CHAPTER-VI

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh, as a writer and novelist quite differs from the earlier Indo-English writers and also from his contemporaries in many ways. His style of writing, themes, plot-construction, characters and background are completely different. There is no need to say that he is more inclined to history for his subjects. So obviously the other things go with it naturally. Due to his continuous treatment of history in his novels, he is sometimes labelled as a historical novelist and to a great extent, it is quite appropriate.

There are so many Indian writers in English like R.K Narayan, Raja Rao, Chaman Nahal, Khushwantsingh, Malgonkar, Salman Rushdie, etc. They all have their own style of writing, own sense of subject selection and own overall impression as a novelist. Ghosh has become one of the central figures to emerge from the English language literary field after the success of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* opened up the international Anglophane markets to the new writing emerging from the subcontinent in the 1980s.

In all his major works, Ghosh meditates upon a core set of issues but each time he does it from a new perspective. Main concerns for him are the legacy of colonial knowledge and discourse on formerly colonised societies, people and ideas; the ambivalent relationship to modernity of the so-called ‘developing’ world; the formation and
reformation of identities in colonial and post-colonial societies; the question of agency for those previously seen as the objects but not subjects of history; the recovery of lost or suppressed histories; an engagement with cultural multiplicity and difference; and an insistent critique of Eurocentricism in general.

After reading his novels, it is clear that almost all of his novels are based partially or fully on history. Event, place or chronology of history is changed in order to make it suit the subject. He puts before us many subjects but all are conveyed through historical events. Post-colonialism, issues of marginalised, nationalism, colonial rule, colonial interests and many others are the subjects that have been treated by Ghosh through history. He uses history every time making it different from the other.

Any research is certainly an outcome of hypothesis. Hypothesis is a seed from which a tree of research grows. Here, the hypothesis is reconstruction of history in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. It is supported and strengthened as research progresses from chapter to chapter. Chapter-1 gives the glimpses of the life of the author, his major works, recurrent themes in his novels, his predecessors and the history and historical forms of novel. Not only the novels of Amitav Ghosh but the non-fiction like academic articles, travelogues, reportage, journalism and criticism are to some extent concerned with history directly or indirectly.
Chapter-2 discusses the major researches carried out on the novels of Amitav Ghosh. Most of them are focus on post-colonialism, nationalism, thematic concerns and comparative literature. No doubt, some of them point out towards the historical reconstruction but none of them focus entirely on this topic. It is the history that runs through all his novels as a background. Though he is an Indian author, his novels are not limited only to India as far as subject matter is concerned. Indian history along with Asian and Colonial history finds its place in his novels.

He is labelled as a post-colonial writer, so many researchers have based their researches on this aspect of Ghosh’s novels. In all the major researches, one or two chapters are dedicated to his treatment of history in the form of nationalism. Being an Indian, it is quite obvious to have traces of Indian history in his novels. Though his works have been researched from historical point of view, none has tried to categorise it like Indian history, Asian history and the history of Britain. From the analysis of the major researches, it can be seen that they lack such categorisation.

Chapter-III is based on the reconstruction of history of India. All of his novels are to some extent concerned with history of India, whether it is Independence Movement or Partition period or Morichjhapi Massacre. All these historical events, major or minor, have been recreated by the author in his novels. He uses major events to base his
Indian Independence Movement is one of the longest freedom movement in the world. It has been the most favourite historical movement for the historical writers in India. In the same way it has been used by Amitav Ghosh. It has been used in both directly and indirectly in his novels. He does not focus on the event that has been noted by the historians, but he treats the events that are neglected by the historians. He treats it as an important factor bringing about a pathetic change in the lives of the victims. Morichjhapi massacre is described as a minor political event in history, though it affected the lives of thousands of refugees.

Characters in the novels of Amitav Ghosh are not merely some persons. They are the representatives of the people of that particular time period. Jethamosai, Tha’mma, Tridib, Arjun are the spokesperson of the time. Through them Ghosh successfully recreates history of time and puts before us the live picture of that time. We witness them through the words of the author. There were lots of people in the same period who suffered such tragedies. Ghosh’s characters are some of them representing the whole period.

Why am I fighting? With whom am I fighting? Am I being used? - these are not the questions asked by Arjun only. These questions are the feelings of all the soldiers who were fighting on behalf of Britain.
In the same way, Why this bloodshed? Why this partition? – these are not only the questions by Tha’mma. It is the notion of all the peace-loving people of the period. Ghosh very beautifully conveys through his characters. He uses history to bring out to the surface the events which were unnoticed by historians.

Real history when written it goes on chronologically, but when it is narrated through fiction, sometimes there is no chronology of time. It runs from past to present and vice versa. There are some other issues happening in between. So it is up to the reader to trace the history. Sometimes it is so implied that it is very difficult to notice or confirm it. History of education policy in India as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi in the form of ‘Basic Education’, is treated in The Circle of Reason. It is so mingled with the theme that it seems inseparable. Thus Ghosh uses history in such indirect way.

Marginalised people are at the centre of his novels. There is no real protagonist in his novels. The theme of the novel seems the protagonist of his novels. He does not talk about the particular person, rather he talks about the issue concerning the masses at large. Partition, Independence Movement, Morichjhapi Massacre are some of the historical events which were concerned with the people at large. He chooses just a background in the form of history and then advances to convey the issue through his characters.
The Shadow Lines, The Hungry Tide, The Circle of Reason, Sea of Poppies are the novels about ordinary people. How the history affected their life? is the central issue in Ghosh’s novels. There was marginality, exploitation, treachery, riots which followed some historical events. Ghosh focuses on such issues and put them before us through his novels. It is not his aim to narrate history but the issues are connected with history, so these issues when threaded with one another, reconstructs history.

Obviously, the history treated by a fiction writer may differ from original history. They take liberty to use it to suit their work. Same thing is there in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. He uses imaginary characters to enhance the effect. It is also true that Ghosh takes less liberty in this regard compared to other historical novelists. Literary writers aim to make their works more entertaining than realistic. In order to achieve this thing they may exaggerate or shorten the effect of some historical events. On the other hand, they have to limit their works to certain pages in order to maintain the interest of the readers, so they can not include each and every detail of any event.

Ghosh’s most of novels are very epical. It is due to his habit of detailed description. He gives detailed description of the event that he treats in his novels. That is the reason his novels are very bulky. While describing the Opium trade in India, he describes the total social, political and cultural atmosphere of that time. Caste system is so rooted
in Indian culture that it almost impossible to demolish it. Ghosh makes its use in The Sea of poppies. In the same way, Satipratha was also a social evil prevalent in the society of that time. If these issues had not been used by Ghosh, it would not have any effect on the theme or plot of the novel. He can’t keep himself away from describing this type of issues and it enables him to create an atmosphere of that particular time in India.

Ghosh also recreates the history of colonial rule in India. *Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke, The Glass Palace* are set against the cruelty waged by colonial masters on Indian mob. They exploited the resources of India and people too. Ghosh treats colonial history from colonised’s point of view. Opium trade influenced the lives of many people. They were forced to grow opium instead of grains. It deprived them of their livelihood. Ghosh describes how they were compelled by the Britishers only for their commercial interests.

Indian people who were in British Army, had to fight only for the sake of Britishers endangering their lives. Ghosh interweaves this dilemma of Indian soldiers while narrating history of Burma in The Glass Palace. Bahram Modi was shown to be entangled in the opium war initiated by the colonisers. He was on the part of losers only due to the policy of Britishers. On the other hand people like Rajkumar were beneficiary of the colonial rule in India and abroad. Ghosh presents both this aspects of colonial rule very beautifully.
In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh treats and base his novel on the age old Indian Philosophy of Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Though it, he conveys the modern man’s problem of alienation, migration and existential crisis in life. The novel symbolically deals with three phases of life, search for wisdom, life of passion and destruction. He uses this philosophy very tactfully and through the life of Alu, he demonstrates it. Ghosh does not reconstruct only geographical history or political history, but he reconstructs the cultural, social history of India too.

India has shared borders with many countries and so is shared history. India as a country has shared history with the Asian countries like Pakistan, China, Bangladesh and Burma. India was directly concerned with the partition and formation of Pakistan and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). There were issues of borders between these countries. India was involved in many such issues. So there were upheavals in India’s relations with these Asian countries. History of these countries has been dealt by Ghosh in his novels. Chapter-IV is an outcome of the research how the history of Asian countries has been reconstructed by Ghosh in his novels.

*The Shadow Lines* is much concerned and based on the history of Bangladesh. Demarcation between two nations can result in riots and can separate many families living happily together. Formation or partition is not merely an act of drawing lines between two nations. Important thing is that it results in the demarcation between the relations of people which
is separated by invisible lines— The Shadow Lines. Tridib is shown to be the victim of these shadow lines. He represents the condition of the people who suffered only due to this shadowy demarcation.

Though apparently the novel seems based on violence, Ghosh gives the message of borderless and peaceful nations. When Tha’mma does not find any visible lines between the nations, she questions the purpose of war. Ghosh symbolically conveys the notion of borderless nations. Tha’mma and Jethamosai are the symbols of brotherhood and peace. They convey the message that a mere border can’t divide people. In this novel, Ghosh reconstructs the history of Bangladesh, especially the period of partition and the formation of East Pakistan which was followed by riots both in Dhaka and Calcutta.

The novel is divided into two sections, first being ‘Going Away’ and second is ‘Coming Home’. It is very difficult to decide whether the characters are going to Calcutta or coming to Calcutta. Problem of homelessness is there. When home is an uncertain place, borders too compound the problem. With this homelessness and an intricate love story between Tridib, May, Ila and Nick, Ghosh has dealt with man’s search for identity. It seems that their identity is somewhere rooted in the history. The novel is full of symbols and all the symbols deal with the theme of man’s search for roots. As Dr. Anjan Kumar says,

“This is not a story of grandmother, but it is a story of the eternal suffering of every man torn between the past and the present. The
novel raises serious questions about roots, identities, war, borders and so on.”¹ (Anjan Kumar, P.32)

_The Glass Palace_ is a massive historical novel of Amitav Ghosh. It is the only novel completely based on the history of Burma. While reading this novel one can feel the reading the history of Burma. It includes the history of Burma from monarchy to democracy, from enslavement to independence. It starts with the dethronement of King Thibaw by the Britishers as a result of their treacherous plan. In this novel, Ghosh uses both Royal and common people, at the same time Real and imaginary characters simultaneously.

Throughout the novel we come across the history of Burma. Though the story starts with an Indian orphan boy, Rajkumar, it covers almost all the historical events starting from enslavement of Burma by the Britishers. History of Burma under colonial rule, freedom movement and also the economic exploitation of Burma, are treated by Ghosh in this novel. The history of Burma is so beautifully reconstructed that readers enjoy it like reading of history.

Social, political, cultural and economic history of the period ranging from 1885 to 1995 is covered in more than 500 pages of this novel. Dethronement, humiliation and the exile of royal family, their miserable condition during exile, are narrated very minutely. It is followed by the historical events like Japanese invasion, 2nd World War, freedom movement led by General Aung san, Declaration of
Independence, assassination of General Aung San and the democracy movement led by Aung San Kyi in Burma. Very long historical period of almost whole 19th century is reconstructed in this long narrative.

India, Malaysia, Japan and Britain are the other countries who have contributed negatively or positively in the history of Burma. Their history whether political or commercial, is implied with the history of Burma. So obviously, while treating history of Burma, Ghosh also reconstructs the history of these Asian countries too. While writing these historical events Ghosh is so lucid that we witness the history through the pages of the novel.

China is one of the leading countries in Asia. In his Ibis trilogy, Ghosh has based his theme on the opium trade and the opium war in which China was directly involved. Britishers had seen the opportunity of opium trade in China and they were deadly willing to have opium trade with China. On the other hand Chinese people and Emperor were against it. It gave birth to opium war. Indirectly, Britishers were expanding their influence over China. Historically there were two opium wars between these two nations. Ghosh uses them very effectively in this trilogy.

In the first novel of this trilogy, China is just mentioned as the chief market to export opium. Through second and third part of this trilogy, one can get the idea of the whole theme of the trilogy. All the three parts are so interconnected that without any one part it is
incomplete. If *Sea of Poppies* is beginning, the *Flood of Fire* is its climax. Story advances with the parts of the trilogy and so does the characters. Interrelationship of characters is very tactfully handled by the author.

History that led to the opium war was slowly and systematically interwoven with the plot of this Ibis trilogy. Efforts of British colonialists to establish their influence on China and the very obvious oppose and protest by Chinese government and the people is well-illustrated in the last part of this trilogy. Characters of the first volume are no more visible in the third part, but they share the same concern that is opium trade. Ghosh, through this trilogy, reconstructs the history of China, especially history of Canton and the opium trade resulting ultimately in the opium wars.

Britain was directly involved in the opium wars. Not only the opium wars, but as the colonisers they were involved directly in the history of many nations. As a result of this Britain has a shared history with colonised countries like India, Burma and so on. Ghosh has used this aspect of British history in his novels. Chapter-V is a result of the research how the history of Britain has been reconstructed in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. They waged wars on many countries to enslave them and kept on their policy of expansion. Tha’mma in *The Shadow Lines* rightly says,
“It took those people along time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of wars and bloodshed.................................War is their religion. That’s what it takes to make a country.”  

2 (The Shadow Lines, P.85)

Britain as a country has ruled many countries and has exploited the treasures of those countries. History of Burma is very minutely reconstructed in The Glass Palace. It starts with the treacherous dethronement of King Thibaw. It was a conspiracy planned by Britishers to acquire Burma. Inhumane treatment of the Royal family, their exile in India and exploitation of Burmese peasants are narrated very beautifully. There was only one intention of Britishers to establish their colonial rule and to expand it to maximum countries.

Behind most of the wars in which Britain was involved, there was commercial interest. It is amply highlighted by Ghosh in his novels. Burma was famous for its teakwood and Britishers were interested in having their monopoly on that teakwood business. King Thibaw was against it, so they dethroned him by hatching a conspiracy. In the same way, opium was most yielding trade and had huge demand in China, so they did it by illegally exporting into China.

Chinese government noticed the hazards of the opium trade for the youth and for the country, so they banned the opium trade. Britishers were not ready to lose such a handsome gain. They opposed Chinese government in the name of ‘Free Trade’. On the same ground they waged
war against China. Historically, first opium war was fought between East India Company and China from 18 March 1839 to 29 August 1842 resulting in Treaty of Nanking. Second opium war was fought from 8 October 1856 to 24 October 1860 resulting in treaty of Tientsin.

Ghosh starts it with the Cultivation of opium in India and ends it with the opium war at Canton. He has also interwoven the issue of illegal transportation of men power to the colonised countries to work for the East India Company. From India, Britishers got both, raw opium and men power for their local and foreign businesses. All these aspects of British Rule have been treated and reconstructed by Ghosh in his novels. They were so treated that reader takes it only as the journey of Ibis and Anahita, but the story from cultivation of opium to opium war runs parallel.

History of Britain is implied with the history of Burma and India because it was British Colonisers who ruled these two countries for more than 100 years. History of China is also implied with the history of Britain as they fought two opium wars against each other. Ghosh has selected a common thing among these countries and has very beautifully used it for his novels and in away has reconstructed the history of Britain too.
Major Findings of the Researcher:

1. There is a direct relation of history with the novels of Amitav Ghosh.

2. There is a harmonious amalgamation of real history and imagination in the novels of Amitav Ghosh.

3. Ghosh uses real historical characters in some of his novels.

4. History in the novels of Amitav Ghosh ranges from personal history to international history.

5. Unrecorded history of marginalised finds place in his novels.

6. Political, Cultural and Social history have been treated in his novels.

7. Ghosh uses history as an instrument to suit and support the themes of his novels.

8. Ghosh reconstructs the history of India, Asian countries and British Colonialism.

9. Ghosh reconstructs the subaltern, marginal, forgotten or suppressed histories that have been neglected by the historians.
10. Ghosh recreates, rewrites and transforms the Anglo-colonial
biased histories that affected the life of commoners of the
colonised nations.

11. Novels of Ghosh are a product of deep study and research of
social anthropology, history, science, mythology, migration,
trade and commerce.

12. Ghosh treats history and fiction in such a way that they seem
inseparable and are complementary to each other.

Ghosh used authentic sources to trace the historical events. He
travelled a lot in order to relate the history with his theme and characters.
That is the reason why his treatment of history is completely apt. Though
apparently the novels are based on history, characters or theme
dominates over the history. That is the real difference between written
history and a reconstruction of history. All the aspects of novel are so
well-designed that we can’t even notice the difference between real
historical events and the imaginary events. Credit is on the part of author
Amitav Ghosh who makes reality seem to be imagination and
imagination seem to be reality.

Ghosh reconstructs the past mixing it with imagination of
fiction. He has portrayed the character of Raja Neel Ratan on the
historical figure, Raja Nand Kumar of Bengal in the eighteenth century. Raja Nand Kumar failed to win the favour of the East India Company’s governor, warren Hastings. So he was charged of forgery and was kept in prison under pitiable condition. In the novel, *Sea of poppies*, Ghosh has depicted the character of Raja Neel Ratan in relation to the opium trade. Raja Neel, his father and the Zamindars of Rakshali were permitted and sought by then company officials to obtain the finances for the opium trade with China. Due to the ban and prohibition on opium by China, Raja Neel faces the financial ruin, the company officials bring the charge of forgery against him. Thus only the setting is changed by Ghosh, but the character remains the same. Though this character has been derived from history, we enjoy it as an imaginary one.

Amitav Ghosh is a multi talented writer, so are the researches on his writings. So many researches have been undertaken by several scholars all over the world, on different aspects of the fiction of Ghosh. Nationalism, post-colonialism, issues of marginalised, historical aspects- are some of the views with which his works have been researched. Though there are lots of researches on his works, there are still many chances of research and deep research on his works.

Though he has dealt with the cultural history of many nations and states, nobody has based his research on this aspect of his writing. So there are chances for the scholars in this direction. He gives such a detailed description of the place, food, rituals, clothing that we come to
know about the culture of that particular state or country. Ghosh has studied a social anthropology, so it is obvious to have the knowledge of cultural varieties of different places.

In his many novels, British colonialism occurs and recurs. *The Glass Palace*, *Sea of Poppies* and other two parts of the *Ibis* trilogy are full of colonial history. This aspect has not been taken as a broad subject by the researches. It has been taken only as the subsidiary to the history of India or Burma, but it can be a subject for deep study or independent research. There is enough matter available in his novels and other fictions to have research on this aspect.

Linguistic variety is also a key aspect of Ghosh as a literary writer. English, Burmese, Cantonese, dialect of Lascar are used very effectively in his novels. Ghosh is a writer with rich linguistic power and variety. He has chosen language and dialect to suit the place, occasion and occupation. His works can also be studied and researched from linguistic point of view. This aspect of his novels worths a deep study.

Present research will be very much helpful in carrying out other researches on the works of this author. History and literature are interrelated and interdependent. Many writers, in India and abroad, have based their literary creations on history knowingly. On the other hand, some works indirectly reflect the history or represent the historical period or age. Some writers have special skill to use history as a background in a very imaginative way. Amitav Ghosh is one of such
differently talented writers. He very rightly says, “If history forgets, fiction reminds us of many things.”