

# Myriad world of Amitav Ghosh's Fiction

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## ABSTRACT

India has contributed significantly to the world of literature and in this regard, Indian English Novel is in the forefront. Many contemporary novelists have expressed their creative urge in English language and have contributed immensely towards establishing Indian Novel in English as a distinctive force in the world of fiction.

In recent years many works of historical fiction too have emerged in the literary limelight. Indian English novelists have turned to the past including their motherland India's. This is in order to trace the old memories and depict the past events of national importance that has created wide 'repercussions'. Novelists like Amitav Ghosh have blended their country's history with their vision and philosophy. He has used techniques of writing that enables him to share his vision of "world". His works reveal that a novelist's prime obsession is his involvement with history and they are imbued with both political and historical consciousness.

It's a fact that majority of Indian novels have been written in response to movements like Gandhian movement, imperial rule, partition of the country and the emergence of modern India. As a writer Ghosh too has been influenced by the political and social milieu of the country. The image of the changing India, politically and socially, cast a deep shadow on Ghosh's mind. His first novel *The Circle of Novel* stretches from a small village in Bengal to the Mediterranean is a skillfully constructed novel of the master craftsman. It refrains from the traditional Indian English Novel in structure as well as themes. *The Shadow Lines* novel which was awarded the acclaimed Sahitya Academy award in 1988 tells the saga of three generations encompassing three countries- India, East Pakistan or Bangladesh and England. It focuses on the Partition of India and its impact on the Bengali psyche. He has effectively depicted postcolonial situation, postmodern dilemma, cultural displacement and issues of migrants in the Indian subcontinent.

In his acclaimed novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* he has employed the likes of Henry James or Conrad by using the cinematic techniques to present the story-line. Another noteworthy work of his is *The Hungry Tide* which is set in the Indian archipelago of Sunderbans in the Bay of Bengal. It also presents the account of 'Marichjhapi' incident in the tide country in 1978-79. It was an uprising of the dispossessed and uprooted refugees who had fled to India after Partition. It showcases the writer's concern for the marginalized when they have to fight cruel surroundings, the society and the vindictive government.

Another feather in the writer's cap is *The Sea of Poppies* which is an extraordinary fictional tale based on colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent and the sea routes in the Indian Ocean. It has detailed description of colonial oppression of Indian farmers, the poor and the marginalized as well as the wealthy Indians by the British merchants and officials and hence exposing the ugly face of colonialism.

Thus we find that Amitav Ghosh's fictional work moves effortlessly across political and national boundaries addressing issues which have emerged in postcolonial deliberations. Using his perceptiveness and wisdom, the writer inquires and explores historical events that were sidelined in government records and advocates the imperialistic and multicultural issues.

In the trajectory of historical fiction-we have always been concerned with the 'other'. It's almost apt in this age of globalization that the gap between battling for the 'other' and straddling it has been reduced. The myriad and diasporic imagination of the above writer is essential for our understanding of South Asian History and Indian history in particular. Ghosh's novels takes the responsibility of re-assessing its troubled antecedents and uses history as a tool by which we can come to terms with our troubling existence. He is both a diasporic and postcolonial writer who uses his imagination to document the history of the Indian subcontinent.

**KEYWORDS:** Historical fiction, Indian subcontinent, Indian English novel, postcolonial, refugees, Colonialism.

## INTRODUCTION

Literature is no literature if it excludes the concerns of the common man. This is in particular relevant to the contemporary Indian English literature. Indian English Novel developed at a junction when the consciousness of its being a part of history was a national phenomenon. The intense emotional stirring of people united in the effort of to achieve emancipation from

shackles of British rule made people associated with the historical and national movements. Such a consciousness is illustrated in the fiction of Raja Rao, Chaman Nahal, Shashi Tharoor, Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh and others.

Many Indian fiction writers have resorted to the country's historic past including the events of national importance. Thus historical novel has emerged on the scene. It evaluates a section of reality as projected by the writer through his writing techniques. According to Walter Allen, 'contemporary novels' are the 'mirror' of their age which reflects not just the 'external features' of this age but also its 'inner conflicts' and issues. The fictional works of Amitav Ghosh, Rushdie and others establish a dynamic relation between individual and historic forces of the nation. Historical fictions of above writers serve the twin purpose of entertainment as well as the instruction and he/she is both a novelist and historian. Chaman Nahal writes:

Herein lies the additional burden that a historical novel places on the artist. The novelist is obliged to do careful research into the period he has chosen for presentation and every detail of that period has to be accurate.

Many Indian novels have been written in response to the freedom movement, colonial or imperial rule, partition of the country and the rise of New India. Such Indian English Novels not only depicted the exploitation of the natives by the British colonial rulers but also the awakened people fighting for their rights. One of the traumatic incident of that age was the Partition of the Indian subcontinent with religious and political differences between Hindus and Muslims leading to widespread disorder and unrest causing loss of human life in an unaccustomed way. Indian English fiction writers responded and wrote novels on the themes of partition, its doomy consequences and the misery of the migrants and refugees in the subcontinent.

Ghosh and many other writers have interwoven their narratives with events of the Freedom struggle and the carnage of Partition. In such postcolonial novels, the novel and old incidents are artistically amalgamated and past experiences become alive. More importantly, common man becomes an active partaker in the making of the History. These writers of the eighties reveal that the distress and suffering did not end with the attainment of freedom and its aftermath had equally challenging issues.

Ghosh creates a fictional framework wherein he gives a new dimension to history and involves reader more actively into his fiction that is infused with both political and historical consciousness. Literature cannot distance itself away from the political forces. In an atmosphere of power- politics, Indian society confronted manifold issues and problems. There was a complete change in the long-cherished human values with the rise of European Modernism. These values were replaced by the commercialized or materialistic values leading to frustration and alienation of the individuals. Writers of the eighties along with Amitav Ghosh have experimented in their narrative structure and their success lies in evolving new idioms, fictional techniques and themes. The predicament of modern man finds expression in these novels. Ghosh too has exploited the traditional mythical and mystical frameworks of Indian consciousness in a distinct way. He along with other novelists has resorted to various modes like Existentialism and Symbolism.

## CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL AND AMITAV GHOSH

Literary history of every country grows by the sensible men of letters that enunciate humanity in real terms and questions the validity of the forenamed in the context of lived consciousness. In the light of above statement, the writer visualizes the world as it is rather than how it should be. The reference here is to the form of 'novel' genre which minimizes the fictional distance and amalgamates various possessions and belongings in its multidimensional form. Indian English novel boasts of tales told in background of variety of experiences, events, places related with Indian sensibility.

The distinctive voice of Amitav Ghosh is worth listening to and novel with him has left its euro-centric corpus and has arisen as a location of discovery of nostalgia, memories, dislocation and so on. At present, Amitav Ghosh is among the most talked about writers in the world of literature and bears many roles- of master story teller, journalist, essayist, travel writer and a teacher. Ghosh was born in 1956 with his father being a part of British Indian army and mother was a constant motivation for his rich childhood experiences. His openness to varied individuals experiences has been a constant element of his fictional themes and is reflected through his celebrated novels, articles, essays and travel-pieces. This Stephanine stalwart is embellished with many literary recognition of merit. For instance, the French version of *The Circle of Reason* (1986) won him the award for 1997 and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the Arthur C Clare Award and had been short-listed for the Pushcraft Prize for his article published in *Kenyan Review*. These conferred titles are the indictment of the immense popularity enjoyed by Amitav Ghosh world-wide. And at the same time Amitav Ghosh is seen down-to-earth in conjuring up his staunch views and opinions.

Since its inception, novel has often been dictated and conditioned by the diversified forces stemming out from the domains like culture, class, science and technology and at the same time, it turned out to be a serene place of comfort one wishes to get in. The eighteenth century picaresque tradition set forth novel to enter the interior aspects of human consciousness in the guise of the champions of 'stream of consciousness technique' novelists who attempted to catch the flow of life before it hardens into intellectual concepts and mechanical habits. Dickensian linear and ameliorative patterns, Proustian multi-layer and complex narrative structures are said to reflect again in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. The master of six novels till date abounds with much of profundity in wit and wane, sense and sensibility and text and texture. His skillful and artistic use of English, subtle

narrative structure with an omniscient first person narrator, acute depiction of the intricacies of factual details and more importantly, his authenticity of the thought content are what his story-telling canvass boasts of. He takes his readers through many parts of the world.

His keen interest in anthropology, in places of day past and day future give his novels an interesting index of information. One of the significant aspects of his narratives happens to be his subtle use of journey-motif which enhances the writer take on his Odyssey through different parts of the world to evolve a cosmopolitan comradeship. His diasporic imagination wanders through the ancient land of Egypt as well as war-ravaged London during the Second World War, through Dhaka before and after partition. His narratives are peopled with many; drawn from their cultural, historical, geographical divergences and bear witness to the historical reality of the events occurred at various locales.

One can visualize the underpinnings of historical and anthropological research carried out in *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *An Antique Land* (1992) and *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004). These novels are but a fictional embracing of historical/political subtexts and an intellectual exploration of both the centre and the periphery contexts of modern history. He constantly looks at the ways to infuse history in fiction only to envision the former's implacability with the latter's potentially more humane qualities.

Amitav Ghosh provides interesting glimpses of various facets of the Nationalist movement in his two novels, *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*. Militant nationalism, socialism and non-violence were all paths leading to the common goal of independence.

Society is the sum total of people's thought processes, vision of life needs and aspirations, customs and traditions, and national commitments. Some of the evil customs, such as Sati, child marriage, fanaticism and untouchability were abolished by reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. However, they could not wholly uproot them.

The modern urban India unleashes a plethora of experience for the Indian English novelists. The rainbow colors and chameleon like altercations of the modern urbanized society have gravitated the novels; they have dealt comprehensively with the urban and cosmopolitan situations where language is no serious barrier; and which truly represent the Indian life; and are plenty and varied enough too for the novelist to find fictional raw materials. Indeed they have tried to draw, through their novels, a living picture of the modern Indian society, projecting here and there its salient features - caste system, disintegration of joint families, man-woman relationship, position of women in society in connection with their traditional concept versus recent emancipation, East-West encounter, the disillusionment and dilemma of the modern man in this urbanized world and his resultant alienation from it.

The scope of 'political novel' in Indian writing in English is very wide and large. It covers all the political and social problems in the history of Indian society because, in it (history), political change is the most important change to which other changes become subordinate. It is difficult to distinguish between social problems and political problems since every social problem acquires a political dimension, pointing towards an all-encompassing political solution.

A large number of Indian English novels written in the post-Independence period have in them treatment of various political issues. Some of them are the communal riots, the Chinese aggression, disputes between India and Pakistan, differences between the political parties of the country and the rise of parochial tendencies. For instance, the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1947 have been treated in Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, the Hindu-Sikh riots have been treated in Khushwant Singh's *Delhi*; the Chinese aggression has been treated by Bhabani Bhattacharya in *Shadow from Ladakh*, the disputes between India and Pakistan have been highlighted by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*-, the fight between the political parties of the country leading to the declaration of Emergency has been treated in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Arun Joshi's *The City and the River*; and the rise of parochial tendencies has been dealt with in Nayantara Sahgal's *A Storm in Chandigarh*. Each great writer has moulded and shaped these significant national events in some artistic pattern.

## GHOSH'S APPROACH TOWARDS HISTORY

The writer's approach may be seen in two perspectives-dissenting and non-conventional reading of the past and next is his representation of history through the viewpoint and perspective of the historically unmapped, the marginalized and the voiceless common individuals and absence of popular historical personalities in his fictional work. He belongs to the literary tradition of Rushdie, Tharoor and Chatterjee. Historical incidents and happenings are written in his novels in the fictional language and subject matter.

His fictional works are endowed with a variety of past occurrences like the Naxalite movement, impact of Bengal's Partition, riots in Dhaka and Calcutta, 1984 Delhi riots, immigrants and refugees after Partition of India. To put in the words of Brinda Bose:

..he is also the one who sees history as that trajectory of events that causes dislocations, disjunctions, movements and migrations, eventually replacing solid markers with shadow lines, destabilizing our notions of the past in the reverberations of the present. (p 15)

## THE CIRCLE OF REASON

With his first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, Amitav Ghosh made an intriguing debut, exploring themes and probing into forgotten episodes of history. Essentially an anthropologist by profession, he tries to shatter the myth of west superiority. The Circle of Reason can be considered a bildungsroman describing the growth of Alu, a Bengali orphan. The novel incorporates elements of the picaresque, the novel of ideas, and also reads like a thriller or detective story.

The plot of *The Circle of Reason* stands on certain historical events: the Indian nationalist struggle of the 1930s, the Bangladesh war of 1971, and the migration to the Middle East from 1970s onwards. However, the main theme of the novel seems to be the period of British colonization of India. Ghosh's characters – Balaram in *The Circle of Reason* – exhibit continuing impact of the Imperial regime's educational policies on the postcolonial India. The novelist tries to point out that the culture, tradition, and ethos of India received a serious setback because of the Raj. Thus the interpretation by the western scholars of India's geography, history, etc. to legitimize colonial rule is a clever ploy according to Ghosh. Similarly, the British tried to prove that the western knowledge is based on sound principles of logic, experiments, and reason, whereas the Indian knowledge is mostly dependent on hypothesis and thus lacks the universal acknowledgement. Ghosh wants to negate this notion and tries to prove that the eastern knowledge also has universal appeal.

*The Circle of Reason* debates the relationship between science, technology, and nationalism in India, which reaches back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. While not fully accepting the conventional science-tradition division, Ghosh problematizes the science-is-west and tradition-is-east dichotomy by interrogating the status and worth of different branches of science in India. The novelist makes an important point that science, technology, and medicine were not conveyed to India by the British in a one-way process of transfer, but involved in a cross-cultural exchanges, developments, and experiments.

In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh portrays how middle class and lower class people are drawn to the oil-rich countries of Al-Ghazira in search of prosperity. But when the immigrants meet reality, the truth dawns upon them that what they have made is a lost bargain. In their craze for the material pleasures of life, they have made is a lost bargain. In their craze for the material pleasures of life, they have lost so many precious things. They have missed the freedom that they experienced in their motherland. Ghosh realistically portrays the unsafe life of the diaspora in the second section of the novel.

## THE SHADOW LINES:

The Shadow Lines presents three generations of Indian and British families who experience the buildup, the actuality, and the repercussions of the 1947 Partition of India into West Bengal and East Pakistan. The novel follows a nameless narrator who works to discover by interrogating and re-imagining the past the reasons for his cousin Tridib's death. However, the past for these characters is separated geographically. The concept of the international borderline is central to this text and this theme is explicitly explored when Jethamoshai considers the implications of the creation of nation and the ambiguity of Partition. Indeed one level of this novel concerns the random and, many times, ambiguous political lines that divide nations and identities.

This novel tempts us to interpret the text as national allegory, an allegory for the British handling of India. But beyond individual connections there is a connotation that the novel as a whole constitutes the nation. Whereas *The Circle of Reason* is about eloquence, search for metaphor, and the narrative capabilities of the narrator and his characters, the breath-taking compass of *The Shadow Lines*, with its axis on the Indian subcontinent's specified context, coils together geographical distances and deliberately attempts to break many myths while taking the country's history, culture, and political situation in its stride. The novel is also in many ways a bildungsroman, tracing the growth and development of the narrator from childhood to maturity. It is part of the Indian experiment with the non-fiction novel whose first significant landmark was Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

The narrative in *The Shadow Lines* takes us across the international border, continents and cultures, child time and adult time, past and present with such ease that one is simply intrigued. It interrogates complex themes like political conflict, national identity, and cultural dislocation – through the use of memory, nostalgia, multiple subjectivities, and overlapping stories. Covering about four decades from the forties to the eighties, the narrative builds on the life and interaction of two families – the one, the narrator's (including Tridib's), and the other, the Prices of London who have been closely associated with Tridib's family throughout this period. *The Shadow Lines* transcends the narrow categorization of an Indian novel. The story centers on Tridib, the narrator's uncle. No less vivid and memorable are the portraits of the narrator's grandmother, his cousin Ila, and the English girl May Price. The novel creates a wonderful scene of relationships – uncles and aunts are interspersed easily and without any confusion in the course of the narrative, as are also different locations: Calcutta, Dacca, and London. We learn that Tridib was born in 1932, had been to England with his parents in 1939, where his father, an important diplomat in the Foreign



Service, had received medical treatment. May Price (with whose family they shared a close relationship) had begun a long correspondence with Tridib in 1959. Tridib died in a riot in 1964, while May was on a visit to India.

### THE GLASS PALACE:

The Glass Palace records the historic events in three countries: Burma, Malaya, and India. The novel may earn the distinction of being called an epic, given its scope and sweep of events. A whole century of colonial rule of these countries is portrayed: from Anglo-Burmese war of 1885, to the World Wars, up to the age of cyber revolution, and thus bringing together history, fiction, and autobiographical records along with memoirs. This novel relates India and Burma in the shared colonial experience, during which a new sense of selfhood and national identity took shape among the peoples of the two countries. This novel recapitulates the fortunes of an extended family of Indian immigrants from the British conquest of Burma in 1885 to the Democracy Movement of Aung San Suu Kyi of 1996. Ghosh attempts to locate in the history of time and nations such people as the beleaguered group of races of British occupied territories in South East Asia.

The novel shows how Burma and Malaya are denuded by the colonial power by trading in timber and rubber. Rajkumar's story is shown in relation to that of Rajkumar and Dolly's sons to those of Saya John's son and grandchildren. There are no well-marked points where one story stops and the other starts. Stories are intermingled; various characters appear and disappear as quickly. The fabric of the novel is based on the heights of colonialism and also on the gravity of World Wars.

The Glass Palace portrays several levels of movements and awareness within the colonial perceptions of India's loss of selfhood and fragmentation of the social system. The emergence of questioning within the Indians, particularly among the educated middle class was an important feature of the process towards the "recovery" of the sense of selfhood. In the characters of Uma Dey, her husband Beni Prasad Dey, and her nephew Arjun, Ghosh creates this struggle that developed on a larger scale during the 1920s and 1940s.

One might be under the wrong notion that the demon of colonialism died with political independence. A class of people, especially those educated in English medium, would always remain grateful to the British and would always be servile to them. Amitav Ghosh explicitly remarks in a talk with Lukose Mathew that he has no good opinion of the institutions left behind by the British. He says:

We grew up hearing that British institutions, especially the rule of law, have decayed. We think it because of our fault that the rule of law decayed. But the British had two sets of laws: one for the whites and another for the Indians. Some people now step into the shoes of the British and think they are above law. We are left with a law which has inequality as its founding principle.[11]

This statement by Amitav Ghosh is an anti-thesis to the imperialist view that the British were a civilizing force who provided us with knowledge and made us progressive. Conversely, the British rule exploited us economically and culturally. Thus it was regressive for India. Ghosh believes that a false sense of gratitude to the British for a wrong cause has harmed our country.

### THE HUNGRY TIDE:

The action of The Hungry Tide is set on the Sundarbans island of Lusibari. When Kanai first invites Piya to visit his Aunt's hostel on Lusibari, he explains that the name itself is a relic of a bygone, colonial era. Ghosh chose to set The Hungry Tide in the Sundarbans for obvious reasons. In this frontier, different cultures have mixed and interacted forming a kind of synthesis. This settlement has a great significance in the colonial history. It successfully erased from the memory of the people, the impact of the imperial governance. There is a great historical irony in Kanai's description to Piya of how the area was settled in the nineteenth century by British officials serving the Viceroy Lord Canning, searching for a suitable location for an eastern port to rival their western port of Bombay. Ignoring strong local advice about the unsuitability of the Matla River for a major sea port due to its tendencies for flooding and cyclones, Canning established his new port. Sure enough, within four years, a cyclone struck and the city was abandoned. In naming the town "Canning" after the name of the Viceroy, there is a subtle indication that this town is a slave or a vassal to the Malta River. Kanai's narrative therefore maps out a new kind of cultural geography, where the remnants of the British rule not only survive but also stand as a mute testimony to the Raj.

The refugees had no support what so ever – political, financial, etc. Moreover, they were on the run from political displacement in their homes. Having arrived in India's frontier territory, the refugees soon discovered that they were not entirely welcome there either. They had thus been rounded up and taken to a "government resettlement camp in central India... to a place called Dandakaranya, deep in the forests of Madhya Pradesh, hundreds of kilometers from Bengal" (118). Ghosh narrates how the political brutality savagely marauders the dark jungle. Thus The Hungry Tide enacts its own voyage into the recesses of political inferno. The novel has two climaxes: the storming of Morachjhapi, and the storm which destroys Fokir. There is great silence about the two climaxes.

The conceptualization of India as a nation is the outcome of colonial rule and its impact on the ethos of the people. In the pre-independence period, the use of the term "nation" for India was applicable to colonial India, which consisted of present day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The British were attuned to the European situation in which people belonging to one

civilization were not only divided on the basis of language, religion, and denomination, but were also involved in protracted wars and continuous violence to establish nations and states. So the colonists never viewed India as one nation. Seeley comments, "India is...only a geographical expression like Europe or Africa. It does not make the territory of a nation and a language, but the territory of many nations and languages."<sup>16</sup> So there were earlier attempts to negate this orientation by conceptualizing India as a nation. Gradually different modes of conceptualization emerged in response to unfolding realities.

Setting *The Hungry Tide* in the Sundarbans allows Amitav Ghosh to create a setting where everyone is on an even footing. It is not just the legacy of Sir Hamilton, but the hostile environment erases all societal strata because everyone is an equal in the struggle to survive in the hostile environment. This theme runs continuously throughout the novel. Nirmal, a poet at heart who constantly invokes Rilke, approaches retirement feeling that his life was poorly spent because he never lived up to his revolutionary ideals. Nilima is the practical side of their marriage, building a cooperative trust, which brings hope to many lives. She, however, is unwilling to do anything that might upset the government whose favours she needs. Their middle-class upbringing and college education bring them no luxury, just the gratitude and respect from the locals in the tide country for the services they provide. This is a life Kanai does not understand. In the Sundarbans, his wealth, servants, and pride have no value. While he feels himself to be superior to Fokir, on the river he needs Fokir's skills to provide for his survival. Piya, who feels closest to the animals she studies, and needs Kanai's translation skills and Fokir's local knowledge of the river and wildlife to do her research on the river dolphins.

## SEA OF POPPIES

In *Sea of Poppies*, which is the first part of the Ibis trilogy, writer revisits some of his earlier themes like incessant migration of people, movement of trade and empires across the Indian Ocean. It also reveals about the ugly face of Colonialism in the Indian subcontinent. Divided into three sections, the historical novel is set in 1830's against the background of Opium wars. It reveals the now established fact that Britain was world's biggest opium producer as well as supplier and this fact is overruled by the British version of history.

More than two centuries ago, the East India Company which fortified the colonial rule in India, turned the banks of Ganga into a 'sea of poppies' to grow opium and export it illegally to China. The work depicts the heat and dust of India under British colonialism, which commences from 'a tumultuous voyage across the Indian Ocean to Mauritius islands on 'an old slaving ship whose ragtag crew is made up of sailors, stowaways, convicts and the English men. The novel opens in a remote village of Deeti, the first character, introduced by Ghosh by giving a picture of Indian village life, as follows:

The village in which Deeti lived was on the outskirts of the town of Ghazipur, some fifty miles east of Banaras. Like all her neighbors, Deeti was preoccupied with the lateness of her poppy crop: that day, she rose early and went through the motions of her daily routine, laying out a freshly-washed *dhoti* and *kameez* for Hukum Singh, her husband, and preparing the *rotis* and *achar* he would eat at the midday.[4]

From the beginning, the lot of Deeti is sketched as pathetic, full of struggle for existence and ups and downs. She is married to an incorrigible *afeemkhor*, an addicted husband Hukum Singh, a high caste Rajput who collapses at the opium-packing factory. Here the workers are as slow as ants in honey and later on passes away. The widow Deeti has no other option except being Sati on the altar of her husband. She is eloped away with Kalua, the ox-cart driver and in whose company she is having 'a curious feeling of joy mixed with resignation' she feels 'as if she really had died and been delivered betimes in rebirth, to her next life: she had shed the body of the old Deeti, with burden of its *Karma*'; (178). But she is 'free passing rest of her life with Kalua.

The novel, divided into three sections of 'Land' 'River' and 'Sea' has different historical and social set ups and life and each has ended in a new beginning. The first section ends with the beginning of new life of Deeti, the second section ends with the beginning of new life of Neel Rattan, the insolent in particular and the third chapter ends with new fate of all the characters of the novel. But historical set up or the 'sense of time' and 'place' is never absent in the book. The sense of time of colonial India when Indian life was so English that even language could not escape impact and Hindi became 'Hinglish'. The canvas of Amitav is wider than historical plot; he uses history only to an extent from which one may look at life in its totality or it may not overpower delicacies and emotions of human life and not in fragments. He himself asserts it in terms of *Sea of Poppies*:

Sea of Poppies is not about any one thing, any more than the past (or the present) are about one thing. There can no doubt that colonialism was the dominant political reality: 19th century India. Yet it is important to remember that it was just one aspect of that reality: people also lived and laughed and loved as indeed people do everywhere no matter what their political circumstances.[5]

Rather the vision of Ghosh on 19th century India appears to be different. He adds:

When I look back at 19th century, what strikes me is the resilience, the resistance, the willingness to change and determination to learn. The past cannot and right not to, be planned down to one dimension.[6]

Ghosh, on the other hand portrays the lives of the people residing near the coast of old Calcutta where Raja Neel Rattan who is entertaining British merchants and sea-man aboard his budgerow with Champagne and chicken and top of forthcoming

Chinese hostilities but soon the tables are turned and the same fastidious Bengal potentate is ruined because he is convicted of fraud and is bankrupted. Here at this point, Ghosh's narration is quite impartial and especially the treatment of the Englishman with the Indian is also worth-noticing. The judges treat Raja Neel Rattan unmindful of his position and place:

The temptation that afflicts those who bear the burden of governance', said the judge, 'is ever that of indulgence, the power of paternal feeling being such as to make every parent partake of the suffering of his wards and offspring's. Yet, painful as it is, duty requires us sometimes to set aside our natural affections in the proper dispensation of justice... (236)

The trial of Neel Rattan and later on the treatment with the Raja like an ordinary man and his painful conviction of Kalapani seems to touch the pulse of time.

The ship Ibis which is making preparations to set for sail to Madagascar loaded with a cargo of Girmittias (in which Kalua and Deeti are also present) and convicts (like that of Raja Neel Rattan). The characters like Zachary, the captain Chillingworth, Sarang Ali (boatswain) and his cruel treatment with the sailors and convicts remind of the India under colonialism. With such outlining events Ghosh intends to show something else. He does not pose himself bending towards a peculiar direction rather; he looks at the things without any personal indulgence. Another significant character Paulette, the daughter of French botanist fostered in Indian atmosphere is forced back into European pretensions of close class and snobbery in the household of Benjamin Burnham, the rich merchant of Calcutta, makes the reader think in another direction against the archetype of British rule.

The historical fiction of Amitav Ghosh are driven by what he said in a note to *The Glass Palace* as 'a near obsessive urge to render the backgrounds' of his characters' lives as closely as he could'. In *Sea of Poppies*, he seems to trace the history of late 18th century Asia when in 1838 the opium wars are about to begin.

### CONCLUSION:

We discover that Amitav Ghosh's fictional work moves effortlessly across political and national boundaries addressing issues which have emerged in postcolonial deliberations. Using his perceptiveness and wisdom, the writer inquires and explores historical events that were sidelined in government records and advocates the imperialistic and multicultural issues.

In the trajectory of historical fiction-we have always been concerned with the 'other'. It's almost apt in this age of globalization that the gap between battling for the 'other' and straddling it has been reduced. The myriad and diasporic imagination of the above writer is essential for our understanding of South Asian History and Indian history in particular. Ghosh's novels takes the responsibility of re-assessing its troubled antecedents and uses history as a tool by which we can come to terms with our troubling existence. He is both a diasporic and postcolonial writer who uses his imagination to document the history of the Indian subcontinent. A significant conclusion that emerges from this study is that the achievement of Amitav Ghosh as a novelist consists in his sensitively responding to the various socio-cultural problems that Indians have been facing for a long time. The response crystallizes into an imaginative construct, the meaning and the relevance of which consist in making sense of modern India, its problems, its people, and its fast-changing socio-cultural milieu.

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