Bloomsbury writers and Aubrey Menen likewise, found the beautiful people of Bloomsbury sadly lacking in human kindness.

A society compelled into self awareness like this provided a fertile soil for fiction and the time was ripe for the emergence of a few talented writers who could lift the Indo-English fiction form to an international status and universal recognition. The three name usually mentioned in literary circles in this context are Mulk Raj Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao. They are known as ‘The Big Three’ an epithet coined by the noted English critic William Walsh. These three have laid the strong foundation for Indian Fiction in English. Against this background these writers have responded differently to the above mentioned situations. There is also a galaxy of writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Kushwant Singh, G.V. Desani, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal and others who nurtured the Indian English fiction.

As literature reflects the life of its time many of the writers wrote about nation. The theme of Mahatma got its birth, got deep-rooted, and became pervasive and strongly impacting. Gandhian economy – self reliant village based economy, giving up prestigious positions to devote to the greater cause of nationalism, amplifying the creed of Ahimsa, denunciation of modern and western civilization, preferring spiritual growth, anti colonial matters, programmes of national reform like amelioration of women, workers, untouchable, and peasants became the major themes of the fiction of this phase. “Nation and national identity
has characterized both the period of anti colonial struggle and of post-
independent India” (Riemenchneider 3).

The writers of this period depicted the society realistically. A group of
writers depicted the social, economic and political oppression of
individuals. Anand’s Untouchable depicts the plight of the untouchables,
Coolie, depicts the exploitation of landless peasant; Two Leaves and a
Bud depicts the exploitation of the teagarden workers; The Big Heart
deals with industrial labour problems. K.S.Venkataraman’s Murugan the
Tiller depicts how an ideal rural colony is founded on Gandhian
principles. And Baladitya throws light on the evils of the caste system
pseudo religiosity etc. Most of the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao’s
Kanthapura, and Kamala Markandaya’s Nectar in a Sieve and A Handful
of Rice, Bhabani Bhattacharya’s So Many Hungers, and Manohar
Malgonkar’s The Prince belong to this category.

There is another group of works which concentrates on an
individual’s search for identity. This is to be seen in Anand’s Lalu
Trilogy, Markandays’s Some Inner Furry, B. Rajan’s The Dark Dancer
and Too Long in the West and most of the novels by Anita Desai and
Arun Joshi. In G.V. Desani’s All About H Hatterr, Markandaya’s
Possession, Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope, and Khushawant
Singh’s Train to Pakistan, a slight variation of this theme is discovered.

Another group of writers deal with the theme of East-West and
attempt to bridge the gulf between India and the West. They have
attempted to present the manifold difficulties of cross-cultural
understanding and to explore the possibilities of mutual tolerance. K.
Nagarjan’s Chronicles of Kedaram and Bhattacharya’s Shadow from
Ladakh and Markandaya’s The Coffer Dams and Pleasure City deal with
this East-West theme.
Apart from these categories of novels, there is altogether a separate category of works which subtly portray human nature in a psychological fashion. In this category, the protagonist is a victim of his own inner tensions and struggles; such are *The Dark Dancer* by B Rajan, *A Silence of Desire* by Markandaya, the novels of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi.

‘Indianness’ formed part of major thematic concern of the novels of this period and they served the purpose of social as well as political reform. Strong didactic tone is characteristic of much of Indian fiction, influenced on the one hand by Victorian moralistic works and on the other by the authors’ critical assessment of Indian customs and traditions. It is a combination of a nationalistic viewpoint and an acute awareness of Western social ideals and customs. The novels of this period display an emerging national consciousness in India and at the same time a manifestation of the hybrid consciousness of the intellectual elite of the country. Hence, these authors are certainly not typical of the Indian population but represent a particular social segment. Therefore, Harrex feels that Indian fiction in English “manifests the mixed sensibility” (quoted Riemenscneider 15). Regarding the growth and authenticity of Indian English fiction Mukherjee says: “Novels must be rooted in the concept of history…few novels which have succeeded are usually the ones firmly rooted in time and place. Yet, most of Indo-Anglian novelists are constantly aiming at an Indianness bereft of temporal and spatial values” (213).

Regarding this, V.K.Gokak remarks “Indo-Anglian writers come from a microscopic minority group and have merely succeeded in creating a hothouse plant rather than one that has sprung from the soil and sprouted and burgeoned in the open air” (quoted in Riemenscneider 9).
A critical assessment of any work of art requires a study of its ‘matter’ and ‘manner’, or of its ‘what’ and ‘how’ both. The discussion of the major thematic concerns would be incomplete without exploring the major technical devices used by the novelists to project their vision. By narrative technique we mean the pattern, coherence, and sense of perspective imposed by the novelist’s selection and explanation. It is a means of expression of their total understanding of man, of Nature, of God. Such understanding and totality of the vision is communicated to us through appropriate means- language, form and technique.

Novel as a literary genre was new to India. So, the concern with the technique has been slow to evolve in the Indian English fiction. T.D. Brunton remarks Indian novel is “embedded in the tradition of ‘Indianness’ rather than that of the genre” (11). Regarding this Spencer holds that “Indianness appears to have prevented the development of the novel before the arrival of the British” (9). As the Indian English fiction attained maturity in the thirties the writers began to make new experiments in the technique of novel by assimilating the innovations of modern European novelists and adapting them to suit the treatment of Indian traditions and ethos. The novelists writing after independence appear to be attracted to new techniques in plotting, narration and characterization. The modern “stream of consciousness” method of narration is tried by a few of them like Raja Rao, G.V. Desani, and Anita Desai. However, most significant experiments were made in the sphere of technique.

**Plot Construction and Art of Narration**

Plot is a story, a selection of events, arranged in time, its beginning leads through a middle to an end. A plot contains motives, consequences and relationship. All plots have some relationship to time because cause
and effect take place in time. The writer’s ideology affects his choice of plot. The Indian English novelists of the period from 1930 to 1980 have revealed their excellent mastery in narration and dexterity in the development of plot. The novels of R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Sudhin Ghose and G V Desani are perfect manifestation of their narrative genius.

R K Narayan’s craftsmanship in plot-construction does not reveal a consistent quality. Narayan’s art, however, reached its maturity after independence. *The Guide* is the finest specimen of Narayan’s artistic genius, where in he handles with the skill the modern fictional techniques such as flashbacks, flashforward, interior monologue and stream of consciousness. The narrative in this novel alternates between the past and the present. The blend of the omniscient and the autobiographical method of narration endow the story with a double perspective. His narration is marked by the quality of naturalness. He entertains but not at a brisk, rollicking pace. He evokes a gentle and simple laughter. Narayan has been recognized as “a born story teller” (Henry Miller), “a first-rate story teller” (Anthony West) and “the story teller par excellence” (Christian Science Monitor, quoted by Shiv K. Gilra 104).

Raja Rao steps ahead Narayan in the art of plot construction. Though deeply rooted in vedantic philosophy and ancient lore – he is open to most modern stylistic experimentations and other technical innovations. For Narayan, the story is everything for Raj Rao it is a little more than a convenience. In *Kanthapura* the story is told from the witness-narrator point of view. *The Serpent and the Rope* because of its philosophical subject-matter requires a sophisticated and intellectual narrator. As the theme is the knowledge of the self and the action takes place in the thought process and psyche of the hero, the narrative perspective is focused on him. The story of the novel, therefore, is
unfolded from the protagonist narrator point of view. In order to communicate his meditations and thoughts of the inmost recesses of mind, the hero-narrator uses the devices of introspective diary entries, self-revealing letters, and jottings of recapitulated poetry quotations from *the Vedas, the Upanishads, Indian lore, and French poetry*. In his narrative perspective he moves to and fro in space and time. Many critics consider *The Serpent and the Rope* as essentially a spiritual autobiography. While being interviewed by Annie Brierre, Raja Rao pointed out “Everything one writes is autobiographical. But it is a metaphysical novel” (26). In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the author goes a step ahead and describes the state of spiritual serenity which descends in the life of a man who leads the life of detachment and resignation.

The novels of Sudhindra Nath Ghose are an exciting experiment in the expression of the Indian ethos in a form firmly grounded in the ancient native tradition of story-telling. His narrative technique shows his rejection of Aristotelian concept of plot and use of the ancient Sanskrit device of the framing story interpolated with tales told by different characters from different sources such as the ancient epics and the puranas, legends and folk-lore and even history. Following the practice of the Sanskrit Champu Kavya, Ghose mixes prose and verse and introduces into the narrative songs in Bengali with musical rotations.

G V Desani’s *All About H Hatterr* is one of the most daringly experimental novels in Indian English literature. It is a novel extremely complex both in theme and technique. The novel may be said to be story of the hero’s spiritual quest for understanding the meaning of life; a social chronicle revealing aspects of white, European and Indian character, an uproariously funny comedy, full of various kinds of humor ranging from sheer farce to subtle wit. Further, it is a triumphant experiment in
blending western and Indian narrative forms. The plot of the novel seems incoherent and scattered. But a close analysis reveals its comprehensive form, perfect design and architectural symmetry.

Manohar Malgaonakar in contrast to Desani is deft story teller, who knows how to function with verve and animation, with wit and detachment. Above all, the charm of his story never wears down, as it possesses the ‘tang’, ‘feel’ or colour of life. As a narrator, he is smooth and straightforward, the narratives run spontaneously, not obscured by redundant situations or long incidental comments. Told in the omniscient style, there is very little scope for loitering here and there. The story is allowed to tell itself, and generally there is little that comes between the reader and the tale. Everything is in organic relation. A good plot presupposes some special tactics-the capacity for vivid portraiture, careful carpentry, subtle motivations, dramatic display, humour, wit, irony, intellectual interpretation and shrewd observations. Malgonkar’s novels have such plots, undoubtedly. He has a lively talent and his novels are carefully contrived, neatly presented. *Distinct Drum* is a fine example of the old fictional technique which involves the use of memory as a narrative medium and helps the author to move back and forth in time and achieve a wide coverage. *A Bend in the Ganges* is a novel in which plot has primacy over character. Epical in scale, it is intended to offer a panoramic view of the pre-independence period in Indian History. The book *The Combat of Shadow* is a skillful product of careful workmanship and its style never cramps. Malgaonkar revolts against the psychological novel of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, which he considers a temporary aberration in the tradition of the novel. His favorite novelists are Kipling, Conrad, Maugham and Forster. What he finds common to the
novels of these writers are well constructed plots, dramatic events and entertainment.

In general the novelists of this period formed perfectly designed, skillfully rounded and well constructed plots, epical in scale and episodic in nature, after the early Victorian concept of plot-construction.

**Art of Characterization**

Aristotle laid utmost emphasis on the plot in a story, later on, this emphasis shifted to character. Character is less important in allegorical, satirical, stream of consciousness, technique novel or highly experimental novels. A great novel enables us to identify ourselves with hero or heroine and enjoy characters. The most enjoyable fictional characters seem to be very life-like. The pre-independence novelists showed marked tendency to construct symmetrical plot, so as to convey their messages to the readers more effectively. But with the popularity of psychological novels, the emphasis is being laid more on characters.

R K Narayan excels as an artful delineator of character. He says his focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy. His novels have gifted us a richly varied portrait-gallery of students, teachers, parents, grand-parents, half hearted dreamers, journalists, artists, financiers, cranks, movie-stars, sanyasis and women-pious and suffering, coquettish and seductive. It is a veritable world of men and women, both real and exotic, brought to life with uncommon dexterity.

Mulk Raj Anand portrays different types of characters. His fiction is a huge country fair where all kinds of people rub shoulders. He covers practically the entire gamut of society, from Maharaja to the mendicant, from the Anglo-Indian, to the untouchable. His understanding of child psychology is also par excellence. The most memorable of his characters are those who have either stirred his humanitarian compassion deeply or
have evoked his admiration. Hence, Bakha and Anantha among his men and Gauri and Parvati (in the short story, Birth) among his women are perhaps his most outstanding creations.

Raja Rao’s skill in portraying living characters is amply displayed in Kanthapura. The Serpent and the Rope reveals a further advance in his technique of characterization. He is no more concerned with delineating characters in their private aspects. He portrays them in relation to the broader and more impersonal objects that occupy mankind, their relation to public affairs, philosophy, art and religion. He also portrays a large variety of characters, drawn from different races and nationalities and they are all real and life-like. If little mother represents the Indian Women of the older generation, Saroja does those of younger generation, Savithri is one of the emancipated girls. Even the minor characters emerge fully alive, breathing with life by a few strokes of his pen.

Kamala Markandaya reveals an excellent sense of mansion workman and resorts to mosaics in the delineation of her characters. A one-line comment here, a passing observation there, a casual description elsewhere and thus a fine picture emerges.

G.V.Desani follows the latest surrealistic technique of characterization. In All About it Hatterr, all the seven sages ultimately resolve themselves into the pseudo-sage, and their various disciples into Hatter himself, of whom Bannerjee is in a sense the ‘alter ego. Humor of character is a part of the intricate comic design of the novel. The name ‘Hatterr’ suggests a ‘Sahib’. He is a tragic-comic character a lifelong prey to a nagging sense of insecurity.

Thus, we see that the novelists of the period imprint a marvelous skill in characterization. These novels mark a transition from stereotyped characters to a new and rich variety of them, from the depiction of their
outwardly idiosyncrasies, manners and charms to the deep and sharp penetration into their psyche and inner recesses of their mind.

**Other Narrative Devices**

Among Indian English writers there seems to be an increasing awareness that English is a pliant language which each writer has to fashion it as the occasion demands. During the last forty years, there has been a great deal of experimentation in the use of the English language in Indian English Fiction. A few writers who wrote novels in English in the early part of 20th century used the language carefully, with stiff correctness, always conscious that it was a foreign tongue. In the thirties one notices a sudden development of Indian English Fiction, in quantity as well as quality and this is because of their confidence in the use of English language as one of India’s many other languages. Out of this confidence arises their will to bend the language according to the situation, Mulk Raj Anand is the first conscious experimenter, followed closely by Raja Rao, and in the next decade by Bhabani Bhattacharya and others.

The Indian English novelist’s writing displays the imprint of the region from which he/she hails. For example, Mulk Raj Anand, manages to convey a Punjabi flavor through his English. R.K Narayan’s novels breathe south Indian air. Raja Rao deals with Kannada-speaking characters and nuances of their language and Bhabani Bhattacharya’s English succeeds in recreating a Bengali rhythm. Kamala Markandaya and Manohar Malgonakar do not associate themselves with the region they represent and their English does not betray their own region. They are as much at home in Standard English as any educated, cultured native speaker.
The major stylistic and linguistic experiments have been made in the Indian English novels of this period can be noticed in diction or literal translation of idioms, in syntax or in the structure of sentences. Further in the use of dialogue, employment of rich images, presentation of more modern and western devices as symbolism and irony, these novelists real a distinctive character and different colouring.

We see a marked change in the technique of the novels written in this period. The novelists writing before 1930 looked for their traditional western models and were largely influenced by their British counter parts in their concepts of plot, characterization, and other stylistic devices. But the writers from 1930 to 1980 feel more attracted towards the latest experiments in the field of the style and language. They have been working hard to evolve more flexible English that would convey the nuances of Indian life. The Indian English novelists, by using various linguistic and stylistic devices, have succeeded in infusing the rhythm of Indian languages into English and in conveying the Indian sensibility. Their language items form Indian thought and imagery and acquire a distinctive identity and suppleness. In the words of Prof. Gokak, Indian English represents the evolution of a distinct standard, the body of which is English but whose soul is Indian in colour, thought and imagery.

There are different opinions regarding this experimentation in the style. Meenakshi Mukherjee states that the style is not integral to the author’s point of view but something added to the material like “icing on the cake or embroidery on a sari”. Further she writes: “No amount of experimentation with style, no amount of conscious innovations will succeed in fiction unless it has inevitability in the context of the particular theme the novel deals with” (201).
However, some of the writers like Raj Rao and Narayan have succeeded in experimenting western form to convey the Indian essence or Indian sensibility while confirming to the correctness of English usage. One critic remarks that the English of the early writers was that of babus, whereas the English of later writers is that of Sahibs. An American writer Allan Wendt points out that “the new Sahibs have produced writing that can be judged by the best western standards” (quoted in Riemenscheneider 10). Thus, it can be emphatically stated that Indian English novelists of this period have enriched the English language considerably by annexing to it new forms of expression, idioms, phrases, imagery and symbols. The developments in theme and narrative technique in this period forecast the future developments.

**Indian English Fiction after 1980**

Indian Writing in English witnessed a renaissance in 1980s. The two cultural and literary events that led to the attempts of departing from the preceding period way of writing are: The first one, Edward Said’s theoretical deliberations in *Orientalism* was instrumental to the emergence of the postcolonial discourse and the second one is the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* with departure from the predominant realist mode of the Indian English novel practised since the 1930s. *Midnight’s Children* is perhaps the most outstanding and ‘ground breaking’ novel of this period. It is a multifaceted narrative; it is at once an autobiographical bildungsroman, a picaresque comedy, a surrealist fantasy, a political and existential allegory, a political satire and a stylistic experiment. Described by the author as a ‘sort of modern fairy tale’, the narrative is an exciting blend of the natural and the supernatural, political allegory and ethical implications.
Such an epoch making work heralded the advent of a new generation with remarkable fresh insights and abundant fecundity and appearance of a certain post modern playfulness, the turn to history, an exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness, even the prominent references to Bollywood, all seem to owe something to Rushdie’s novel. As a result of this and a considerable degree of orientation in the Indian world view there is a paradigm shift in Indian English fiction’s theme and narrative strategies employed to objectify the intended vision of life and world. The influence of Rushdie’s work is acknowledged by critics and novelists alike. Shyam Asnani observes that *Midnight’s Children* led to “the birth of a new kind of Indian English novel moving from the portrayal of the contemporary socio-political themes to the imaginative treatment of individual fantasies in the mythic/archetypal, fabulist and satiric modes” (26). Paranjape has remarked that it has really jolted the very foundation of the Indian English novel. Anita Desai points out “Indian writing in the past was characterized by recurring portrayals of stock-scenes, themes and characters and a turn away from the circular to the linear narrative structure under the influence of Western literature” yet recently in “*Midnight’s Children* Salman Rushdie wound the straight line of narrative into a circle” while in *Shame* he “Mythologized still-living people and turned events in living memory into fantastic legends” (26). Besides, several other happenings in the literary circle around the world, *Midnight’s Children* has changed the way of thinking of the Indian English novelists. A flood of young writers delighted to return to the old style of storytelling that was strangely the latest and ‘newest’ style. Similarly the use of English by this new generation is a break away from a literary language, towards the spoken language of the streets. Once
again Anita Desai points out that Rushdie is leading the way followed by “a long trial of imitators” (26). She is certain that their writing points to a new beginning.

Thus, the work of Rushdie and other novelists writing away from India could not easily be accommodated within the prevalent, nationalist discourse. So, the idea of the ‘New’ Indian novel in English began to make its gradual appearance in the late 1980s. Regarding this change from ‘old’ novel to ‘new’ novel, Viney Kirpal remarks:

Here (New novel) there is a lack of the staidness, solemnity, and self consciousness that once characterized the Indian novel. They are uninhibited and cosmopolitan in their reach. Unlike the earlier novels, they are neither idealistic nor are they sentimental. There is a great determination to experiment with new forms and themes. Politics- national and international- is their most important theme and the displaced, marginal modern man is their favorite protagonist. The writing is brisk, vigorous, racy, and irrepressible. The novels express the deep urge of the protagonist to speak out unfettered by restraints who virtually screams to be heard (quoted in Riemenchnieider 27)

Nonetheless, the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ are not totally severed, since the novelists of this period continue to employ techniques of traditional Indian narrative: “episodicity; plotlessness; the story-within a story”, the new novelists’ manner suggests “anarchy, disarray, dizzy dislocation”. The examination of the opinions of many writers and critics reveals that these radical changes are embedded in the economic, political and social upheavals of the 1970’s. The new novel reflects “a recognizable change in the national sensibility, expression and literary form”. Further, Viney Kirpal points out: “The 1980s novel reflects as never before, the theme of
the mixed Indian tradition. The controlling temper of the period is synthesis, polymorphism where all religions, all communal groups including the minorities have an important place” (27).

The study of the Indian English fiction after 1980 unfolds the following changes in theme and narrative strategies. The first important theme is these novelists go back to history. Even the early novelists also went to history but objective of them was to portray the greatness and the glory of our civilization. They are the revisionist historiographers. Due to the impact of many literary social and political developments or changes these new novelists feel ‘the reality is the matter of perspective’. In other words they are skeptical about the recorded materials. They depict how the historical events affected the lives of the individuals. They bring to light the untold stories and subjects. They strongly believe that since the history of postcolonial territories was, until recently, largely a narrative constructed by the colonizers, its fictions and languages in which they are written operate as a means of cultural control. Moreover, they read the present through the present. They resort to history with the purpose of finding its relevance to contemporaneity, to caricature the present personalities, to allegorize, to record the unrecorded, to give voice to the subaltern, to subvert it, to question the hegemony, to unfold the constructedness of many ideas, concepts and truths, to interrogate the concept of nation and finally to present their point of view through it. Salman Rushdies *Midnigh’s Children* Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosomes* are good examples for this. “These post modern and post colonial writers seek to recast history as a redefinable present rather than an irrevocably interpreted past” (Helen Tiffin 170-176).
The important thematic concern of these novelists is that from the outset they have been attempting to establish or rehabilitate self against either European appropriation or rejection. This establishing or rehabilitation of an independent identity involves the radical interrogation and fracturing of these imposed European perspectives and their systematic replacement by an alternative vision or the attack on or erosion of the very notion of system and hegemonic control itself. This also involves the dismantling, demystification and unmasking of European authority.

The writers of this period question the nature of unity. The issues of imagining the nation and the fate of children of *Midnight’s Children* have become pressing one. The present world is plagued by neo-colonial catastrophe like economic disorder, social malaise, governmental corruption state repression, the tension of conflicting philosophies and incongruous forms of social behavior. All these crises are highlighted by these novelists.

Due to poststructuralist influence novelists of this period bring together the past, the present and the future to solve many tensions prevailing in the present world. Also it is done to explore the residual effects of foreign domination in the field of political, social and economical spheres. These writers mix the imperial and colonial cultures. This is done to convey the idea that this is the order of the day in the globalized situation and to show the resistance to the idea of unity of place. So, the actions in the novels of many novelists take place in different places of the world. For instance Vikram Seth sets the scene of his *The Golden Gate* in the U.S.A. and *An Equal music* in European countries. In Amitav Ghosh’s *The Circle of Reasons* and *The Glass Palace*, the actions take place in India, the U. S.A., Burma and Egypt.
The fiction of this period reflects the cultural translations, cultural dislocations, cultural crises and cultural degeneration. Hybridity, heterogeneity and pluralism prevail everywhere. In Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* the characters are American, in *An Equal Music*, the characters are British and in Jayadeep Roy Bhattacharya’s *The Gabriel club*, the characters are mid European. Thus, the characters also have become globalized.

Some of the major narrative devices the writers of this period employ are non-linear plots, multiple narration, flash back and flash forward, anti-heroes and heroines, more about common men, magic realism, intertextuality, mixed genres, story within story, chutnification and so on. The discussion of some of these is as follows. These novelists have widely traveled, acquainted with many Western theories and got exposed to the consequences of modernism with more emphasis on science and reason. In order to show their displeasure and to write back resorted to “magic realism”, the style of combining ordinary events with dream like events. These writers resorted to magic realism to tell their own stories to the world, to decentre the centre, to bring the peripheries to the centre and to reject the concepts of unity of time place and action. In order to achieve this task they resorted to Indian traditions, beliefs, legends, mythologies and folklore. Thus, this Indian mine is being unearthed, familiarized to the West, written back and written home also.

The novelists of this period employ the device of intertextuality. They believe that all texts are free to swim with their linguistic or literary or generic companions, in a sea of intertextuality in which previously accepted distinctions between them hardly mattered. Meaning of a work is perceived better when it is red in relation to other texts. Through this technique these writers dismantle the binaries, hierarchy of disciplines.
The novelists of this period mainly depict metropolises, their inhabitants, their problems, plights, culture and their way of life. The reason for this is that “the nation itself has moved from the village centrism of the Gandhian era to the city centrism of the post-Nehru period” (Mee 320). Some critics, however, believe that Indian writers in English have taken advantage of this trend to retreat into metropolitan or cosmopolitan elitism which produces literature intended only for the English-reading privileged classes within India or the international public outside.

The very striking aspect of the Indian English fiction after 1980 is the playfulness in the use of language. The novelists before 1930s were very much meticulous and conscious in using English. Because firstly most of them were writing after mastering that language, secondly they were writing to English readers. The novelists of the period from 1930s to 1980 started experimenting with use of English and many of these writers stayed abroad for at least some period got mastery over it and it became possible to experiment. The writers of this period used Indian words, phrases, idioms, proverbs and sometimes translated words from the regional language into English. All this was done by these writers to establish Indian identity, to convey the Indian sensibility through it and to give the Indian ‘tang’ and ‘colour’ to the language.

The novelists after 1980 have also experimented with the use of English. But here the objective is entirely different. First of all, the experimentation with use of English is not at all a problem for these writers because many of them have learnt it from the birth and now it has become one of Indian languages. The writer of this period uses the regional language words neither to establish the regional identity nor to privilege one language over the other. The novelists of this period feel
that “The Indian ‘tang’ is not a pure essence but the masala mix of culture that has always been able to appropriate influences from outside. Indian identity lies in the chutnification not in the distinct language” (Mee 321). Again this experimentation with the English language strategy is used to decolonize, to dismantle the hegemonic structures to show the distrust and finally to convey the idea of cultural translation, cultural dislocation, cultural weightlessness, cultural crisis, hybridity, identity crisis and multiple identities.

**Indian Women Writers in English**

The first major women writer is Kamala Markandaya who is an immigrant writer, her ten novels present remarkable range of characters from poor peasant women in *Nectar in Sieve*, through the urban poor of *A Handful of Rice* to the higher class in *The Golden honey comb*. The conflict between tradition and modernity, East and West runs through all of her novels. She also throws light on how the development is amounting to a kind of neo-colonialism and racial prejudice, of which she has first-hand experience, against, Indian emigrants in Britain.

The next major woman writer is Nayantara Sahagal. Her novels reveal a close acquaintance with the political elite, major political and national events which form the background to each her eight novels. Her novels present the life of the richest sections of Indian society, their hypocrisy and shallow values. At the same time she is concerned with the Indian heritage and its value for the educated Indian. *A Time to Happy* articulates the problem of identity faced by the English-educated elite and exploration of the fate of women within domestic sphere. Her later novels *Rich Like us, Plans for Departure*, and *Mistaken Identity* depict the slow erosion of values among both civil servants and people at large.
Another important woman novelist is Anita Desai, if Shahagal depicts political circumstance, Kamala Markandaya social circumstance, Anita Desai concentrates on the psychology of her women characters. She believes writing is a process of discovering truth, the truth is nine-tenth of the ice-berg that lies submerged beneath the one tenth visible portion we call reality. She says her novels are no reflection of Indian Society, politics or characters. Anita Desai depicts very confidently the plight of educated upper-middle class women. Desai’s westernized, educated women protagonists seem to have the luxury of freedom of choice but deeper analysis reveals them to be frustrated and emotionally dependent. Her characters range from daughter, young wife, middle aged wife, mother, to grandmother. All these women tend to be fragile introverts. Most of her novels reveal the breakdown of relationships material or familial. In later novels *In Custody* and *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, Anita Desai has switched over to male centered plots. Anita Desai’s novels are experimentations in the latest narrative techniques. Her novels are marvelous presentation of the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters. Anita Desai has found it necessary to explore the inner as well as the out climate and to disperse the narration in the flow of several sensibilities. *The Cry the Peacock* consists almost entirely of Maya’s interior monologue. It is a brilliant impressionistic novel. For the stream of consciousness technique Anita Desai indebted to the pioneering attempts of Proust, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is another woman writer whether she is an Indian writer or not is an interesting problem. But in an interview she herself has said that she should not be considered as Indian writer, but one of the European writers who have written about India. She has
written many short stories and about twelve novels. The important theme of her work is reactions of the westernized protagonist and their conventional Indian families to the subject of arranged marriage and romantic love.

The major women writers who have started writing after 1980s are Shashi Depshapande, Gita Hiraharan, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. When their counterpart novelists after 1980s assert that they have a right to rewrite national history, these women writers also claim that they have their own say about what constitutes the nation. Shashi Deshapande is a leading writer dealing with situation of women in urban, middle class in her *The Dark Holds No Terror, Roots and Shadow, That Long Silence* and *Small Remedies*. *The Binding Vine* depicts fears, hopes and uncertainties of an urban middle class consciousness. Here she has recorded the unrecorded and translation acts as a metaphor to signify the gaps. She employs a kind of stream of consciousness technique. Her characters and situation are presented in a realistic mode.

Gita Hariharan is another important woman writer who does show interest in experimentation, her *A Thousand Faces of Nights* and *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* are concerned with rewriting folktales and children stories. She insists the necessity of reconstruction from the dismantled parts of various ideas, beliefs and models because those are our inheritance. Traditions, beliefs and folklore should not be considered as mean, irrelevant, outdated and closed. But indeed they are tested truths, relevant, useful, vibrant and open source for writing about present needs.

Arundhati Roy is another important woman writer, who employs post modern and post colonial devices like magic realism, allegory and goes back to history, myths and traditions. She focuses on the identity
crisis and records the unrecorded. In her Man Booker Prize winning novel *The God of small Things*, places her heroine, in the context of traditional Hindu narratives. Her divorcee heroine struggles hard against the fate laid out by convention. This novel provides a powerful imaginative statement of the way people can find themselves ‘trapped outside’ their own history. She also records the dislocations between the ‘Small God’ of individual lives and the ‘Big God’ of the nation.

Some of the common themes run through most the novels of these women writers are the discrimination against the daughter, the silence of women, no recognition of their talent, conflict between modernity and tradition, East and West and the lack of communication between the sexes.

A number of women novelists have made their debut in the nineties. Their first novels are quite effective in revealing the true state of Indian society when it comes to the treatment of women. All these writers were born after independence and English does not have any colonial associations for them. Their work is marked by an impressive feel for the language and authentic presentation of contemporary India, with all its regional variations. Generally they write about the urban middle class the stratum of society they belong and know best.

**The Emigrant/ Diaspora Writers**

English language writers from the erstwhile British and French Colonies in the last thirty years (1980 onwards) have become migratory birds flying away from their home land to U.K. or USA for occupation, international recognition and fame. For one reason or the other they choose not to return home. As a result they face the problem of identity both for themselves and their writings. How are they to be labeled as writers? – Indian, African, Caribbean etc. Again what should be the
nomenclature of their writing? Indian English literature, African literature, Sri Lankan literature and so on. As a result of this question these writers are addressed differently in postcolonial terms- expatriate, immigrant, exile, immigrant, diaspora, these terms are often overlapping and confusing.

Expatriate writer is one who voluntarily leaves the country to promote his/her career and keeps the option open to return home. A K Ramanujan, Raja Rao, Meena Alexander, Kiran Desai belong to this category.

Emigrant or immigrant writer is one who leaves the country and settles abroad permanently. Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie belong to the category.

The diasporic writers are those whose ancestors have left for another country V.S.Naipal belongs to this category. V.S.Naipal is for us a diasporic writer but for Caribbean’s an emigrant writer. Salman Rushdie can also be treated as a writer in exile for almost a decade. Moreover, there are some writers who divide their time between UK, USA and their home land. To this category belong many African, Caribbean and Indian Writers. Names of Anita Desai, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, can be cited in the context.

The question what are the themes these writers work on is curious one, in spite of living in a different country. Firstly, it is about their former home lands and its culture. It is argued most expatriate writers have a weak grasp of actual conditions of contemporary India. And tend to recreate it through the lens of nostalgia, writing about “imaginary homelands” (to use Rushdie’s Phrase). Ramanujan wrote more about India remaining in the USA. Kiran Desai writes about Darjeeling in her Man Booker Prize Award winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. 
These Emigrant or diasporic writers are always conscious of their identity. What Chinua Achebe said in an interview with Kwame Anthony Appiah in 1982 seems to be valid for all categories of English language writers (exiles, emigrants, expatriates, and diasporas). “I am an Ibo writer because this is my basic culture; Nigerian, African and a writer…. no, black first, then a writer. Each of these identities does call for certain kind of commitment on my part. I must see what is to be black- and this means being sufficiently intelligent to know how the world is moving and how the black people fare in this world. This is what it means to be black or an African, what does it mean to a white man” (Innes 208). This signifies the necessity of being conscious about one’s self, culture and country.

V S Naipaul in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech declared that this prize was tribute to the country of his living (UK) and the country of my ancestors (India); this is a clear example of a writer seeking a double audience. They deliberately keep the term ‘post-colonial’ to describe their writings, so that they can appeal to the readers of both the worlds.

Most postcolonial writers are under the spell of migration. They feel that one has to be away from one’s own country to understand it better from outside and at the same time, to understand other territories a new.

There are some critics who comment that the writing of these writers is not authentic and not rooted in the soil, time and space. But the writer like Ramanujan denied this; he says “I have done a lot of work on India since coming to this country (USA). I have done it more comfortably here than I could have done it in India” (52). In the same interview Ramanujan opines that “if colonization affected our own indigenous language, culture and literature, English has helped us fight against the colonizers. English has been the ‘other’ through which we
have returned to ourselves, it has taught us to be self critical and made us critical of English” (79). Thus, it is clear that these writers write back to the homeland and to the centre (former colonizer). There is a good deal of debates over the status of the emigrant writings. It is not like the mythical Shakuntala disowned by both the parents. On the contrary, the emigrants have endeared themselves both to the natives of their former home land and the country of their new home. But it is viewed these writers have rewritten particular works from the English canon.

Apart from these themes the emigrant writers have brought a sea change in the use of English language in their texts. They have made the use of English language flexible in their fiction one instance from Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* will suffice. The novel begins with the first person narrative. “I was born in the city of Bombay…… on the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I come. Oh, spell it out; spell it out, at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence. I tumbled forth into the world…. And there are so many stories to tell, too-many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane” (9). The diasporic literature represents displacement and its consequences like unhomeliness, identity crisis, hybridity and ambivalence and their contributions to their home countries. Thus the emigrant or diasporic writing has also contributed to the renaissance of Indian English fiction during this period.

**Amitav Ghosh and his Achievements**

Amitav Ghosh is one of the prominent, popular Indian novelists in English in the contemporary context. He is a prolific writer so far he has written eight novels, three non-fiction works and several scholarly
articles. Most of his novels have won national and international literary awards. His works have gained critical acclaim across the world. Ghosh has acquired a unique place among the Indian English novelists. When we examine the great works of great writers like Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*, G V Desani’s *All About H Hatter*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, and Aurundati Roy’s *The God of small Things* the fact what Raj Rao said in an interview, “Everything one writes is autobiographical” (Briere 26) is true. It underpins the necessity of knowing the life, achievements and background of an author. Hence a brief account of Amitav Ghosh’s life, his contributions, major concerns and position among the Indian English novelists is provided below.

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta on 11 July 1956. Asked about the personal experiences that had been most influential on his writing, Ghosh has spoken of the city as “A kind of constant that runs through all my books the centre of my imaginative world” (Pier Paolo Piciucco 253). His father was a Lieutenant Colonel in the army and his assignments meant that during his youth Ghosh spent time in Sri Lanka, Iran and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh), while being based at boarding school in India. Much of his writing focuses on families and one branch of his own family lived in Burma (Myanmar), a connection which he has traced, in fictional form, in *The Glass Palace*, particularly drawing on the experience of his uncle, the timber-merchant Jagat Chandra Dutta.

Ghosh attended Doon school in Dehra Dun and one of New Delhi’s most illustrious educational institutions, St.Stephen’s College during a period when, India was in the high noon of nationalist self confidence of a kind that was to vanish just a few years later. Several of his fellow-students later achieved prominence as novelists or as figures in Subaltern Studies movement. After leaving St.Stephen’s with a B.A. in History in
1976, he obtained an M.A. in Sociology from the University of Delhi in 1978.

He received a diploma in Arabic from the Institute Bourguiba des Langues Vivantes, in Tunis, Tunisia, 1979. He went to St.Edmund’s Hall, Oxford University to do post graduate work. As a part of that course, in 1980 he went to Egypt to do the field work for his doctoral research under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria. He was awarded his D.Phil in social Anthropology for his thesis on “Kinship in Relation to Economic and social organization of an Egyptian Village Community” in 1982. In his later ethnographical work In an Antique Land, the central figure is a researcher who has obvious affinities with Ghosh can be read as a companion –piece to the thesis. He worked for a while as a journalist for the Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi. Since then he has been a visiting Fellow at The centre for social sciences, at Trivandrum, Kerala (1982-83). A visiting professor of Anthropology at the university of Virginia (1988), the University of Pennsylvania (1989), the American university of Cairo (1994), and Columbia University (1994-97) and Distinguished Professor of Comparative literature at Queens College of the City University of New York (1999-2003). In the spring of 2004, he was Visiting Professor in the department of English at Harvard University. He spends part of each year in Kolkata, but lives in New York with his wife, Deborah Baker, an editor at Little Brown and Company and their children, Leela and Nayan.

He has to his credit the following works, The Circle of Reason (1986) received Prix Medici’s Estranger Award, The Shadow Lines (1988) awarded with the Sahitya Academy Award. In an Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveler’s Tale (1994), a blend of several genres. The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium, and

Since he is a studious student of history his novels reflect historic sensibility. As John Thieme points out he is a revisionist historiographer. For him past is not something dead or remote but it is still present. He attempts to read and understand present through past and visa versa. So, he takes up a historical event, dwells upon it from different perspective to throw light on the impact of that on the individuals’ lives, families and nation. His opinion exemplifies this. He says, “My essential interest is in people and their lives, histories and predicaments” (Hawley 7).

The important theme that unfolds through Ghosh’s novels is blurring of divisions. He criticizes the dubious nature of borders, between nations and peoples and between literary genres. The boundaries have led to communal, cultural, linguistic and racial clashes and bloodshed. These affect not only individuals but affect nations also. So, it is the need of the hour to think about boundaries that divide people. Ghosh expresses his opinion regarding boundaries in these words: “what interested me first about borders was their arbitrariness, their constructedness. I think these lines are drawn in order to manipulate our ways of thought that is why
they must be disregarded” (Hawley 9). Like Edward Said, Ghosh draws attention to the artificiality of the East-West binaries of Orientalism. Boundaries are to be interrogated in order to dismantle the hierarchy of classes, castes, cultures, religions and nations.

Ghosh provides space for the subalterns. So in most of his novels the protagonists are often orphans or from down trodden castes and classes. Otherwise those voices would have gone unheard. His works display an abiding concern for what Gayathri Spivak and other have discussed as the voice of the “subaltern”. In an interview Ghosh says “I Think I share some of the concerns of the Subaltern Studies group because I am from the some milieu as many of the group members” (12). So, Ghosh endeavors to recuperate the silenced voices of those occluded from the historical record. In most of his novels this is revealed. Alu in The Circle of Reason, Mangala and Lakkhan in The Calcutta Chromosome, Bomma in In an Antique Land, Rajkumar and Dolly in The Glass Palace, Fokir and Moyna in The Hungry Tide are the marginalized characters. Ghosh portrays the potential in these characters and the need to provide opportunities to these people. He does not indulge in bashing India. Rather he exposes lapses of both the orient and the occident. His works unearth local values, cultures, stories, and legends which remained earthed and unheard till these days. So reading of his novels reminds us of Keats’s words unheard melodies are sweeter than heard melodies. His novels evoke a sense of pride and pleasure among the readers in generals and Indians in particular. While depicting the subaltern characters; he empathizes with his characters, so they move us along with their movements. Moreover he has a humanist concern to transcend culturally constructed differences.
The other postcolonial theme that underpins so many of others is that Ghosh brings to light how harmonious living existed in the past between colonized countries. *In an Antique Land* depicts the cultural and commercial exchange between South Asian and Middle East countries. Indian relationship with Egypt is depicted in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. John Skinner writes Ghosh’s concern is “not only with colonizers and colonized, but with both historical and contemporary relations between different colonized groups. Not so, much ‘The empire Writes back’ then as ‘the empire writes home” (17). In the context when the communal riots are common in South Asia, these relationships are of great significance.

Ghosh’s novels offer a wide range of knowledge. Using the device of intertextuality Ghosh provides knowledge of various subjects. *The Circle of Reason* provides the knowledge of phrenology and weaving. *The Calcutta Chromosome* provides information about malarial history. *The Glass Palace* supplies information about how teak wood is cut and transported along the river currents first and then with elephants. *The Hungry Tide* presents the vivid picture of Sundarban. In the interview he says “I am deeply interested in the methods of knowledge and in our own ways of knowing. This is, as you rightly point out, one of the central themes of in my work” (Hawley 14). So in most of his novels several local myths are interwoven which acquaint the readers with traditional cultures and practices.

Ghosh’s novels reflect his engagement with various, political, social, and cultural issues that most of colonized countries face in the present context. His novels display the postcolonial themes like colonial encounter, its impact on social, economic, political and cultural life of the colonized countries, exploitation by the colonizers, construction of the
Other, construction of binaries to further their interests, placing of Others’ values, cultures, systems in the lower order of hierarchy, imposition of the Western thoughts and theories on the colonies and projection of the West as best in all respects. They also deal with resistance to Eurocentric ideologies, re-reading or re-visiting of colonial discourses, replacing these with indigenous values, and cultures, subversion of the grand narratives, and decentering the centre. He brings together past, present and future to address many of the central concerns that are troubling contemporary consciences. Among them, the construction of cultural difference, the interaction of traditional and modern, technologies and discourses, the tension between the Eastern and the Western value system and the merits and demerits of globalization. The globalization has led to displacement, hybridity, ambivalence, diaspora, unhousedness, and plurality of identities. As literature is the mirror of the society postcolonial writers deal with these themes.

Being a social anthropologist Ghosh employs family as a form in his novels. As family is the pivotal unit of the society major events in most of his novels interwoven around the families.

Each one of his novels is different from the other. His novels do not present a world of fantasy; instead they present a world of complex reality. Before writing any novel he undertakes lot of research then he writes, so his works are conscious creations. Ghosh has spoken of the pleasure he derives from dealing with documents. In author’s note to The Glass Palace he says that he has done five year preparation in collecting the materials, meeting people and visiting the places. The research which he undertook to write In an Antique Land has not only supplied material to this novel it has helped Egypt to revisit and recover its history.
When the survey of Indian Fiction in English is done, it is found that most of the writers’ themes and techniques employed in their novels are stereotype. Based on this they can be branded as realist, postmodernist, postcolonialist, feminist and so on. But Amitav Ghosh is not like that his every novel is different from the earlier one. *The Circle of Reason* is a postmodernist novel, proves him to be the first child of *Midnight’s Children*. *The Shadow Lines* is entirely different focusing on the impact of an historical event on individual’s life; it is narrated in a nostalgic manner. *In an Antique Land* is a blend of autobiography, travelogue, history, and anthropology. It is a reading of the present through past. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a science fiction. *The Glass Palace* depicts the impact of colonial rule on a royal family, displacement, cultural translations, identity crisis and it is a chronicle of life. *The Hungry Tide* depicts the life of subaltern and the impact of imposing western ideology. Thus every novel is different and he can not be narrowed down to any group that he does not like also. Therefore he is considered a canonical writer and themes and techniques of his novels have become literary touchstones. Thus, he is different from his contemporaries, though shares some aspects. Therefore, Ghosh has a unique place in the Indian Writings in English.

This uniqueness of Ghosh and of his works prompted me to take interest in Ghosh works. Though some work has been done on Ghosh’s novels from broad perspectives like postcolonial and postmodern perspectives taking individual novels, but the detailed work by selecting all novels and by narrowing down the perspective to one particular aspect of postcolonialism has not been found. Hence, I have taken up the detailed study of six novels of Amitav Ghosh under the title of
“Thematic Concerns and Narrative Strategies in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh”.

Only the following novels of Amitav Ghosh are taken up for analysis in the present study: *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *In an Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveler’s Tale* (1994), *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium, and Discovery* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2002), and *The Hungry Tide* (2004). The other two recently published novels *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *The River of Smoke* (2011) are not included in the study scheme because they are published after the registration for PhD and were not included in the original research proposal. But a brief note on them is included here to have a comprehensive understanding of his novels. This is followed by division of the thesis.

*Sea of Poppies* (2008)

Amitav Ghosh has established himself as a writer of uncommon talent who combines literary flair with a rare seriousness of purpose. The publication of Sea of Poppies marked both a departure and an arrival. The novel was his first to be shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is the first volume in a projected trilogy. It is set in north India and the Bay of Bengal in 1838 on the eve of the British attack on the Chinese ports known as the first opium war. In this novel Ghosh assembles from different corners of the world sailors, marines and passengers for the Ibis, a slaving schooner now converted to the transport of coolies and opium. In bringing his troupe of characters to Calcutta and into the open water, Ghosh provides the reader with all manner of stories. The readers are introduced to Deeti, soon to be widowed; her addicted husband, who works at the British opium factory at Ghazipur; and Kaua, a low-caste carter of colossal strength and resource. Moving down
stream, we meet a bankrupt landowner, Raja Neel Rattan; an American sailor, Zachary; Paulette, a young Frenchwoman, and Bengali foster-brother Jodu; Benjamin Burnham, an unscrupulous British merchant, and his Bengali agent, Baboo Nob Kissin; and every style of nautch girl, sepoy and lascar. On their way to “the black sea”, these characters are exposed to a suttee or widow burning, a shipboard mutiny, a court case, jails, kidnappings, rapes, floggings, a dinner party and every refinement of sex. Sea of Poppies ended amidst a raging storm, rocking the triple-masted schooner, the Ibis, and its colourful array of seamen, convicts and labourers sailing forth in the course of transforming their lives.

Ghosh has interwoven two great economic themes of the 19th century: the cultivation of opium as cash crop in Bengal and Bihar for the Chinese market, and the transport of Indian indentured workers to cut sugar canes for the British on such islands as Mauritius, Fiji and Trinidad. Like his other novels, this novel also unfolds several postcolonial dimensions. Ghosh provides space for the subaltern, depicts colonizer’s exploitation of human and natural resources, migration, displacement and as New Statesman remarks: “Sea of Poppies is bathed in rich vernacular”.

River of Smoke (2011)

River of Smoke is the second volume of a proposed trilogy. The first Sea of Poppies takes us along the Ganges and to Calcutta, where the poppies are grown and the opium processed. River of Smoke follows the story through to Canton in China, where the opium is sold. The Chinese authorities are trying to prevent illegal imports of the drug which has inflicted a plague of addiction on the Chinese population while making fortunes for the irrepressibly shameless trades, mostly British. We now learn that two other vessels have also been caught up in a similar (or perhaps the same?) storm: the Anahita, a sumptuously-built cargo vessel
owned by the Bombay Parsi merchant Bahram Modi and carrying his biggest shipment of raw opium for sale in Canton, and the Redruth, a Cornish vessel with a cargo of unusual flora on which sails a Cornish botanist looking for rare plants, especially the mythical golden camellia, in China. A handful of characters from the previous volume re-emerge from the Ibis, notably the Bengal-raised orphan Paulette, who accompanies the botanist Penrose, and the dispossessed raja, Neel, who signs on as Modi’s munshi.

At the end of *Sea of Poppies*, the clouds of war were looming, as British opium interests in India pressed for the use of force to compel the Chinese mandarins to keep open their ports, in the name of free trade. *River of Smoke* develops this theme. Bahram Modi is importing a huge consignment of Indian opium that he hopes will make his family’s fortune once and for all, and liberates him from the status of poor son-in-law of a rich family. But he is also exploring an alternative life in Canton, free from the rigid strictures of Bombay’s social hierarchies. Here he is the successful entrepreneur, the only Indian member of the Committee of the Western-led Chamber of Commerce in Canton and the lover of a Chinese boatwoman, Chi-Mei, through whom he has fathered a son he cannot acknowledge.

The author’s sympathies are largely with the Chinese, though it is impossible for the Indian reader to escape identifying with Bahram, a man of great but flawed humanity who inspires profound loyalty from his staff. The British traders’ hypocritical and self-justifying espousal of the doctrine of free trade in high-minded rhetoric is something else. “It is not my hand”, pronounces the British opium trader Burnham, “that passes sentence upon those who choose the indulgence of opium. It is the work
of another invisible, omnipotent; it is the hand of freedom; of the market, of the spirit of liberty itself, which is none other than the breath of God”.

Ghosh’s purpose is clearly both literary and political. His narrative represents a prodigious feat of research; the readers are struck by the wealth of period detail the author commands. Yet there is nothing artificial about this historical novel; he immerses readers in its period till it seems real enough to be contemporary. Many writers have placed the white man at the centre of their narratives; Ghosh relegates his colonists to the margins of his story, giving pride place to the neglected subjects—impoverished and usually non-white victims. Ghosh portrays his characters with integrity and dignity. He is particularly good at representing the distinctive voices of his characters; what sometimes seemed forced in the earlier book is natural and convincing in this one, exquisitely reproducing the new hybrid language resulting from the mongrel mating of tongues. Despite the varied nationalities of his characters, the Indian reader can be left in little doubt about the author’s basic allegiance. This is an Indian novel, but one written by a 21st-century Indian, one who is both cosmopolitan and conscious of his heritage.

Fungtai Hong, where Indians are based, vividly evokes the other world into which they have been transposed: “a world in itself, with its own foods and words, rituals and routines”, where Indians of motley origins, hailing from different regions, speaking different languages and ruled by different political dispensations, come together into a consciousness of their Indianness. “At home, it would not have occurred to them to imagine that they might have much in common — but here, whether they liked it or not, there was no escaping those commonalities.” With this trilogy, Ghosh has come a long way from the magic realism of
his first novel. *River of Smoke* is written in an almost old-fashioned style, its prose straightforward and unadorned, its emotions deeply affecting. His trilogy is emerging, two-thirds of the way through, as a monumental tribute to the pain and glory of an earlier era of globalisation — an era when people came into contact and collision, intermixing costumes, customs, convictions, consonants, couplings and cash.

Ghosh’s both these novels serve a larger cause, the reclaiming of a story appropriated for too long by its villains — those who, centuries ago, conquered (or imposed their will on) foreign lands, subjugated and displaced their peoples, replaced their agriculture with cash-crops that caused addiction and death, thrust addictive poisons on them for profit and enforced all this with the power of the gun masked by a rhetoric of civilization and divine purpose.

The division of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter I- “Indian English Fiction after 1980” deals with a brief note on Indian English fiction with more focus on Indian English fiction after 1980, an introduction to Amitav Ghosh, his works, achievements, his career, major themes of his works and objectives of the thesis.

Chapter II, “The Concept of Narrative Technique” deals with the concept of narrative, importance of narrative technique, major narrative devices and their trajectory and their role in realizing the objectives.

Chapter III- “Postcolonialism and Amitav Ghosh”, deals with definition of postcolonialism, origin, nature, scope and development of postcolonialism, major contributors to postcolonialism, different dimensions and limitations of postcolonialism, and Amitav Ghosh as a postcolonialist.

Chapter IV- “Interrogation of Science in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*”. In *The Circle of Reason* Ghosh interrogates
the civilizing and ameliorating objectives Western science, imposing of othering ideologies; he deconstructs the grand narrative; he depicts the relativity, destructive and dichotomizing nature of Western science, and unifying and relative value of Eastern sciences. The Calcutta Chromosome interrogates the authenticity of Ronald Ross’s discovery of malaria parasite and constructed dichotomies. It provides agency to colonial subaltern.

Chapter V- “Blurring of Boundaries in The Shadow Lines and In an Antique Land”. The Shadow Lines blurs the constructed physical, religious, racial, linguistic and cultural boundaries which divide people and their implications. In an Antique Land highlights the absence of these boundaries and harmonious living in the twelfth century and relative value of the past in relation to the present. It is a reading of the past through present and visa versa.

Chapter VI- “The Theme of Dislocation in The Glass Palace and The Hungry Tide”. The Glass Palace displays political, economic, religious, cultural, linguistic, and physical dislocations brought about by colonial occupation. The Hungry Tide deals with the dislocation of refugees by the colonial minded governments and the dislocation of inhabitants of tide country by the hungry tides.

The “Conclusion” sums up the major theme in each chapter and its relevance in the contemporary context. It also provides a brief note on other themes found in the selected novels of Ghosh and possibilities of further research.
**Works Cited**


