LANGUAGE, HISTORY AND SOCIETY: AN ASSESSMENT OF AMITAV GHOSH'S SELECT NOVELS

SUMMARY
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Summary

The present thesis is an analysis of the select novels of Amitav Ghosh, one of the most serious writers crafting fiction in English today, from the perspective of language, history and society. Post 1980 Indian English fictional scene has become variegated, complex and thematically richer. In the changed contemporary scenario reality, instead of being treated as stable, monolithic, absolute or transcendental in nature, is considered to be pluralistic, provisional and contextual. Corresponding to these ideas, the fictional reality depicted in contemporary Indian English writing is comprehended as constructed and discursive instead of being mimetic or representative. Postcolonial perspectives have also impacted the critical and the creative aspects of Indian English fiction. How the colonial rulers created a particular image of their subject races to perpetrate their hold on them forms an important feature of the emerging forms of narrative. The variety of life that forms the subject matter of postcolonial creative and the critical writings also includes different forms of oppressed human existence even after the end of British Imperialism.

The postcolonial fictional writings often provide a revisiting to history and contest through its existing interpretation. The fiction writers often mix fact and fiction to re-examine the earlier happenings, incidents, views and assumptions. Their major concern being the nature of reality that existed during the colonial period, these writers often concentrate on the political and social happenings with a view to contest the academic or the accepted versions about them. In the process, these writings use the historical facts and references to persons and places to subvert the earlier discourses. Another aspect of the
presentation of contemporary social reality and history is the interaction between the majority view and a marginalized consciousness.

The fictionalisation of contemporary history in the works of contemporary Indian English fiction writers also brings out a changed perspective. Instead of presenting historical truth from monolithic view of the governing consciousness of the author, the contemporary writers tend to provide multiple perspectives. It highlights the constructed nature not only of the historical truth but also that of the different perspectives. In spite of the presentation of the political implications of the constructed reality the involvement of multiple perspectives tends to make their works artistic. It saves their works from being propaganda. The intervention of politics in common human experience also finds expression through multiple points of view. In the process what gains significance in relation to historical events is not the truth but truths.

Language is a specific but complex system of acquiring and using speech sound into communication. It is human capacity and cognitive ability to learn and use sounds, words, signs and symbols. In this sense it is a system (of signs) for encoding and decoding information. Language is a part of narration. It does not exist in vacuum rather it is rooted in cultural and social contexts. Myths, allusions, idioms, proverbs, memories and histories all are an inevitable part of language. Language, therefore, has certain social, political, cultural and climactic relationships where words and speeches evoke certain responses. In this manner society and culture absorb its environmental and contextual behaviours and, in an accumulative process, create and recreate myths and associations. As far as Indian English fiction is concerned language, history and society play a very important role in executing and progressing towards a bright future both for the novel and its exponents.
In the present scenario the role of language has also witnessed tremendous change. Language is no longer treated to be an objective medium used to express or represent already existing reality. Language now is used to construct a world according to the given cultural and socio-historical context instead of representing or expressing stable reality. In the construction of a particular context, language is used to deconstruct and destabilize established systems of understanding. For example, in postcolonial and feminist perspectives language is effectively used to deconstruct established cultural stereotypes. Similarly, the interaction of various cultures has resulted in a cultural mix. It has marked the emergence of a mixing of different languages rejecting the purity of language. The use of a language contesting an understanding of life on hierarchical and binary terms has a special significance in postcolonial and feminist perspectives. Language is used to mark a decolonised state of existence and the rejection of centralised, totalising and unitary views that result in the marginalization and suppression of certain social groups.

All these factors have introduced the inclusion of a variety of elements in fictional works that mark the interdisciplinary nature of literature, particularly fiction. A novel today includes the elements of biography, history, sociology, anthropology, fantasy, romance, journalism etc. Similarly, the art forms like film, advertisement and computer generated images also form a part of fictional writings. The existence of a variety of elements destabilizes the traditional norms governing the understanding of literature. Therefore, an understanding of recent fiction writing requires a changed perspective which is not based on the fixed notions of canonical literature. In contemporary Indian English fiction the recent novels of Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Khushwant Singh etc. mark the inclusion of the elements of different art forms making their works interdisciplinary in nature.
Consequently, a shift from traditionally accepted standards and forms of life to the popular and marginalized forms of life, and from fixed literary norms of presentation to altogether new, striking and wonderful has resulted in the writings of contemporary Indian writers as well as the writers of the Indian diaspora such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arvind Adiga, M.G. Vassanji, Hari Kunzru and several others.

Amitav Ghosh is acknowledged by many as one among the finest practitioners of the genre who emerged out of the post-Midnight’s Children boom in Indian English fiction in the 1980s. He has written consistently good novels and non-fictional prose works which have won great acclaim both in India and abroad. Critics have recognized his extraordinary virtuosity as a faithful chronicler of the contemporary world, one who has enhanced our knowledge of buried histories and has borne an eloquent witness to some of the momentous events of our times. Amitav Ghosh's oeuvre comprises seven major novels and five important works of non-fiction.

Amitav Ghosh is a novelist of unusual variety in whose works travel, history, cultural commentary, political reportage shade into one another, the whole permeated with ruminations on freedom, power, violence and pain. This preoccupation with a plethora of experiences, issues and stories that his works deal with can perhaps be traced to the exceedingly varied experiences that he had as a child accompanying his diplomat father to different parts of the world. Indeed, a survey of his fiction reveals an author who revels in the challenges of depicting people from diverse backgrounds and histories, and telling their individual stories that are set off against the broader sweep of historical events and contexts.
Amitav Ghosh, as a writer, drives his strength from transforming forgotten stories, the histories of subalterns who were hitherto considered outside history itself, into major and significant, if not, grand narratives. His work is characterized by a thematic concern with modernity, globalization and the violent production of the modern nation-state. Ghosh’s writing is constantly attentive to details of local people and places, while also demonstrating their imbrications in global historical movement. Through his consistent critique of the operation of empire and the legacy of the colonial encounter, Amitav Ghosh emphasizes the impact of colonialism on shaping modern understanding of subjectivity and nationhood.

In order to make an assessment of the select novels of Amitav Ghosh from the perspective of language, history and society, as depicted in them, a comprehensive but uncomplicated scheme of chapter division has been followed. The thesis consists of the following chapters:

Chapter I : Introduction
Chapter II : *The Calcutta Chromosome*
Chapter III : *The Glass Palace*
Chapter IV : *The Hungry Tide*
Chapter V : *Sea of Poppies*
Chapter VI : *River of Smoke*
Chapter VII : Conclusion

Chapter (I) is introductory and expository in focus and presentation. There is a brief analysis of Indian English fiction from its beginning in pre-independence era to the contemporary times with the focus on post 1980 Indian
English fictional scene followed by a synopsis of Amitav Ghosh’s life and writing career, influences on him and his thought processes and a brief introduction to his novels and non-fictional prose works.

Although the Indian English novel emerged into a recognizable form in the 1930s after its false start and gestation during more than six decades, it gained a striking momentum and magnitude only after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981. By the time *Midnight's Children* appeared, the language used in Indian English Fiction had already shed its alienness and exoticity and was getting further enriched by the exploitation of diverse ranges of registers and reverberations. The writers after 1980s show a skilful mastery of forms and innovations. They gave shape to the thematic aspects of conflict between tradition and modernity and resolved it through innovations in stylistics.

The post 1980 generation of Indian authors in English was free of the burden of the consciousness of both English language and novel as a form that belonged to the west. These novelists used English language deftly, covering a larger canvas of emotional, political, cultural, geographical and historical issues. There was gusto of creativity, vigour, hope and confidence surfacing through rich, mischievous language, funny, comic and humorous approach that reigns their writings. There was an awareness of national and international developments reflected in themes woven around the displaced, marginalized modern man and uninhibited modifications in the genre. These works were advance in theme, use of language, especially English, style and technique. They set their premises of writing around socio-political, cultural and national issues that emerged after independence in India and later shifted this focus to the individual’s quest for personal existence, identity and social relationships.
Contemporary Indian English fictional scene has become variegated, complex and thematically richer. The writers settled abroad and the ones who divide their time between India and abroad have contributed much to this rapidly developing sub-genre of English literature. Now Indian English literature no longer remains limited to the writings necessarily of the sons of the soil. It has broadened the scope of fictional concerns of these writers from purely Indian to the global and transnational.

The diaspora writers in particular interweave the Indian and the global that marks the emergence of cultural mix at a mass level in the times impacted by globalization and unprecedented growth in the field of technology and communication. Their writings show how the developments in one part of the world have immediate and wider impact in different parts of the world. Their fictional works become more significant for giving expression to cross-cultural encounter from a different perspective. The writings of Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh, M.G. Vassanji, V.S.Naipaul and Hari Kunzru, to name a few, provide an inside view of the problems faced by the displaced people in their adopted homes in a way that questions the traditional understanding of the concepts like home, nation, native and alien. These writers contest essentialist nature of the difference between cultures premised on binary division informing the east and the west. Whereas the earlier writers depicting cross-cultural encounter often created stereotypical forms of life and characters to mark the essential difference between the cultures, diaspora writers often contest fixed notions of identity and stable norms that govern life at home and abroad. Diaspora fiction highlights an altogether different attitude of the people from the erstwhile colonies in the postcolonial times.

Contemporary writers hailing from the previously colonized nations, particularly India, explore forms of life that existed during the British rule and
expose the subtle strategies employed to make the colonized people take their subjugated position as something natural and transcendental. These writers also bring out the functioning of almost the same power politics that defines the relations between the power wielding people and the people kept at the margins even after the end of political imperialism. A number of contemporary writers fictionalize these aspects of life and the postcolonial critics analyze and expose the way colonialists propagated constructed reality about different societies and cultures as the reality. The theoretical perspectives used for the purpose are usually based on the insights provided by Michael Foucault, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and the other postcolonial thinkers. All these ideas contest monolithic, unitary and totalitarian views about reality and its understanding.

Linguistic, historical, social and national issues are very important themes under the wider term ‘Postcolonialism’. It defines the aftermath of colonization in the literary and social world that has been affected by colonial process. The domination of European countries, primarily England, over the rest of the world began in fifteenth century. By the end of nineteenth century England was the single largest imperial power ruling over the whole world. Postcolonialism started right from the time of Britishers invasion in those countries which are now known as Colonies. Colonization brought with it the conflict of social, historical and cultural identities. There was an inherent clash between the natives, indigenous precolonial cultures, and the culture imposed on the natives by the imperial forces.

During late 1980s or rather early 1990s, ‘Postcolonialism’ emerged as a discipline in the literary study. This resulted in a drastic change in the literature of that period. Literature written during this period has been placed under the umbrella term ‘Commonwealth Literature’ or ‘New Literatures in English’. In other words, it undertakes those literary works that are influenced by colonization. This discipline has got wider acknowledgement and applicability
under the influence of the works of certain eminent critics like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, Gareth Griffith, etc. Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffith rightly observe:

These writers also work to reclaim the past, because their own histories were often erased or discredited under imperialism, and to understand their own culture and personal identities and chart their own futures, on their own terms rather than the terms superimposed on them by imperialist ideology and practice. (Ashcroft et al 1989:151)

With the advent of New Literatures in English the way towards a possible study of the effects of colonization in and between writings in ‘English’ and writings in indigenous language opened. These writers also gave proper attention to native languages along with English. They rather tried to mingle English with native languages which incarnated English in more indigenized form than a foreign language. What especially marked these writers was their experiment with narrative techniques and their use of English language. These post-modern novelists considered language a play thing, to be twisted and moulded as required. They gradually realized their commitments ‘to self’ in the form of self-expression and self-assertion. While writers like Vikram Seth, Upmanyu Chatterjee, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh threw light upon the relationship of social, historical and political aspects of the country as well as the freedom of the individual, women writers such as Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur etc. broke the long silence and gave voice to Indian women’s plight.

A great literary, postcolonial writer, philosopher and anthropologist, Amitav Ghosh possesses a vigilant sense of perceiving human condition, society, culture, behavior, language and history in a perfectly interesting way. He is highly acclaimed in the literary world for his novels, travel writings and
journalism. Amitav Ghosh was born in 1956 in Calcutta. The son of a former lieutenant in the British Indian army, Ghosh spent his childhood in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran, and India. He completed his B.A. in history at St. Stephen's College, New Delhi, in 1976. Following the completion of his M.A. in sociology from Delhi University in 1978, he went to Oxford University to study social anthropology, and earned an M.Phil. in 1979 and a Ph.D. in 1982. During his Ph.D. research, Ghosh conducted field work in the village of Lataifa, Egypt, an experience that subsequently became the basis for his book *In An Antique Land* (1993). Following his doctoral studies, Ghosh worked as a journalist for the *Indian Express* newspaper. He has taught and researched at a number of institutions, including the Department of Sociology, Delhi University (1987); the Departments of Literature and Anthropology, University of Virginia (1988); the Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania (1989); the Centre for Studies in Social Science, Calcutta (1990-92); the American University in Cairo (1994); and the Department of Anthropology, Columbia University (1994-97). He lives in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife Deborah Baker an editor at *Little Brown and Company*, and their two children, Leela and Nayan.

Ghosh's writing spans a variety of genres. From the travel narratives in *Dancing in Cambodia and At Large in Burma* (1998) to the combination of ghost story, science fiction, and revisionist history that characterizes *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) to the epic narrative scale of *The Glass Palace* (2000), Ghosh's fictional and non-fictional literature demonstrates fluidity across narrative form. His work is characterized by a thematic concern with modernity, globalization, and the violent production of the modern nation-state. Ghosh's writing is constantly attentive to details of local persons and places, while also demonstrating their imbrications in global historical movements. Through his consistent critique of the operation of empire and the legacy of the
colonial encounter, Ghosh emphasizes the impact of colonialism on shaping modern understanding of subjectivity and nationhood.

Writing is a career that Amitav Ghosh chose after he completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology. Therefore, his distinctive cognitive skilfulness is very well reflected in the delight that he feels in narration, in character development, depiction of surrounding and history, in themes, symbols and stylistic devices which is possible only after a deep academic study and investigation. As Brinda Bose astutely observes:

He has a keen understanding…of political, historical, sociological and cultural nuances of his subjects…and [it] is this sensibility that sets him apart from the clutch of Indian novelists in English that are springing from the woodwork ever since Rushdie immortalized the genre. (Bose 2003:18-19)

He himself suggests, “Every writer is an Individual and every writer has a right to define his own role.” (Hawley 166) Speaking with Michelle Caswell, he says that, “The novel is a meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing, rendering meaningless the usual workaday distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist, etc.” (Hawley 166)

As a trained anthropologist and researcher, journalist and writer Ghosh raises the dilemmas of migrants and natives of South-Asian countries like India, Burma, Bangladesh, Egypt, Singapore etc. He also highlights the contemporary issues of South-Asian countries including imperialism; political, economic and cultural materialism. He takes keen interest in learning, acknowledging and representing not only Indian socio-political and cultural events but also that of other South-Asian countries. Having experienced the riots in India in 1984, he emerged as an interpreter to the relationship between a nation and its individuals; and the impact of cultural and socio-political events on the lives of
individuals and natives through his lively and intimate craftsmanship in literary writings.

Amitav Ghosh’s first novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is concerned with the picaresque adventures of Alu, an eight year old orphan who lives in Lalpukur in West Bengal. He is a weaver who leaves home to travel across the Indian Ocean to the oil town of Al-Ghazira on the Persian Gulf. The novel can be seen as an allegory about destruction of traditional village life by materialistic modern influence of western culture. The novel also explores the relation between culture and imperialism. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is a family saga set in Calcutta of 1960s. It covers a large span of period of three generations. The story gradually moves around the places like Calcutta, Dhaka (earlier known as East Pakistan) and London. The young unnamed narrator hero, Tridib, and narrator’s Grandmother provide the basic framework on which the novel moves. The time span of the novel extends from 1939 to 1979 and the crucial events occur in 1960s. Memories link the past to the present and many of the characters live more in the past than in the present.

Amitav Ghosh’s third novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), marks a shift away from the exploration of personal memories and moves towards a metaphysical exploration of identity itself, suggesting at the same time that history, as defined by the educated elites in the world, is far less tamed than one might think. The novel has been described as “a kind of mystery thriller” by *India Today*. The theme of the novel includes history, the politics of scientific research, psychological affiliations, technology and memory. This novel is a merging of various genres like science fiction, criminal detection, history and even spiritual meditation. *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh’s next novel, came in 2000. The novel opens in Mandalay in 1885. Amitav Ghosh weaves into the life of his central protagonist, Rajkumar, the bewilderment and frustration of a family scattered due to the post imperialist dislocation in various regions of the
Asian continent. He has depicted the critical sociological and political repercussions of the experiences of exile, homelessness and loss. *The Glass Palace* is a discourse of postcolonial subjects where Ghosh attempts to remap the histories of three crucial South-Asian countries: India, Burma (Myanmar) and Malay (Malaysia), life of Kings and Queens, sites of Empire through the late nineteen and mid-twentieth centuries, and reference to places and times, which forced him to create a fictional world.

_The Hungry Tide_ (2004) by Amitav Ghosh is a work similar in style and tone to Ghosh’s previous masterpiece *The Glass Palace*. Its smaller plot and limited range of characters make it more accessible in comparison to the earlier book. It has only two conceptual plots: first, where it explores the plight of displaced people; a group of refugees from Bangladesh, and the other one is related to the question as to how humans share a complex and dangerous ecosystem with animals. Amitav Ghosh’s new trilogy of novels, the ‘Ibis Trilogy’ is a stunningly vibrant and intense human work that confirms his reputation as a master storyteller. The first volume of this projected trilogy, *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is set in India in 1838, at the outset of the three-year Opium War between the British and the Chinese. This epic novel follows several characters from different levels of society who become united through their personal lives aboard, on the ship and more generally, through their connections to the opium and slave trades. _River of Smoke_ (2011) is the second volume of the proposed Ibis Trilogy. While the first part of the trilogy _Sea of Poppies_ (2008) took the readers along the Ganges and to Calcutta, where poppies are grown and opium processed, _River of Smoke_ follows the story through to Canton in China, where the opium is sold. The proliferating details, the constant off-shooting of side stories, the use of multitude of Chinese, Indian and Creole words that buzz throughout the text, enrich and engorge the theme of _River of Smoke_.

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Chapter (II) – *The Calcutta Chromosome*, is devoted to an analysis of Amitav Ghosh’s third novel in which he seems to have amalgamated literature, science, philosophy, history, psychology and sociology in a theme that encompasses history, the politics of scientific research, psychological affiliations, technology and memory. *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery*, is Amitav Ghosh’s third novel which was published in 1996. The novel has been described as “a kind of mystery thriller” (*India Today* 14). In *The Calcutta Chromosome* Amitav Ghosh amalgamates literature, science, philosophy, history, psychology and sociology. The book, for the most part, settles in Calcutta and moves back and forth from past to present. It is a medical thriller that describes the adventures of apparently disconnected people. These characters time and again are brought together by mysterious turn of events. R.K. Dhawan accurately notes that “Ghosh makes a unique experiment in *The Calcutta Chromosome* by combining various themes and techniques. He amalgamates here literature, science, philosophy, history, psychology and sociology”. (Dhawan 26)

Amitav Ghosh won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction for this novel becoming the first Indian writer to win such an award. Talking to his interviewer Paul Kincaid Amitav Ghosh tells that what he wished to do was to “integrate the past and the present.” (Kincaid.net) He had conceived the idea from a secret society dedicated to achieving immortality from the Egyptian Gnostics. Nonetheless, science fiction critics do not think of *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a typical science fiction. “The novel’s historical sections, in fact, stick very closely to the actual facts of Ross’s record of his experimentation”. (Hawley157)
Paul Kincaid suggests two thematic points that could be drawn from this novel that is “the role of colonialists as exploits but is largely ignorant of local culture and knowledge,” (Kincaid.net) and the “very different attitudes to knowledge and research in East and West.”(Kincaid.net). In his essay on this novel, Tabish Khair says that the main concern of *The Calcutta Chromosome* is “the question of subaltern agency vis-à-vis alienation.” (Khair 145)The novel encounters a network of traces to provide the presence of an alternative subaltern history, which exists in parallel with colonial history.

The novel presents three searches; the first is that of an Egyptian clerk, Antar, who was working alone in a New York apartment in the early years of the twenty-first century. Antar was trying to trace the adventures of L. Murugan, who disappeared in Calcutta in 1995. The second search is related to Murugan’s obsession with the missing links in the history of malaria research. The third and the last search is related to that of Urmila Roy, a journalist in Calcutta in 1995. Urmila was researching on the works of Phulboni, an eighty five years old writer, who produced a strange cycle of “Lakhan stories” that he wrote in the 1930s but suppressed thereafter.

It is the great charm of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, that although this is a science fiction and situated somewhere not-too-far in the future, it is, in fact, an implied rewriting of history. Ghosh has this historical sense in many of his other works that there may have been a lot going on throughout the centuries that the history-book writers just decided to overlook. That is the very realm which has drawn Ghosh to its doorstep, again and again.

From the beginning till end the story moves and uncovers its complex arrangement of traces. It interweaves a number of equivalent search stories which ranges from those of Roland Ross and his medical contemporaries of late nineteenth-century to Antar’s search for Murugan through the resources of
internet. This search at this moment (in the near future) has already become considerably more intricate than it was at the time when the novel was published. *The Calcutta Chromosome* assumes much the same element as Amitav Ghosh has represented in his earlier works. Therefore, in this sense, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, which initially seems to be very different from *The Shadow Lines*, explores very similar terrain. In the words of a critic:

Amitav Ghosh deliberately uses a postmodern technique with fragmentation, ambiguity and a destructured subject. Metanarratives invariably serve to mask the contradictions inherent in any social organisation and Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* is interspersed with “Mini-narratives” which may be read as isolated and almost autonomous units. These autonomous units are joined by a thin mysterious thread that holds the novel together. (Sengupta 129)

This novel also reflects Amitav Ghosh’s knowledge and acquaintance with scientific researches and discoveries regarding Malaria and the scientists associated with this field. This instigates Murugan into the center of his theory, which implies that there is, beyond science, a counter-science, “which disputes the claim to know: …not making sense is what…is to attempt to know it.” (105)

This novel marks something of the shift away from the exploration of the personal memories and moves towards a metaphysical exploration of identity itself, suggesting at the same time that history, as defined by the educated elites in the world, is far less tamed than one might think. This is completely a craftsmanship of Ghosh’s writing that he keeps on moving back and forth. This style makes the work interesting for the readers to read and at the same time sustains the reader’s interest to know, what is going to happen next? Thus, one’s sense of self, of one’s place in time become unhinged as this detective story unfolds. The themes include history, the politics of scientific research, psychological afflictions, technology and memory, among others. Like so many
of Ghosh’s work, this one is the merging of various generic expectations—science fiction, criminal detection, history, and even spiritual meditation.

Chapter (III) – *The Glass Palace*, deals with an assessment of this novel in which Ghosh has depicted the critical, sociological and political repercussions of the experiences of exile, homelessness and loss through a discourse on postcolonial subjects aimed at remapping the histories of three crucial South-Asian countries - India, Burma (Myanmar) and Malay (Malaysia). *The Glass Palace* (2000) is a vibrantly detailed family saga. It is set in south-central Asia against the tumultuous backdrop of the twentieth century. The novel is based in the east in the land which was known as British India. Amitav Ghosh is among those handful writers in the world who have the capacity to interweave history with travel to make a gracious and elaborate story like *The Glass Palace*. Minna Proctor says in one of the reviews:

> When you heave your final sigh and turn the last page of Amitav Ghosh’s new novel, *The Glass Palace*, you feel as if you’ve travelled for 100 years on foot, through the most distant and lush lands on the globe. *The Glass Palace* is as close as a person tucked cozily into an armchair on a rainy day can get to the rubber plantations of Malaysia, the teak forests of Burma and the bustling city streets of Rangoon and Singapore, bearing witness to the demise of the Burmese monarchy and the rise and fall of the British Empire. (Proctor.net)

After his excellent work on Egypt, *In An Antique Land* (1992) Amitav Ghosh has used his craftsmanship to narrate a story from the days when India was colonized. Ghosh has introduced subtle cultural and lingual differences with extreme finesse and sensitivity in his work *The Glass Palace*. *The Glass Palace* meets the requirements of a historical novel: it “not only takes its setting and some characters and events from history” (Abrams 133) and “makes the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and narrative”
(Abrams 133) but also uses “the protagonists and actions to reveal what the author regards as the deep forces that impel the historical process.” (Abrams 133) While issues of the nation and history have become predominant concerns of the postcolonial Indian novel in English, *The Glass Palace* actively revisits and recreates historical sites that discursively suffer from either colonial excess or colonial neglect.

The story starts from Burma (Mayanmar) and traverses through pre-indepenedent India, parts of Bangladesh, Malaysia and Singapore. It is an attempt to identify in the history of time and nation such group of people who inhabited British occupied areas in South East Asia regions. The novel starts in 19th century with the introduction of the central protagonist, Rajkumar Raha, who lands up in Burma in a state of penury due to a shipwreck. The novel is divided into seven parts and each part has a title or name which reflects the central idea of that chapter. The first part (part one) ‘Mandalay’ is the introductory chapter which includes the introduction of the central protagonist. These chapters and sub-chapters, on the one hand, help in avoiding the lack of interest on the part of readers as the novel is voluminous and, on the other hand, they carry the story forward by weaving various characters and incidents together.

*The Glass Palace* is a discourse of postcolonial subjects where Amitav Ghosh has made an attempt to remap the history of the three crucial South Asian countries: India, Burma (Mayanmar) and Malay (Malaysia), life of Kings and Queens, sites of Empire through the late nineteen and mid-twentieth centuries, and reference to places and times, which forced him to ‘create a fictional world’. The appeal of his work lies in his ability to weave “indo-nostalgic” elements into more serious and heavier themes that go side by side with depiction of history, culture and society. Ghosh is interested in imaginary geographies. He has written about India, Bangladesh, Burma, Egypt, Cambodia,
Britain and America, and his interest in those places where different cultures meet.

Amitav Ghosh illustrates the mixture of cultures in his writing as expressed through language that he deals with. With the advent of New Literatures in English almost all the Indian writers in English had represented a new kind of English. This opened the way towards a possible study of the effects of colonization in writings in ‘English’ and writings in indigenous language. Amitav Ghosh has also given proper attention to native languages along with English. He has made use of local Hindi or Hindustani language in *The Glass Palace*; apart from this his creativeness could be seen in the use of metaphoric language. *Baya-gyaw, aingyi, hti, gaung-baung* (the turban of mourning), *patama-byan* (examination), *yethas* (bullock-carts), *htamein, lugalei, tai*, etc are some of the words he has used from Burmese language. Apart from this he has used a good collection of Hindi sayings and proverbs along with Hindi terms in this novel. They are like that: *kala*, *kai*? *Sub kuchh theek thaa*, *dhobi ka kutta- na ghar ka na ghat ka*, *khalasis*, *ek gaz*; *do gaz*; *teen gaz*, *jhinjhinaka bazaar*, *gaaris*, *kuchh to karo*, *basti*, *langot*, *buddhu*, *havildar*, *kaun hai* etc. The novel is brimmed with such words which add the flavour of multilingualism thereby making the novel interesting for the readers.

Chapter (IV) – *The Hungry Tide*, focuses on the language, history and society as depicted in this novel which shares Amitav Ghosh’s concern for the individual against a broader historical and geographical backdrop highlighting the plight of displaced people struggling to find their place in the world. *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Amitav Ghosh’s fifth novel, is a contemporary story of dislocations, disjunctions and destabilization. It has been well-acknowledged as an ecological novel. It is a unique novel with the amalgamation of anthropology, environmentalism, migration, travel, ethnography, photography and landscape wrapped under the veil of fiction. It is similar in style and tone to
Ghosh’s previous masterpiece, *The Glass Palace* (2000). Its smaller design and limited range of characters make it more reachable in contrast to the earlier book. Sunita Sinha rightly observes:

Following his internationally acclaimed historical saga, *The Glass Palace*, the next novel, *The Hungry Tide*, narrow in scope but masterfully conceived, is an admirable book. Whereas in *The Glass Palace*, a time span of almost a hundred years from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, and a landscape stretching across more than five thousand kilometers forms the mega canvas on which Amitav Ghosh maps the personal stories of men and women along with the political history of the whole of south and southeast Asia in his novel, *The Hungry Tide* focuses on one region - Sundarbans - a vast archipelago of islands lying below Calcutta on the gulf between India and Bangladesh. (Sinha 119)

Ghosh raises serious apprehension about decay and degradation of the rich environment of the Sunderbans by careless activities of the humans. Morichjhapi is the name of an island in the Sunderbans. Besides raising issues of environment and ecology, the novel vigorously takes up the cause of the subaltern settlers and migrants. At the center of the text is the plight of the poor living in the most uninhabitable forests of the Sunderbans in West Bengal, particularly the island of Morichjhapi. “The novel demonstrates how environmentalism and conservation, nevertheless, has its own costs, and it explores the ethical dilemmas that result from this.”( Rahman 94). The novel has only two plots: first, where it investigates the dilemma of displaced people – a group of refugees from Bangladesh, and the other one is related to the question as to how humans share a complex and dangerous ecosystem with animals:

In between the sea and the plains of Bengal, on the easternmost coast of India, lies an immense archipelago of islands. Some of these islands are
vast and some no larger than sandbars; some have lasted through recorded history while others have just washed into being. These are the Sundarbans - the beautiful lands. Here there are no borders to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea, even land from water. The tides reach more than two hundred miles inland, and every day thousands of acres of mangrove forests disappear only to re-emerge hours later. For hundreds of years, only the truly dispossessed and the hopeless dreamers of the world have braved the man eaters and the crocodiles who rule there, to eke a precarious existence from the unyielding mud. (Harper Collins 2004)

While most of Amitav Ghosh’s writing meditates on the arbitrary nature of national borders, subalterns etc, this book is obsessed with personal divisions between men and women. One of the major elements of the novel’s plot is the story of Kanai’s growing affiliation with Piya. Another is Piya’s developing understanding of Fokir. A third is Kanai’s regular transformation through the reading of his uncle’s relation of the ‘Morichjhâpi incident’. The novel shares Ghosh’s concern for the individual against a broader historical and geographical backdrop. The book is divided into two sections – The Ebb: Bhata and The Flood: Jowar – and is set in Sundarbans. Each section consists of several of small chapters, dealing with a particular incident.

Sundarban is located in the northern part of The Bay of Bengal and stretches across coastal India and Bangladesh. Along with its beauty and diversity it is the home of the Bengal tiger, which has killed tens of thousands of people. Because tiger is an endangered species, the government has taken steps to preserve its natural environment. This, however, has resulted in confrontations with the local populace, and that conflict is part of the novel. Probably, in the setting of the novel, the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, a deep communication is plausible and pragmatic between its inhabitants and
nature. More importantly, deep communication is enacted out through interaction between the urban and rural characters in the novel. Ironically, the ecological communication in the Sundarbans is so deep-rooted that it almost always supersedes human communications. In an interview to UN Chronicle, Amitav Ghosh’s asserts:

I think the world has been globalizing for a long time. It is not a new phenomenon, but one that has achieved a new kind of intensity in recent years. The only real barrier to a complete uniformity around the world is not the image but language. Images can be exchanged between cultures, but the domain where globalization has truly been resisted is that of language. We can send e-mails, which can be instantly translated, but that is shallow communication. For any kind of deeper, resonant communication, language is essential. All such communication is deeply embedded in language. (48)

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* reflects the concern of anthropologists with the porosity of cultural boundaries. The novel reveals that there can be no simplistic response to the notion of Indian ‘nationality’. The articulation of political and economic demands assumes a critical role in this context. In fact, Indian nationalities vary in size and are at varying stages of development. National identity itself is an abstract concept that subsumes the collective expression of a subjective individual sense of belonging to a socio-political unit: the nation state. It is a cultural construct, not affixed objective reality, but an ongoing journey and changeable process, dependent on and deriving from social relations and hence not exclusive of other identities. In the construction of ‘multinationalities’ *The Hungry Tide* attempts to recognize decisive elements like common territory, common origin, common historical experiences, common language, common religion and morals, and common customs.
However, the novel also cautions that these objective elements cannot possibly be juxtaposed but can only be understood in terms of interdependence:

Ghosh’s characters are as alluring as the setting and the chemistry among them is just as complex as the natural forces they confront . . . *(The Hungry Tide)* remains, a compelling book about ordinary people bound together in an exotic place that can consume all. The narrative moves fluidly between past and present, mesmerizing us with its grasp of the minutest detail and careful research. (Sinha 122-123)

Chapter (V) – *Sea of Poppies*, is devoted to an analysis of this epic novel which is Amitav Ghosh’s first volume of the Ibis trilogy, which traces several characters from different levels of society united chiefly through their personal lives aboard a ship and through their connections to the opium and slave trades. This remarkable novel unfurls in north India and the Bay of Bengal in 1938 on the eve of British attack on the Chinese ports known as the First Opium War. A group of people from different caste and class were moving together by leaving behind their past to find their way of living on the Ibis to go to Mauritius. Ibis is an ex-slave-trading ship bound for Madagascar with its cargo of Opium, indentured labours and criminals:

The first novel of the *Ibis* trilogy, Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* tells the tale of the ‘girmitiyas’, a forgotten first of the Indian diaspora that was marginalized and dispossessed, of labourers who quit their homes and hearth and were flung to remote outposts of the Raj to work as virtual slaves of the empire. (Mukherji 87)

In bringing his troupe of characters from different corners of the world, Amitav Ghosh provides his readers with various colours and shades of stories. The sweep of this historical adventure spans from the lush poppy fields by the river Ganga, the rolling high seas to the exotic backstreets of China at the time of Opium War. But it is this Panorama of characters which encapsulates the
vexed colonial history of the East itself, which makes the novel breathtakingly alive and a masterpiece from one of the world’s finest novelists.

Like Amitav Ghosh’s other novels this one is also been divided into three main parts: Land, River and Sea. And within these main parts there are sub chapters which provide the novel a unique fragmentation and give the readers a proper understanding of the narrative. The story begins from the village of eastern Bihar in which Deeti, one of the chief protagonists, lived on the “outskirts of the town of Ghazipur, some fifty miles east of Benares.”( Ghosh 2008:3)

*Sea of Poppies* is set in the early half of nineteenth century colonized India. A vessel, named Ibis, carries within it a strange assortment of people dominated primarily by the migrant labourers (girmaiyas) bound to Mauritius. These migrants, who have been gathered from different part of India, become important participants in the cross-cultural interaction that take place in the multicultural vessel. The novel focuses on the power of human relationship transcending cultural, religious, social, racial and even colonizer-colonized differences which has been emphasized through Paulette’s unlikely sibling Jodu. Jodu is an indigene boatman. Though Jodu was not much interested in imbibing the ‘civilized’ culture of the West, Paulette, as a child, internalized within her both the Western and indigenous cultures. She was called Putli by Jodu’s mother, her “Tantima” (aunt-mother) and throughout she was forced to perform the dual role of Paulette and Putli, preferring the latter to the former. Unlike any white child, “the first language she learnt was Bengali, and the first solid food she ate was a rice-and-dal khichri cooked by Jodu’s mother. In the matter of clothing, she far preferred saris to pinafores – for shoes she had no patience at all, choosing, rather, to roam the Gardens in bare feet, like Jodu.”(67)
Ghosh significantly makes Paulette an agent of harmony. In Ibis, she becomes a pivotal figure connecting people of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds, from Neel to Baboo Nob Kissin, from Deeti to Munia, from Jodu to Zachary. The vessel offers her the chance to voyage across the multifarious borders much more freely than she could have done in the ethnocentric European community in Calcutta. Ibis becomes an ideal space and reflects contrast to the repressive Bethel.

Sea of Poppies also traverses significant linguistic borders. On the one hand, Ghosh leads us into the inner recesses of Ibis to explore the novelties of Laskari language; on the other hand, he takes us to the shores of Calcutta where native Indian languages make strong inroads into the spoken language of the semi-nativized British people. It is, however, his fictionalization of the Laskari Language that detains us here. Laskari language is a particular variant of Sea-pidgin or nautical jargon. The contact languages, be it pidgin or creole, have their origin in setting that presupposes multilingualism, linguistic assimilation and inevitable border crossings. Pidgins are auxiliary languages which originate in a need to communicate between speakers who, in addition to their own native language, need to communicate with speakers of some other language. The primary function of pidgin is utilitarian as it serves to facilitate communication between speakers who do not share a common language and thus renders various need-based activities like trade, tour and travels, sea-faring and even plantation and imperialism possible. The utilisitarian function of the language, more often than not, though not always, transforms and extends into a medium where besides linguistic border, the pidgin-speakers cross the borders of culture, race and religion as well to forge the bonds of camaraderie.

Sea of Poppies zeroes in on a particular variant of sea-pidgin as it investigates the ‘laskari language’, a marginal language of the marginal lascars. The term ‘lascar’ traces its etymology to the Persian/Urdu ‘lashkar’ meaning
“soldier” or “army”. The meaning though got a distinct marine transformation as “lascer” came to be identified as the indigenous or native crewmembers of a sailing ship. The terms ‘indigenous’ and ‘native’ are not really helpful as the lascared had their origins to a wide range of cartography spread along the shores of the Indian Ocean. They were a peculiar assortment of people, hailing from as diverse of places as Arabia, east Africa, Malaysia, Sima (modern Myanmar), Philippines, China and different place of undivided India, both from her eastern and western coasts. The Sea of Poppies is wonderfully evocative of the sorrow and suffering, torture and oppression, and most importantly, the displacement and alienation of migrant labourers the fabric of whose lives was torn asunder by the compulsions of colonial economic imperatives.

Chapter (VI) – River of Smoke, deals with Amitav Ghosh’s second volume of Ibis trilogy which traces the fate of the other characters from the Ibis and describes the opium trade in China. It is a vibrant novel with multiple plots. Set during the opium trade describing the nineteenth-century Asian subcontinent with creative enthusiasm and deep historical insight, Amitav Ghosh’s Ibis trilogy is a voyage through the complex history that continues to resonate throughout the world. While the first novel of this trilogy, Sea of Poppies (2008), took the readers through the Ganges and Calcutta, where the seductive opium was cultivated and processed, River of Smoke, the continued saga, follows the story in China, where the opium is sold:

Amitav Ghosh's River of Smoke (2011), the second book in 'Ibis' trilogy is a voluminous novel of over five hundred and fifty pages containing three divided parts - Part one- Islands, Part Two - Canton, Part three - Commissioner Lin, with eighteen chapters and more than twenty major characters. The naming of the tripartite division of River of Smoke denotes that the theme of the novel goes from the whole to the part, from the margin to the centre. (De 117)
It takes the readers to the opium marketplace via the clipper ship Anahita, which is secretly loaded with perhaps the most valuable cargo of Opium, ever to leave India, and the Redruth, carrying Frederick “Fitcher” Penrose, who is determined to track down China’s priceless horticultural treasures. The Chinese authorities are trying to prevent illegal imports of the drug, which has inflicted a plague of addiction on the Chinese population.

The novel talks about the incidents on Ibis, which was caught in a storm in September 1838, along with two other ships, Anahita and Redruth. Beginning with the details of the changing lives and traditions of Indian migrants in Mauritius; the novel traces the fate of other characters from Ibis and describes the opium trade in China. The novel has a rich tapestry of characters from various cultural and geographical backgrounds whose common interest is trade with China. The plot is set in Fanqui town, a small strip of land used by foreigners to trade with local Chinese traders, a year before the first opium war.

The novel envisages to epic dimensions, both historical and imaginary characters from the nineteenth-century past. It is typical of Ghosh’s novel in terms of its broadness of scope, which attempts to encompass a complete social and intellectual reality. In River of Smoke the ‘storm’ imagery is central to the narrative: it saves the sentenced inmates of the Ibis vessel which is already featured in Ghosh’s earlier novel Sea of Poppies (2008) but spoils some three hundred chests of opium carried by another ship, Bahram Modi’s Anahita. It makes Deeti perceive that even “a tufaan could have an eye,” while the convict and escapee zamindar Neel Kanta Halder realises the efficacy of the description of the storm in a science journal he read in 1838:

. . . a gigantic oculus, at the far end of a great spinning telescope, examining everything it passed over, upending some things, and leaving others unscathed; looking for new possibilities, creating fresh
beginnings, rewriting destinies and throwing together people who would never have met. (20)

The novel takes a start from Deeti who is now in her old age. She has her children and grand children whom she narrates the story of her past. *River of Smoke* is a novel which repudiates the “forces of evil” that “celebrate their triumphal march through history,” (553) by supplanting the British Victorian meta-narrative of the opium trade with localised micro-narratives of people and places ravaged by it. The plot, characterisation and climax of this novel create the impression of immense variety and dizzying chaos similar to the historical context of the opium wars in China; simultaneously they show promise of yet another exciting and erudite sequel to this (neo)-Victorian episode of the nineteenth-century presaging twentieth- and twenty-first-century diaspora, globalisation, multiculturalism and their attendant dangers, such as drug-trafficking, continuing economic exploitation, and armed conflict over resources.

Ghosh’s biggest success is his ability to trace the right balance between the Victorian historical data and evidence he uses and the neo-Victorian fiction he re-imagines, constructing some resonant and often unsettling continuities and discontinuities with the novel’s prequel, leaving scope for more to come. His omniscient grip over the narrative, a partial reversion to Victorian narratorial practices on his part, and the wealth of background historical research, as documented in the elaborate “Acknowledgements” section of the book, prove that the sheer mastery of story-telling of any contemporary historical novelist can still make Victorian history relevant to us.

Alternately, in the entire novel this statement functions as a key observation that emphasises Ghosh’s intervention in the stable narrative of the imperial opium trade. Despite using the historical records of Commissioner Lin,
the pictorial documents left by the Macanese painter, George Chinnery, and the official ghettoization of foreign trade, Ghosh alters the flow of history by mining out a typhoon of characters and their multicultural experiences left out of these official histories. Moreover, he is also keen on establishing the neo-Victorian aspect of this nineteenth-century narrative by introducing issues of contemporary relevance like drug-trafficking, globalization and linguistic hybridity.

The plot is very complex and has multiple characters – it charts out the destinies of characters from the earlier novel like Deeti, Neel and Paulette, among others, and elaborates the lives of the merchant Bahram Modi, the naturalist Robin Penrose and the artist Robin Chinnery, to mention only the principal few. Their stories are intertwined by the metanarrative of the opium trade, its ups and downs and the ravishing conflict over trading the drug itself. Some of these characters, like Deeti, Neel and Robin, are successful in adapting to such a volatile and confusing environment and survive as the narrative ends while the towering merchant figure, Modi, gives up his life:

Inhabiting an in-between space in terms of intercourse between nations, populations, languages and identities, the novel is a fictional construct built on the foundations of exhaustive historical research. Each word and detail is full of information, sometimes leaving the reader amazed with the kaleidoscopic range . . . This novel is linked to the first more in terms of theme than character. Some characters like Deeti, Neel and Paulette do figure in River of Smoke, their perspectives adding to the multiplicity of viewpoints. And though the issue tackled is sensitive, the author is restrained in his manner so that the novel does not pass any judgments on the opium trade and is just content to present things as they are . . . The reader is presented with a historical tableau from which he can draw his own conclusions. Textured in the myriad hues of
love, romance, adventure, discovery, fiction and history, *River of Smoke* is an immensely enriching read. (Mahanta 2011:155-156)

*River of Smoke* is a novel with a huge array of minor characters and episodes that link up with these major ones to convey to us the enormity of the Chinese trading world in the nineteenth century. The novel re-invents the cultural phenomenon of Asian Diasporic multiracialism and multiculturalism in one of its very crucial and originary moments in the Asian subcontinent. Its prequel, the much-acclaimed *Sea of Poppies*, displayed similar liberationist impulses by exposing the intricacies, contradictions and complexities of British oppression in Victorian India, economic plunder re-enforced by the foreign powers, the narrowness and superstition of Indian village communities, casteism, poverty, gender hierarchy, untouchability and the notorious Kala Paani. This system ensnared Indian labourers with the promise of a new life and better possibilities elsewhere, but resulted in their being horded aboard ships like animals, as on the Ibis, to be exploited as little better than indentured servants, the horrors of which Ghosh describes with both outrage and sympathy.

The last chapter of the present thesis, Chapter VII, is a documentation of the findings flowing from the previous chapters. An assessment of Amitav Ghosh’s select novels – *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011) from the perspective of language, history and society reveals that the issue that Amitav Ghosh raises in these novels are local as well as global which challenge the social, cultural, religious, political and lingual boundaries. Amitav Ghosh, as a writer, drives his strength from transforming forgotten stories, the histories of subalterns who were hitherto considered outside history itself, into major and significant , if not, grand narratives. In the postcolonial world, among the postcolonial writers Amitav Ghosh is one among the most versatile and prominent writers. He is an eminent international writer with extraordinary set
of mind and thoughts. His books either reflect postcolonial scenario or depict the pre-colonial and colonial themes. His works, mainly novels, are brim with interesting themes which reflect his craftsmanship of weaving the themes against the historical, geographical and social backdrops. His central characters are travellers in diasporic exile: a psychological victim of “the migrant sensibility” that Salman Rushdie calls “one of the central themes of this century of displaced person.” If in Rushdie’s metaphor “past is a country from which we have all emigrated,” in Ghosh the description of time and space is more extreme. He treats “national borders as permeable fictions.”

Amitav Ghosh has remained consistent and prolific since his arrival in literary world. His writing matures gradually in its unique style with the increasing number of his works. He continues to be a strong voice among contemporary literary artists and eminent thinkers of his period as far as his fictional and non-fictional works are concerned. It is difficult to categorize him within the limits of any typical style or genre. He has emerged as a prominent writer of his age with the power of his versatility. Beside this, a vast range of the characters in his works provide a quality of multiplicity, multidimensionality and cosmopolitanism to his works. His literary masterpieces are marked with the characteristics of post modernity and interdisciplinary values. Innovation and variety in the subject matter are the undistinguished part of his works. The issues that he raises in his works are local as well as global at the same time. This, on the one hand, interests a wide range of local and global readers and, on the other hand, adds to the quality of universalism to the theme.

Although Amitav Ghosh does not consider himself a postcolonial writer, he has depicted almost every bit and details that comes under the umbrella term ‘postcolonial’. Language, history and society on the whole are inseparable from Postcolonialism. This concept of Postcolonialism exists only because of
imperialism and colonizers’ occupation and exploitation of the natives, the indigenous people. Postcolonialism therefore deals with those cultures and societies which had been affected by the colonial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. It analyses and examines the aftermath of colonization. In other words, it undertakes those literary works that are consequence of the colonial process. Postcolonialism, on the whole, deals with the search for cultural, social, individual identity in a colonized nation. It reflects the conflicts and dilemmas of developing national identity after colonialism.

Ghosh, like other postmodernist writers, makes use of the multiple narrative schemes in his novels. His method of storytelling, back and forth journey in time, and ease and brilliance in employing these devices make his novels outstanding. His complex narrative technique very well goes with the mood and temperament of the characters and also adds to the beauty of the novel. His novels prove the point that Ghosh cannot be easily excelled in respect of the narrative technique. Discarding a linear structure and conventional narrative scheme, Ghosh employs a circular, loop-like structure and multiple narrative schemes in his novels. Amitav Ghosh’s writings creatively negotiate through the complex web of social, historical, political, economic and cultural issues of past and present. Through his craftsmanship of analyzing certain ideology on subaltern and marginalized issues Amitav Ghosh stands on national and international ground as an influential and renowned writer of the time.

Amitav Ghosh’s novels have a marked position in representing postcolonial literature. His fiction has always been about “communities” against the broader social and historical backdrop and it is always focused on the individuals. An analysis of his novels reflects the lives of people who inhabited British occupied territories in South-East Asia. Ghosh has depicted the critical
sociological and political repercussions of the experiences of exile, homelessness and loss focusing more on the individuals and how their lives get affected by the contemporary social, cultural changes than on the massive historical sweep that serves as background. Nonetheless, they show his keen and deepening interest in history, time and place and memory.

Ghosh’s novels are not confined to India alone; his narratives traverse different locations of the world and, in doing so, present varieties of cultural practice in genre-splitting fictional frames. One implication of this process is that his text is also an interesting exercise regarding the form of the novel. Each Ghosh's novel thus presents the different narrative framework through which the story is told. However, unlike many contemporary novelists whose experiments with language and forms sometimes appear radical, Ghosh’s innovation do not take away the readability of his novels, which is why he has been so popular also among the common reading public.

Amitav Ghosh, in his enthusiasm to show connections across religious, cultural, social, political and lingual boundaries, often creates medieval utopias of communal harmony and tolerance. Through his writings he also tries to establish a link between the rising techno scientific culture and the concretization of boundaries. It seems that Ghosh’s engagement with the imperialist, capitalist enterprise of the West makes him a somewhat bitter critic of the West and, at times, he goes overboard in crediting all the ills of the present era to the West. Amitav Ghosh, in his writings, relates ‘scienticism’ or scientific imperialism with the political imperialism and capitalism. In his endeavour to make connections and challenge boundaries Amitav Ghosh emerges as one of the most prominent exponents of the postcolonial literary world.