CHAPTER-V

RECONSTRUCTING HISTORY OF BRITAIN

Britain has a long history sharing the history of many countries that were under its colonial rule. Most of the countries of the world have shared history with Britain. So when we talk about these countries, a reference of Britain comes inevitably. The writers who have written their fiction focusing around the period of colonial rule, are knowingly or unknowingly dealing with the history of Britain. History of Britain is thus reconstructed many a times and in many varying forms with different angles depending on the writers. Amitav Ghosh is one of such writers who are known as the post-colonial writers.

Social, political, cultural and economic history of Britain is reflected in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. In his novels, Britain is in the form of coloniser. Colonialism has a long history and has a long lasting impression on the colonised. Ghosh tries to write from the colonised’s point of view in his novels. We can see an important role of Britain and Britishers in almost all of his novels. Revolts, Independence movement, Suppression of the Movement, Economic Interests, East India Company, Opium War, Second World War, Partition period have been dealt in by Ghosh in his novels. They are mostly focusing on the involvement of Britain.
Though Britishers had left the countries, the effect of colonialism was there even after years of their leaving. Political, cultural, social changes were going on with the effect of colonialism. It was like a rebirth of the nations. Though these all are post-colonial effects, they have their roots in the colonial rule. Ghosh has written his novels relating past and present or the story moving from past to present and the vice-versa. So obviously he is treating colonial rule in order to show its effects afterwards.

Ghosh’s engagement with some of the serious issues facing contemporary ex-colonies in Asia and Africa is reflected in his novels. Each one of his novels, whether it is *The Circle of Reason* or *The Shadow Lines* or *The Glass Palace* or *The Hungry Tide* or *Sea of Poppies*, is concerned with the impact of the colonial encounter on the political, social and cultural lives of the now independent countries like, India, Bangladesh, Burma and many more. The novel like *The Glass Palace* contains the story of real history of Burma under the colonial rule and how it became independent.

*The Glass Palace* is all about the British imperialism and its policy of colonial expansion and the use of colonised to the extent of exploitation for achieving their interests. The novel is the best example of Britisher’s treacherous plan to expand their rule by dethroning the King of Thibaw. It was the policy of Britishers to intrude any country in the name of business relation and then to take over the country just to
fulfil their desire of economic gain. The target of Britishers is The Burmese Teak and the Malayan rubber that attracted them to have large profit earning object of that time. Anjan Kumar has rightly said in this connection,

“Once the colonial power is firmly established and has a clear military superiority over the hapless and unprepared native rulers, it looks it for, and often fabricates, dispute with an inconvenient native ruler so as to justify dethroning him, annexing his state, and sending him into exile.”¹ (Anjan Kumar, P.131-132)

It was a dispute in which British timber company was in the wrong, but they used the same for waging a war against King Thibaw in Mandalay. He was dethroned and thus the monarchy came to an unexpected end in Burma. The intention behind the war was clearly stated in the statement of Saya John while discussing the issue with Rajkumar. He says,

“The English are preparing to send a fleet up the Irrawaddy. There’s going to be a war. Father says that they want all the teak in Burma. The King won’t let them have it so they are going to do away with him.”² (The Glass Palace, P.15)

As per their pre-determined policy the King with all his family members and some attendants was sent to exile in Ratnagiri. He was not given enough time to prepare or think about anything. His departure from
the palace was not that of the status he used to enjoy. He was sent to exile because Britishers did not want him to be a hurdle even in future. He was not even given a chance to present his side. It was a one-sided decision of the Britishers to send him and his family to exile. Queen Supayalat strongly opposes their hypocrisy when she says,

“The English alone understand liberty, we were told; they do not put Kings and princes to death; they rule through laws. If that is so, why has King Thebaw never been brought to trial? Where are these laws that we hear of? Is it a crime to defend your country against an invader? Would the English not do the same?”

(The Glass Palace, P.150)

It is not only the case with King Thibaw, we find the reference in this very novel about Bahadur Shah Zafar who was exiled to Rangoon by the Britishers. Zafar was the last Mughal emperor. After suppressing the revolt of 1857, he was deposed and was sent to exile. According to the Thonzai Prince, Zafar lived there in a very miserable condition. He was much aged and blind then. As the evidence of his staying there, one street of Rangoon is named after him as Mughal Street. So it was the tradition of Britishers to send the Kings to exile or to keep them away from the mob in order to avoid any kind of issues.

Same is the case with Raja Neel Ratan who fictionally represents 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.

During the colonial rule, they used to exploit the people of colonised country is any possible way. People of India were brought to Burma in the name of employment and were compelled to do the jobs that the Burmese people would feel inferior to do. There were more Indians than the Burmese in Rangoon who were brought there by the Britishers. King on his way to Ratnagiri watches the Indians and felt pity for them. He said,

“The British brought them there, to work in the docks and mills, to pull rickshaws and empty the latrines. Apparently they couldn’t find local people to do these jobs. And indeed, why would the Burmese do that kind of work?”

*The Glass Palace*, P.49

Indians were sent there by the Britishers as the slaves who would work for them. Even their army consisted of the Indians. Two third of their total sepoys were Indians. The sepoys from Hazara Regiment and
the 1st madras Pioneer were the most trusted troops of sepoys. They were used to fight with even the Indians during the Revolt of 1857. Even fighting with their fellow brothers these sepoys showed loyalty to the British. They also fought against Burmese with a great zeal and the Burmese could not defend them.

In the 19th century, Britain was going on expanding their commercial interests, especially in its colonies. India had been the main source of wealth and labour for them. Through this wealth and the military strengthened by Indians, Britain proved their dominance all over the world of the time. In 1833, after the slavery had been banned, Britishers allured poor Indians to provide them employment. They exploited them by recruiting them in Burma, Fiji and Africa, on plantation, in docks, mills and railroads. Remaining others were recruited in their army to fight for them in the country and abroad. Business craving person like Rajkumar served as a mediator to lure the people from India by assuring them to make their fortune in Burma.

British Empire got its impression as a huge government apparatus in addition to having a powerful trading presence. They started imposing its hierarchies and protocols on its colonies. They used the bureaucracy to implement their colonial rules. It was used as an instrument to create their favourable condition in the country under their rule. They treated the colonised countries and their people as the caged
animal. Even they interfered in the matter of marriages of the princesses. In this regard, collector Beni Prasad Dey’s wife Uma says,

“Did this mean that one day all of India would become a shadow of what it had been? Millions of people trying to live their lives in conformity with incomprehensible rules?”

(The Glass Palace, P.136)

Uma’s assumption comes true when later in 1930s man like Arjun were fascinated by the British Raj and joined British Army. Arjun took pride to be a part of a British Army and always justified his decision of joining it. Recalling his experience as an orderly in a hospital in Singapore, Saya John pitied the condition of Indian soldiers in British Army. He treated many very young Indian soldiers who were injured during the war. According to Saya John, they endangered their life only for the sake of a few annas that a coolie could earn easily. This shows the miserable condition of Indian people who joined British Army. Saya John rightly says, “Chinese peasants would never do this- allow themselves to be used to fight other people’s wars with so little profit for themselves.”

(The Glass Palace, P.29-30)

Arjun represents the people who believed the Britishers as the modern and the most civilised people. Arjun always tried to imitate them as far as his conversation, manner and behaviour are concerned. He defended his side while talking with a congressman by saying that he
was there to defend the people of India. He was so fascinated by the western culture that he was unable to decide what is wrong and what is right. His madness for this western culture can be compared with that of Ila in *The Shadow Lines*. She is also very much impressed by the western culture and is willing to lead that kind of ‘free life’. Justifying the western culture she says,

“Do you see why I have chosen to live in London. Do you see, it is only because I want to be free- free of your bloody culture and free of you?” 7 (*The Shadow Lines*, P.88-89)

Ila tries her best to discard her Indianness and lives like a western. Even in her this form, they are not ready to accept her. She lives with the white people sharing her flat with them. Her flat-mates, one Irish scientist and an active Ghanian leader of Anti-Nazi League can’t accept her as one of them. They regard her as a decorative piece and a guest. Here, it is clear that the only external outfit or western manner is not sufficient to get identity as a white. Colour or racial discrimination has been treated very tactfully by Ghosh.

Like Ila, Arjun is also stubborn about his beliefs about the British Army and the military rules and regulations. He can’t realise a purposelessness of his duty. While answering the question asked by Hardy about this purposelessness, Arjun reminds him of the inscription on the wall of Dehradun Military Academy which places the safety of
people and country ahead of any other thing. Hardy here very intelligently puts a logical question before Arjun. He asks,

“Well, didn’t you ever think: this country whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time- what is it? Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don’t have a country- so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time? And why was it that when we took oath it wasn’t to a country but to the King Emperor- to defend the Empire?”  

(The Glass Palace, P.330)

To this very logical question, Arjun replies that it is sufficient to make a career in Army. Hardy again says if the safety of the country comes first, they should stay in the country, but instead they are sent abroad only to fight for the Empire not for India. Kishan Singh was also of the same opinion. People of Indian Independence League called them not as the soldiers but as the hired killers- mercenaries. To great extent, it is right as the Indians in the British Army were paid to fight for the Empire and its expansion not for the nation. A letter from Amreek Singh also urges Arjun and the fellow Indian Armymen to rethink over the purpose of their service. He wrote,

“Brothers, ask yourselves what you are fighting for and why you are here: do you really wish to sacrifice your lives for an Empire that has kept your country in slavery for two hundred years?”  

(The Glass Palace, P.391)
Arjun tears the letter regarding it as a rubbish thing. Hardy is not able to recognise the real enemy with whom he is fighting. He is not of getting credit for winning it or getting blame for loosing as they are just the employees not soldiers in the real sense. Here too, Arjun says that he does not feel the same. Being a soldier with patriotism and being just an instrument is quite different. Here, they are being used by the Britishers to win the battles for them.

Racial Discrimination is also found in the novel when the Indian Army Units were staying in Malaya. Firstly, we find it with reference to the boards hanging outside the clubs having the warning ‘No Asiatics allowed’. It was under colonial rule, so obviously the clubs were for white people only. Arjun and his men were surprised to see it. Same boards were found everywhere in restaurants, clubs, beaches and trains too. Arjun’s friend Kumar regards it as a ‘Colour Bar’. In Singapore, the pools were opened for Asiatics only after the others specially whites left the pools. Here, Kumar very sarcastically says, ‘We’re meant to die for this colony-but we can’t use the pools’. Arjun too, faced such situation while attending meeting or dining with the white officers, but he was unable to realise it. He believed it to be the superiority complex of the officers.

When the Japanese invaded Burma, many Indians were on the target of the Japanese and also of the Burmese natives. So there was special evacuation was going on to rescue the people and to move them
to safer places. Dinu persuades Alison to leave Burma and to go to Singapore where she can get evacuation train. Alison, Saya and Dinu reached there, but to their astonishment they were stopped at the entrance. On asking about the reason, the guards replied that it was only for the ‘whites’. Here too, we find a reference of colour or racial discrimination. Even in the war time critical condition Englishmen thought of only themselves.

Indians as the British Army men are ready to die for the Empire. They are endangering their life for the expansion and safety of the Empire. On the other hand Britishers show selfishness by evacuating only the white people in the situation of war. They are concerned only with their own safety and monetary gain. For that they can go to any extent. They used and exploited the colonised people for their commercial and political purposes. Arjun, in the end realises the fact when they were left on the war front to die. They had to run hither-thither to save their life, but they could not. They sacrificed their life for the British, not for the own country.

English people are not exception from the exploitative attitude of the British. Young Europeans were recruited on the duty in jungle. They can lead a life of only two or three years before the malaria or dengue caught them and they have to be hospitalised. They grow prematurely aged at the age of only nineteen or twenty. British Company knew that very well, so they try to take maximum profit out of them before they got
ill. They are left in such a condition almost thousands miles away from their homes that they can’t escape the place or situation. As Saya John puts it,

“The company knows this very well; it knows that within a few years these men will be prematurely aged..............during those few years the company must derive such profit from them as it can.”¹⁰ (*The Glass Palace*, P.74)

Britishers also taught the Burmese people to use animals for the human profit. They used to use the elephants only in pagodas and palaces, for wars and ceremonies. With the entry of the British in the teakwood business, they taught the native people to use elephants for the commercial purpose by girdling trees and moving logs. In this way Britishers showed them another way of earning through animals. Credit for this should be given to the British though there was selfishness on their part.

Use of bureaucracy and control over it, can also be seen in this novel. It was the main characteristic of the British rule to use bureaucracy as an instrument to work for them and their Empire. Bipin Baharey Dey is the best example of such kind of system developed by the Britishers. He is deputed as a caretaker-cum-spy to keep watch on the King Thibaw and his family. He is not allowed take decision on his own. He knew the miserable condition of the royal family, but he was not able to it by his own decision. He has been just a mediator. He was well
aware of the charges of Queen Supayala. He feels ashamed at his helplessness and perceives the immoral nature of his role, as an officer of British government with the sense of a loss in his own self, he chooses the death as the only way out.

Bipin Baharey Dey and Arjun are the victims of the same circumstances. They realises their own mental subjugation to the imperial racist-oppressive ideology some time after they have been the beneficiaries of its practices that divided the colonized people themselves. At first they enjoyed their position in upper strata, in the colonial power structure. But gradually the inherent injustice and falsity of the empires claims of humane liberal civilisation purposes are revealed to them and they become disillusioned.

Ghosh has also interwoven the independence movements of Burma and India from the British colonial rule. In Burma, it was General Aung San who worked for the liberation of Burma from the British and also from the Japanese. He played a key role in the independence of Burma. He was the chief leader of the Burma Independence Army. With the help of Japanese, he was successful in getting rid of the British rule. He also succeeds in kicking out the Japanese from Burma. As a result of these invaluable services of Aung San, he won the first National Election held in 1947.

As far as India is concerned, there are many movements working towards independence of India. Ghosh also uses as a backdrop for his
novel *The Glass Palace*. Non-cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, Indian Independence League, Indian National Army are treated very beautifully by Ghosh. These movements had a great effect to create a patriotic fervour among the people of India. The target of all these movement was to get independence from the British rule.

Appreciating Ghosh’s talent of writing, with special reference to *The Glass Palace*, Carool Kersten rightly says,

“Apart from its absorbing story, what makes The Glass Palace into special book is the fact that in his history of the British Empire there is hardly an Englishman in sight. The epoch is seen entirely through the eyes of locals the so called colonized people.”

(Kersten, www.rambles/net/ghosh_glasspalacem.html)

All the characters in *The Glass Palace* are from India or from Burma. Though there are some white characters like Allison and Saya John, but they are used in such a way that they do not seem to be English. At the same time, it should be noted that they are minor characters. Main characters are from India or Indian sub-continent. The credit for using them to depict a history of British goes to Ghosh. He has constructed a plot of the novel from the colonised’s point of view, instead of coloniser’s point of view and he succeeds to make it possible without any white character in sight.
Beginning of *The Shadow Lines* and the last two sections of *The Glass Palace* are set against the backdrop of post-war and war condition of the 2\(^{nd}\) World War respectively. In this war Britain had a great role to play and it had to face a disastrous destruction in Britain. It was due to participation of Britain in this war that nations like India and Burma could get independence from them. They loosed the hold over these colonised countries in order to save and support their own country. As a result, after the end of 2\(^{nd}\) World War, colonial rule became weak. It is also one of the reasons for granting independence to the colonised countries like Burma and India.

Ghosh’s Ibis trilogy is also set against the Commercial and Empowerment purpose of the British colonial rule. They found that there were no more chances of extracting money out of the spice trade in India. They opted for another option that is Opium trade. Opium trade had a huge market in China. Taking it as a central idea, Ghosh based his trilogy on Opium War between Britain and China. An indentured labour contract is also interwoven in this trilogy. This trilogy consists of *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015).

Looking at the demand of opium and the profit in this trade East India Company jumped in to this business. Main area of opium produce was the tribal belt between Bengal and Bihar located near the river bank of Ganga. They erected a huge factory in Ghazipur for opium processing. The processed opium was exported illegally to China. They were in need
of raw material or raw opium to be processed in this factory. At that time there were a few opium growers in this region. They targeted the local farmers to be persuaded or compelled for growing opium instead of grains or any other crop. It was almost impossible to persuade them to grow opium willingly. As it was British rule, farmers were compelled to grow opium by allowing them to have some advance money for that. Within a short period, almost all the farmers started growing opium willingly or under the pressure of Colonial rule. Following lines convey the greed of Britishers to encourage opium growing at any cost.

“........now the factory’s appetite for opium seemed never to be sated. Come the cold weather, English sahibs would allow little else to be planted; their agents would go from home to home, forcing cash advances on the farmers, making them sign asami contracts. It was impossible to say no to them.”12 (Sea of Poppies, P.29-30)

If anyone denied or broke the contract, they had to face consequences in the form of loss of income and land too. Their thumb impressions were forged and were paid much less as a reward. White magistrates worked as a mediator and always favoured the British Empire. It would obviously result in poverty of the people. Many a times they faced shortage of grain. Their income was not sufficient enough even to pay the advances.

People like Hukum Singh had to work in the opium factory to earn some extra money. Here too, they were able to earn much less
compared to traditional farming. Working in this factory was also hazardous. Most of the workers in the factory grew *afeemkhor* due to the adverse condition of the work and also the adversity of their own economic condition. Deeti was not able to repair the thatch of her house for years and her husband grew an addict to opium. Hukum Singh dies at an early age due to this addiction. Deeti and her husband are only the representatives of the oppressive condition of the time.

East India Company made handsome profit out of this trade. They went on expanding their business by bullying the farmers to get raw opium and hiring the labourers-cum-slaves to work for them in the factory. They saw a big fortune of this trade in China. Burnham Bros., a shipping company and trading house that had extensive interests in India and China, worked as an agency on behalf of the East India Company to export the processed opium to China. Though it was illegal as far as Chinese laws are concerned, the Britishers were concerned not with the law but with the monetary gain and profit.

East India Company concentrated highly on this trade and did not allow any other to enter this trade. Nobody dared to jump in to this business without the consent of East India Company. They had to either work for it or had to leave the business. Britishers allowed only some of the Indian firms to enter this business, but they are paid commission had to depend on them. They could earn only a part of profit after so much
investment and labour. It is clearly indicated by the author through following lines,

“......for in eastern India, opium was the exclusive monopoly of the British, produced and packaged entirely under the supervision of the East India Company; except for a small group of Parsis, few native-born Indians had access to the trade or its profits.”

*(Sea of Poppies, P.85)*

Though the Britishers were indebted to Rakshali estate, they did not allow them to enter the business. Ancestors of Neel Ratan Halder helped the East India Company to fight against the muslim rulers of Bengal. They played a dual policy by lending money to one side and sepoys to another. When the British were victorious, Halders granted them the permission to establish a business there. Old Halder knew nothing about the British and their intentions. People like Mr. Burnham worked as a mediator between the East India Company and the Rakshali Estate.

Raja Neel Ratan Halder entered this business as a partner of East India Company. Halder had a good credit among the aristocratic people and the landlords of the time. Britishers agreed to make him a partner as they knew that it was possible only through Halder, to persuade the rich people and landlords to invest their money in opium trade. Halder estate was paid ten percent dasturi as a reward. It was a handsome reward at
that time. According to the terms and conditions of the agreement, the business risks and the loss were to be borne by the investors. Here, business skills of the Britishers are obvious to earn maximum profit out of the investments made by local people. They very shrewdly instigated these native people to bear the risks.

Seeing the hazards, the trade of opium was banned in China. There wasn’t much loss on the part of India, but for Britishers, it is almost impossible to balance the economy in the absence of this trade. Under the suspicion of upcoming war, the East India Company and the merchants concerned with it are suspecting the future of their business. It was the most worthy business of the time and the Britishers were not ready to leave it in any condition. In his conversation with Mr. Reid, Burnham clears the reason. He says,

“For the simple reason that British rule in India could not be sustained without opium- that is all there is to it, and let us not pretend otherwise. You are no doubt aware that in some years, the Company’s annual gains from opium are almost equal to the entire revenue of your own country, the United States?”¹⁴

(Sea of Poppies, P.115)

This statement shows the importance of the opium trade for the East India Company. It was the largest business for the Britishers after the spice trade faced downfall. Business policy of the Britishers and the
economic interests were evident in the conversation between Mr. Reid and Burnham. Burnham goes on to say,

“Do you imagine that British rule would be possible in this impoverished land if it were not for this source of wealth? And if we reflect on the benefits that British rule has conferred upon India, does it not follow that opium is this land’s greatest blessings?”  

*(Sea of Poppies, P.115)*

Chinese Emperor came to know about the trade resulting in the addiction and illness on the part of the youth of the country. His men informed him about this trade and the adverse effect of this trade at present and in future. Opium was responsible for ruining the career and the future of the Chinese youth. Bahram came to know about this and the upcoming steps of the Emperor through the Magazine *Chinese Repository*. It contains the message from the Chinese officials to the Emperor. The message is,

“Opium is a poisonous drug, brought from foreign countries. To the question, what are its virtues, the answer is: It raises the animal spirits and prevents lassitude. Hence the Chinese continually runs into its toils.”  

*(River of Smoke, P.132-133)*

Knowing the truth and the future hazards of this trade, the Emperor banned the trade in China. On the other hand, East India Company was not ready to lose this chance of high returns. If the ban
imposed by China stayed longer, it would have resulted in a huge loss on the part of the Company. Here too, they show their business skills by arousing a kind of disapproval about this ban among the merchants concerned with this trade. They planned to compel the King to withdraw the Ban he name of free trade. Merchants who belonged to countries other than Britain did not know the real benefit of this disapproval. There is a very less benefit on their part, but they were used by the Britishers to oppose the Ban. This strategy of Britishers gave birth to the opium war.

Britain earned double profit from exporting opium and importing Chinese tea. This balanced the inflow and outflow of the silver in Britain. In Britain and America, Chinese tea trade had grown as a principal source of profit for East India Company. The taxes on it accounted for fully ten percent of Britain’s revenues. There was also a huge demand of Chinese silk, porcelain and lacquer-ware. On the other hand China insisted only on domestic products. Ban on Opium trade resulted in an immense outpouring of silver from Britain. Zadig rightly says, “Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that without it British would not be able to hold on to their Eastern Colonies; they cannot forgo those profits.”17 (River Of Smoke, P.174)

Business policy and the commercial interests of British have been used by Ghosh to the great extent. They have been dealt in directly and indirectly in The Glass Palace and the Ibis trilogy. The world is well acquainted with this aspect of British Empire. Their notion of expansion
at any cost is obvious in these novels. Imposing their interests on the colonies and to compel them to work for them was also the Chief characteristic of this empire and it has been very beautifully treated by Ghosh. They dared to break laws and even to wage war against the countries that opposed their commercial interests.

Neel Ratan Halder was brought on trial in the case of forgery. Many Pundits, Munshis and many English men too, appealed the court to give relaxation to Neel on the religious and some social grounds. The judge who was an Englishman, rejected all the appeals saying that the crime that Neel had done was an intolerable offence. Judge set a good example of justice when he announced that only the forfeiture of property was an inadequate penalty for such a crime. He pronounced the exile of Neel in addition to seizing his property. The judge nullified all the appeals by saying,

“ But we see no merit whatsoever in the contention that men of high caste should suffer a less severe punishment than any other person; such a principle has never been recognized nor ever will be recognized in English law, the very foundation of which lies in the belief that all are equal who appear before it....”18

(Sea of Poppies, P.238)

We feel proud to know about such a great judiciary system erected by Britishers in India. But when the occasion comes to judge the
case in which Englishmen or the interest of the English was implied, they do not care for the law. King Thibaw was exiled from Burma without giving any chance of judicial defence or having his side. Chinese Emperor tried to eradicate opium trade from China with the help of law. Looking at the profit from this trade Britishers opposed this law. So it is clear that Britishers did not believe in equality of justice but only in safeguarding their political and commercial interests. Ghosh has brought out these contradictions of British interests in his novels.

New Commissioner, Lin Zexu, was appointed in Canton especially to eradicate and outlaw the opium trade. In his first proclamation, he urges the foreigners to co-operate and surrender their ships loaded with the chests of opium. He reminds them of the rewards and profits given by the Chinese authorities. The British are not ready to succumb to this lawful demand of the commissioner calling him a mad and a tyrant. It is a duty of any country to respect the laws of another country, but instead of obeying them, the British plan to make out an alternative to carry on this business by erecting a trading centre in Archipelago Island that has been seized by the British Government. Mr. Lindsay, in this regard says,

“Let us be honest: the first of these propositions- of giving up the opium trade- will not be adopted while any other possibility remains open. So there is only one plain and obvious alternative. It
is the formation of a settlement under British Rule on the coast of
China.”19 (River of Smoke, P.421)

He advises to do the business from a neutral place which is not
under Chinese authority. From there, local Chinese smugglers would do
the rest work of smuggling it into China. Mr. Lindsay adds, ‘Western
respectability would thus be preserved and the burden of blame would
fall clearly on the Chinese.’20 (River of Smoke, Pg.422). Britishers here,
play a double game of earning profit from the trade and blaming China
for the same trade. East India Company encouraged the opium trade for
its own sake, but the blame falls on China. Mr. Jardine in his farewell
speech held China responsible for this trade. He says,

“We are not smugglers, gentlemen! It is the Chinese officers who
smuggle and who connive at and encourage smuggling, not we; and
then look at the East India Company: why, the father of all
smuggling and smugglers is the East India Company!”21

(River of Smoke, P.405)

It is through the letter of Commissioner Lin Zexu addressed to
Queen Victoria that the commercial interests of Britain were revealed.
Lin blames Britain and the East India Company for ruining the youth of
China by smuggling opium and making the youth addict of it. He raises a
very logical question before the Queen how one can sell the object that
he himself feels hazardous for his own people. Selling or consumption of
Opium was banned in Britain taking into account the future of the country. It shows the dual policy of Britain to refrain from this drug in its own territory and selling it in other territories.

They also tried to justify this trade in the name of religion. Burnham says, ‘Jesus Christ is free trade and free trade is Jesus Christ.’\(^{22}\) (\textit{Sea of Poppies}, P.116) According to the British anything against ‘free trade’ is against the God. Even they wanted to impose Christianity on the Chinese through this trade. They regard opium trade as a blessing of the almighty. As Burnham adds,

> “If it is God’s will that opium be used as an instrument to open China to his teachings, then so be it. For myself, I confess I can see no reason why any Englishman should abet the Manchu tyrant in depriving the people of China of this miraculous substance.”\(^{23}\)

\(^{(\textit{Sea of Poppies}, \text{P.116})}\)

Here, the tactics of British Empire to achieve their commercial goals through religion are clearly indicated by Ghosh. Expansionism of trade and religion run parallel with the expansion of colonial rule. In many countries they ruled, they used the same technique of expansion. There was an inter-relation of trade, religion and British rule. They supported and promoted one another and lastly proved beneficial for the British.
Another aspect of British rule that was indentured labour or *girmit* system is also used by Ghosh in his *Ibis* trilogy particularly. For them, the Asian and African countries were the main sources of labour. They used these sources in an exploitative way. People of these countries were recruited by East India Company for the labour work. They were not employees but the slaves working for the company with a little reward and by endangering their own life and leaving their families to suffer in their absence. They were transported to other countries like Marich (Now Mauritius), Malasiya, Burma and many others.

They were transported through slave ships like a commodity as per the requirement. Many of them died during the journey and those who survived did not return to their home. They were assigned the inferior and hazardous works. Some Indians like Burnham and Rajkumar did the work for the British Company to provide such *girmitiyas* in accordance with the requirement. It is revealed through a letter to be handed over to Me. Burnham. It contains the message from M. d’Epinay to send coolies.

“My canes are rotting in the field. Tell Mr. Burnham that I need men. Now that we may no longer have slaves in Mauritius, I must have coolies, or I am doomed.”

*(Sea of Poppies*, P.21)

The very treatment that was given to the *girmitiyas* during their voyage, as described by Ghosh, shows the cruelty of Britishers. After signing the agreement, they were not allowed to oppose anything. They
were treated rather as the slaves. Slavery was prohibited in America and there was an effect of it everywhere, but Britain did not follow it. They recruited slaves in the name of coolies. The coolies who died mid way could not even get right to have cremation. It shows the extent of cruelty waged upon them. Here too, Britain sustains its commercial interests at the cost of human rights of the coolies.

In *The Circle of Reason*, another special facet of the British is treated by Ghosh. Though it is about the conflict between the tradition and the modernization, it indirectly points to the westernization of the Indian and Asian trades. Ghosh uses the adverse effects of western industrialisation on the traditional small industries, as a backbone of this novel. History of weaving, for what India was famous and had earned international credit, was shown to be struggling against the new technologies introduced by Britain and other western countries. Narrating the history of weaver’s trade, Balaram says to Alu,

“......[the loom] has created not separate worlds but one, for it has never permitted the division of the world. The loom recognizes no continents and no countries. It has tied the world together.”

*(The Circle of Reason, P.59)*

Then famous and the international trade has come to the verge of downfall due to the industrialisation of the trade. Europe and many other countries produced cloths with the help of huge machines and exported
them to the colonized countries making the local small industries collapse down. Extending his lecture on the history of the loom by placing it in the context of British imperial trade, Balaram asserts,

“Lancashire poured out its waterfalls of cloth, and [the] once.....peaceful Englishmen.......of Calcutta......turned their trade into garrotte to make every continent safe for the cloth of Lancashire, strangling the very weavers and techniques they had crossed oceans to discover. Millions of Africans and half of America were enslaved by cotton” 📌 (The Circle of Reason, P.61)

The British ravaged India’s formerly thriving weaving and handicrafts industries through an exploitative system of tariffs which prevented the export of Indian textiles. Simultaneously, Britain used its colonial sovereignty to allow India’s cotton plants to be used in the production of Lancashire textiles, which were then exported back to India at inflated prices. This British policy proved to be a double blow for Indian cotton industry.

Issue of commercial interest has also been hinted in The Circle of Reason. In his journey, Alu reaches Al-Gazhira which was then famous for Oil resources and the industries for its processing. Britishers’ craving for getting oil power is obvious when Ghosh writes,

“A few years ago the British had found oil in some of the kingdoms around al-Ghazira, and already there were rumours that al-Ghazira
was just a speck of sand floating on a sea of oil. So, the British, for the first time, sent a resident to al-Ghazira, to make the Malik sign a treaty which would let the British dig for oil.”

(\textit{The Circle of Reason}, P.268)

Certain historical events, such as Indian nationalist struggle of the 1930s, the Bangladesh war of 1971, and the international tide of migration to the Middle-East of the 1970s onwards, are foregrounded in \textit{The Circle of Reason}. But the novel is more concerned with the British colonization of India. Through the character of Balaram, Ghosh has dealt with the impact of British education policies on post-colonial India.

The novel is based upon the debate concerning the interrelationship of science, technology and nationalism in India. The period of this debate is almost the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The debate also seems to be between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. Main advocates on the part of ‘tradition’ are Ram Mohan Roy, Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru, whereas on the part of ‘modernity’ there were colonial thinkers like William Jones and Macaulay. Ghosh does not make it like an encounter between East and west. He, rather, problematizes ‘the science is West and tradition is East’ dichotomy.

In the colonial context, British always tried to establish that the discourse or reason was their exclusive property. In India, the people were stereotyped, illogical, while Britain’s scientific and technological
practices were shown to be proof of their superior reasoning. Western science was also portrayed as being objective, culturally neutral, benevolent in intention and allowing access to ‘truth’. This belief justified the colonialist argument that eastern countries were inferior, childlike and in need of guidance from the alleged archetype of advanced reason, the West.

It is worth-mentioning here that it was only after the Industrial Revolution that the distinction between science and pseudo-science assumed the rigidity that we know today. This point is perhaps most graphically illustrated in colonial India, where the British administrators’ desire to promote science as a visual spectacle to the illiterate masses of India caused mesmerism to gain temporary acceptance within mainstream science, even as late as mid-nineteenth century.

The power of science was tremendously important for European expansion, providing justification for imperial nations top continue their exploitation of Asia and Africa, under the rubric of the ‘Civilising Mission’. No doubt, it has also helped the colonised nations a lot with science and technology. But it rather helped the colonisers to establish their power and to strengthen it. Thus, scientific and technological advances worked as the tools of empire. As Claire Chambers puts it,

“...scientific and technological advances may be interpreted as ‘tools of empire’. They were deployed in a practical way, in the
shape of advances in weaponry, medicine, transportation and communications, to achieve global hegemony.” 28

(Claire Chambers, P.41)

Under British rule, many western scholars set out to interpret India and build up a storehouse of data about its geography, history, peoples, languages, and so forth. British administrators used this to legitimize colonial rule and simultaneously attempted to stage western knowledge as constituting a superior and universally applicable worldview. In this way, the issue of ‘knowledge’ in the colonial context was entangled in a complex web of power relations.

Ghosh’s allusions to a vast range of scientific projects encourage the reader to think about how western science drastically alters, and yet is itself hybridized by its encounter with, Indian society. In this novel, Ghosh makes the important point that science, technology and medicine were not conveyed to India by the British in a one way process of transfer, but were in fact involved in a complex series of cross-cultural exchanges, translations and mutations.

This thought has been dealt in this novel and it runs throughout the novel. Balaram upholds the thought of scientific reason. It is supported by many characters and events in the novel. Gopal, for example, historicizes the practice if reason and views it as a source of power. He believes that the reason discovers itself through events and
people. Indirectly it suggests that the scientific reason is a product of history and society.

British history is related to more or less extent with the history of the countries which were under their colonial rule. They ruled almost all the colonised countries in order to exploit their commercial resources. While dealing with the history of these countries, British history also appears to be treated whether directly or indirectly. British history is so closely and largely interwoven with the history of colonised nations that sometimes it seems inseparable from each other. Ghosh has dealt directly with British history in *The Glass Palace*, but it seems that no novel written by him is out of the footprints of British history.

May it be intentional or unintentional on the part of Ghosh, but it is certain that without it the novels would have been incomplete. In each novel, he has dealt with different themes with different settings, but he succeeds in intermingling the real history with the imaginative plot and story. In his hands, the history becomes so fictional that it is almost impossible to separate them.