Chapter Four

Historicizing Multiple Space of Diaspora : Amitav Ghosh

Like Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh attempts to historicize multiple space of Indian diaspora in his fictional writing. His interest in history is necessarily linked with the human aspects and therefore he traces the origins of different cultures and nations in re-vised historical contexts. He imagines the historical condition which is at once post-colonial as well as diasporic. In order to understand an ongoing process of history, Ghosh endeavours to re-assess its troubled antecedents and thereby come to terms with troubling present. In his findings, however, he realizes the diasporic nature of all history which indicates that diaspora cultures are not only oriented towards lost origins or homelands, but that they are also produced by ongoing histories of migrations and transnational cultural flows. In other words, by historicizing such a diasporic space in its multiplicity and heterogeneousness, Ghosh clearly points out that similarity and difference simultaneously co-exist, in any given history of diaspora. In Indian context, Ghosh explores such a diasporic trajectory of history that at once dismantles and demythifies the rigid notion of nation and its boundary and re-narrates and re-invents the smooth and uninterrupted flow of intermixed culture of diaspora. In the words of James Clifford, Ghosh's writing "...draws attention to the complex 'roots' and 'routes' that make up the relations between cultures..." (qtd. in Dixon 12).

Ghosh does this re-visioning of history through different modes, *viz.*, historical re-construction, magic realism and the narrative of third space. He also employs the narratives of personal history, memoirs and recollections which return to homeland. Underlying this his-torical concern, he seems to stress the need for defining one's self and identifying sites of resistance. That is, he attempts to fill gaps in nationalist histories by telling alternate revi-

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sionist stories suppressed or elided by nationalism's dominant discourse. Anjali Gera comments that Ghosh "... substitutes stories for history to unmask the narrative of history" (110). On the other hand, G. J. V. Prasad appreciates Ghosh as a cosmopolitan writer who "... weaves together a pluralistic and self-reflexive view of the world... that challenges the smugness of accepted narratives..." (56). At times Ghosh also makes use of the fantasy to give impetus to his narrative energy *a la* Rushdie. Finally, in his own distinctive way, Ghosh devises the mode of the third space by moving away from the moorings of homeland and the land of adoption.

Doubtless, Rushdie's inventiveness, irreverance and audacity in re-visioning of history became a liberating force for a large group of Indian writers living either at home or abroad. Many of them like Shashi Tharoor, Mukul Kesavan, Upamanyu Chatterjee including Ghosh are known as "Rushdie's children", but over the years unusual writers with distinctive voices have emerged who have only a vague family resemblance with Rushdie. Ghosh must be considered as one of these writers who have chronologically followed Rushdie in the history of the Indian novel in English. Despite a few occasional touches of Rushdie, Ghosh has emerged successfully with a distinctive voice of his own as a competent novelist. For this reason, his work has been regarded as post-colonial with the textual interminglings of Rushdie and Ben Okri. Notwithstanding this postcolonial stance, Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray are also quite obvious influences on Ghosh.

Born in Kolkata in 1956, Ghogh studied at St. Stephens College in Delhi, St. Edmund Hall, Oxford; and the Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria. For some time he worked for the *Indian Express* newspaper in New Delhi and earned his doctorate in Oxford before he wrote his first novel. Ghosh possesses diasporic identity, because as an Indian of Burmese

origin who was raised in Bangladesh, Iran, Sri Lanka, has done his writing in Egypt, and now does it in the U.S. Not surprisingly, therefore, his own situation corresponds well with the subjects of emigration, exile, and cultural displacement addressed in his work. Ghosh himself admits : "... I grew up on stories of other countries... the most intriguing of these stories were those ... of Burma" (*Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* 65).

During the post-eighties, Ghosh embarked on writing a new kind of Indian novel in English which is marked by visible departures and divergences from the earlier novel, because it undertakes the re-writing of history in a re-visionist mode. In the new novel in English, the novelists like Ghosh not only blend the historical discourse with the fictional narrative, but at the same time they also construct an alternative subversive narrative in parallel to the official version. Such a revised historical narrative appears in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), which is set on the partition of India. Likewise, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* and of course Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) employ the narrative structure that run counter to the official narrative. Ghosh not only questions and challenges such an official version but he also delineates the multiple space of diasporic history in his fictional writing.

Ghosh's first published novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986), follows the fortunes of a young weaver, Alu, who is brought up in a Bengal village and after a false accusation that he is a member of a terrorist group, subsequently flees westwards, first to a fictional Gulf state and later to Algeria. The novel suggests that weaving is a diasporic activity which transcends national origins and unites worlds that have habitually been viewed as separate; and in so doing, it anticipates Ghosh's later contention in *In an Antique Land* that the medieval

trade-routes functioned as a mobile inter-continental network that was largely unaware of Western Oriental/Occidental bifurcations. Not unnaturally, in keeping with Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Ghosh's *Circle of Reason* is yet another step in portraying social realism garbed in fantasy. The realism becomes clear by the symbolic value of Alu's journey. Alok Kumar and Madhusudan Prasad privilege the motif of journey as a symbolic trope in Ghosh. They believe that in *The Circle of Reason* "... as also in his later novels, journey is a symbol of hope and discovery at the same time it is a symbol of displacement and endless drift" (Alok and Prasad 182). They rightly conclude, however, that journey in Ghosh is "...at once symbolic of emancipation and entanglement, ... an escape and a noose" (Alok and Prasad 182).

In *The Circle of Reason*, therefore, Alu's adventures take him from his village on the borders of West Bengal to the Middle East, thence to Algiers and from there back home again. The narrative is divided into the two parts – part one, dealing with Alu's uncle Balaram in Lalpukur and part two with Zindi in Al-Ghazira. Towards the end of the novel, it is disclosed that Zindi is an Egyptian. Ghosh has "...defined her in a broader, more human context that transcends the boundaries between Indian and foreign" (Basu 153). If Balaram is a symbol of Reason, then Zindi is a symbol of the instinct for survival and maternal identity. Both Balaram and Zindi's identities dissolve at the end of the novel. Alu is indisputably the main protagonist, however, a glue that holds a nomadic novel together, but for much of the action he is the silent centre around which an abundance of other stories are told. Many of these include fabulist elements and although Ghosh never departs from the bounds of what is strictly possible, the use of fantasy suggests a world-view that has affinities with both contemporary magic realism and a range of Indian narrative traditions. Indian influences include the Sanskrit classics and

the modern Bengali literature and these two strands come together towards the end of the novel, when a character attempts to stage a production of Tagore's *Chitrangada*, a dance drama based on an episode in *The Mahabharata*.

An element of fantasy thus weaves through the circle of Reason, binding characters and incidents together and investing them with the lurid light of comedy. It is particularly prominent in the second part set in Al-Ghazira. Here extraordinary events that reflect the collision of traditional and modern value-systems are sometimes reminiscent of happenings in Garcia'z Maconda. When Alu is buried in the collapsed debris of a newly-built commercial complex, he is saved by two antique sewing machines on which a huge slab of falling concrete comes to rest "just a hair away from his nose" (*Circle* 240). A cross-eyed egg-seller is said to be able to see Cairo and Bombay simultaneously (245-46). A seventy-five-year-old woman, renowned "for her astonishing ugliness" is much loved of the pearl divers and boatmen because she could scare sharks into tearing out their own entrails simply by grinning into the water" (255).

And just as happens in several magic realist novels, *The Circle of Reason* employs a complex series of analeptic and proleptic references, partly to engineer suspense, but also to suggest the convergence of the ordinary and the extraordinary and to eliminate the possiblity of reading the narrative passively, as a causal, linear chain of "real" occurences. In this sense, as G.J.V. Prasad rightly observes: "...*The Circle of Reason* is about narration itselt...about patterning, the various personal efforts at imposition of order on a chaotic world in order to come to terms with it... about the aesthetic quest necessary for the motivation and survival of the artiste in every soul in an inherently deadening, hostile, and uncertain environment" (101).

Reason, as the title itself suggests, is circular and the view that the novel propounds is antipathetic to linear historiography. In the first part, Balaram's main rival is his "*doppelganger*", Bhudeb Roy, who opposes his vision of circularity with a belief in the "straight lines" (*Circle* 99), on which the technological progress of Europe, America and Japan has been founded. Though Balaram's world is destroyed at the end of this section, the primacy of reason in the novel remains unchallenged, as Alu migrates to new climes and ensures the continuation of Balaram's cyclic vision through his weaving and his continuation of the campaign against germs.

In fact, weaving is a dominant trope in the narrative of *The Circle of Reason*. Here it functions in two ways : as an organizational device, in which disparate strands are juxtaposed to create unexpected linkages and analogies; and as a central motif by demonstrating that received historiography has constructed dichotomized models of cultural interaction. G.J.V. Prasad, therefore, aptly notes that Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* "... challenges the smugness of accepted narratives and points of views and the certainties of postcolonial borders as well as generic boundaries" (56). All the major characters in the novel are called upon to fill in the gaps in the historiographic narrative by relating parts of the story. The principal quest in the novel seems to be a search for the right metaphor for narrative purpose and hence these characters float in a sea of metaphors – carbolic acid, birds, sewing machines, germs, the book *Life of Pasteur* and of course the central metaphor of "weaving".

The Circle of Reason concludes on an affirmative note of Alu's possible return to "home" and an assertion that "[H]ope is the beginning" (*Circle* 423). Due to the text's continued emphasis on the circularity of Reason, such an optimism has been anticipated right from

the beginning. The circular view of things in particular, is associated with the trope of Alu's loom and the activity of meaning. For example, Ghosh concludes a passage on the romance of "cloth" with a panegyric on the unifying, transcultural benefits of the weaver's loom :

Man at the loom is the finest example of Mechanical man; a creature who makes his own world as no other can, with his mind. The machine is man's curse and his salvation, and no machine has created man as much as the loom. It has created not separate worlds but one, for it has never permitted the division of the world. (55)

In this way, *The Circle of Reason* moves between various narrative strands and navigates the trade-routes that link supposedly separate countries and cultures. Such fluidity in the novel challenges notions of discrete nationhood and other forms of identity. Although it dramatizes a range of cultural conflicts, ultimately it expresses a humanist creed, which unsettles a range of binaries like those between tradition and modernity, nature and technology and East and West in a manner that anticipates the dominant impulse in Ghosh's later work.

Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) focuses on a very particular personal history – the experience of a single family – as a microcosm for a broader national and international experience. Vinita Chandra looks at *The Shadow Lines* from the perspective of revisionist history and holds the view that "... Ghosh highlights the "minor riots" within India" whose "...suppressed memories form the foundations of the accepted historiography in the tacit agreement of historiographers to leave them uncovered" (67). She concludes that in this novel, Ghosh "... attempts to represent a past, and a national identity, that is multilayered, complex and interwoven rather than binarized" (Chandra 78). Neelam Srivastava also affirms

that in his writing Ghosh "...is at pains to foreground the cultural syncretism of the Indian subcontinent in strategic opposition to the historicism of nationalistic discourse" (79).

The lives of the unnamed narrator's family have been irrevocably changed as a consequence of Bengal's partition between India and Pakistan at the time of Independence and the subsequent experience of the East Pakistan Civil War of 1971, which led to the creation of Bangladesh. The "Shadow lines" of the title are the borders that divide people and, as in all Ghosh's work, one of the main emphases is on the arbitrariness of cartographical demarcations. Towards the end, when members of the family are about to undertake a journey from Calcutta to their former home in Dhaka, the narrator's grandmother wants to know whether she will "be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane" (*Shadow* 154), an ingenuous response which nevertheless foregrounds the absurdity of the revisionist map-making of the politicians responsible for partition.

Meenakshi Malhotra maintains that in *The Shadow Lines* "...personal memory and experiences are often pitted against official versions of history and grand narratives or 'metanarratives' of freedom and nationalism" (167). She argues that the characters who move towards a sense of freedom, albeit a national, contingent one are those who have freed themselves of other people's inventions and are the actors in their own history, like May. Ila, struggling towards a post-colonial identity, is still trapped in the history of colonialism. Likewise, Meenakshi Mukherjee propounds that in this novel Ghosh employs the tropes of maps and mirrors in order to perceive the true nature of space and time and therefore "[J]ust as cartography is the science of codifying space, history is the discipline of narrativising time. The public chronicles of nations are interrogated... by highlighting... the reality of the fictions

people create around their lives...and...by recording the verifiable and graphic details of individual memories that do not necessarily tally with the received versions of history" (*The Perishable Empire* 134-35). In other words, she holds the view that the novel "..... obviously questions the idea of nationhood that is consolidated through the baptism of wars or coercive state apparatus" (Mukherjee 146).

The narrator's family journey to Dhaka to rescue an aged relative and in the climax of this episode the narrator ponders the deadly effects of borders, when his cousin, Tridib is killed amid the communal violence. Although he concedes that the political map-makers were well-intentioned, he is struck by the fact that the bonds that link Dhaka and Calcutta are closer than ever : "each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking – glass border" (*Shadow* 234). Shadow-Lines are, however, more than just the frontiers constructed by politicians. They are the lines of demarcation that separate colonizer and colonized, present and past, self and image. Ultimately they are the signifying acts that construct notions of discrete identity. As always, Ghosh is not only at pains to depict the porousness of geographical borders, but also the artificiality of a range of binary categorizations of culture and areas of the human psyche.

Contrary to this, Ghosh presents the character of Tha'mma, the narrator's grandmother, who is an apt example of militant nationalism. When her grandson asks her if she would have really killed the British officer, she quickly responds : "... yes, I would have killed him. It was for our freedom : I would have done anything to be free" (*Shadow* 39). The personal history of anti-imperialism thus sharpens her sense of nationhood and of the formation of the Indian nation-state. Ghosh envisages such nationalism as the shadow-line drawn between people and

nations, which is at once both an absurd illusion and a source of terrifying violence. Ghosh

extends the nation of the "looking-glass border" beyond divided Bengal and when the narrator

comes to see himself as the mirror-image of an English character he has never met, it bears a

marked relationship to forms of colonial discourse that define non-European subjectivity as

the inferior partner in a two-tier power structure : "Nick Price, whom I have never seen, and

would, as far as I knew never see, became a spectral presence beside me in my looking glass,

growing with me, but always bigger and better and in some ways more desirable" (*Shadow*

55).

Tridib's death, May's return to England, and Tha'mma's futile visit to Dhaka in search of

the Jethamosai whose sense of reality has been frozen by the partition are thus part of a pain-

ful story of the birth of new countries. Imparting a valuable insight into the world of *The*

Shadow Lines, therefore, Jasbir Jain aptly comments that it "...explores... the historical

reshapings of geographical boundaries and the inability of these boundaries to confine human

emotions and memory" (82). Ghosh is engaged with the cultural and historical past by reject-

ing the process of historicizing the imperial past in favour of personal memory and imagina-

tion. As one of the narrators rightly wonders, "[A]nd then I think to myself why don't they draw

thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name

? What would it change ? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a

memory ?" (*Shadow* 247). Tridib's story is thus a defiance and disruption of the meta-narra-

tives of religious and nationalist agendas that create ruptures and divides within the human

psyche. Tridib therefore rightly inspires the narrator to construct his own narratives in order

to avoid getting incarcerated in someone else's oppressive stories that reflect ethnic and reli-

gious jealousies and rivalries. He is timely warned by Tridib that the alternative to inventing one's own story "wasn't blankness – it only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we should never be free of other people's inventions" (*Shadow* 31). Suvir Kaul also observes in this matter and notes that the narrative in the novel is a search "...for the elusive formal and causal logic that will allow the narrator's autobiography (and equally the national biography that is interwoven with it...) to cohere, to make sense" (269).

Finally, *The Shadow Lines* also offers the theme of immigration in its narrative structure. In fact, the very first sentence of the narrator clearly states this : "[I]n 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father's aunt, Mayadevi, went to England with her husband and her son, Tridib" (*Shadow*). The rest of the narrative then follows with a presentation of diverse attitudes and relationships, fostered by the complete dissolution of barriers between different cultures and nations. The narrator also accepts the cultural predicament into which he was born. He experiences the agony of an educated Bengali who looks to western values and yet cannot yet rid of his native roots. The more deeply he looks within himself, the more clearly he senses the chasm of his divided self. He has within himself Tha'mma, Ila, Tridib and May and does not know how to reconcile the conflicting demands of his divided self nor does he comprehened if a reconciliation is possible at all. For him there are no clear-cut answers nor daylight perceptions but only to accept calmly his dilemma. Tridib is also strangely resigned, nevertheless he combines within himself the best of both British and Bengali cultures. The conflict of the narrator, however, is the conflict between middle-class Bengali conservatism and affluent British liberalism; between action and contemplation, prejudice and perception; bondage and liberation, illusion and reality. In this way, *The Shadow Lines* imparts mul-

tiple space to its narrative chronicle.

Homi K. Bhabha has proposed that nationalities, ethnicities, and identities are dialogic, indeterminate, and characterized by "hybridity". In the chapter "The Commitment to Theory" in his seminal book *The Location of Culture* (1994), he defines hybridity as what "is new, neither the one nor the other", which emerges from a "Third Space". He emphasizes that the third space has fluid sense of nationality and identity and that the identity is narratively produced rather than arising from an intrinsic essence (*Norton* 2377). Like Bhabha, Ghosh also demonstrates the hybrid, interstitial nature of cultures, as articulated through language. This becomes overtly defined in his next novel *In an Antique Land* (1992).

Ghosh sees the transcultural world of medieval Indo-Arabic trade in *In An Antique Land* as a phenomenon which challenges notions of 'purity' or political enclosure. In other words, Ghosh is engaged not so much with history as with the alternative cultural connections and narratives excluded by the writing of history. The use of family connections and personal letters makes the sense of history intensely personal in the novel. This domestic vision is a deliberate subversion of the grand historical narrative. Rather it is simply the space in which people can make their own connections most readily. Ghosh felt very proud of writing *In an Antique Land*, because in this novel he writes about Jews, Muslims, and Hindus and finds a point of entry among their inter-relationships. The narrator of the novel is a humane historian who travels between cultures and negotiates the "third space" in various kinds of society. He also attempts to redefine the present time through a nuanced understanding of the past by straddling between cultures. Ghosh's narrator suggests that it is impossible to accept any story or history as the ultimate truth, because "truths" vary according to perspectives and locations.

Ghosh's narrator, therefore, sees history as the trajectory of events that causes dislocations, disjunctions, movements and migrations, eventually replacing solid markers with shadow lines, destabilizing one's notions of the past in the reverberations of the present. Instead of battling with the other cultures, the narrator straddles the "other" and accepts their difference without any conflict.

Influenced by his association with the subaltern studies scholars, Ghosh in *In an Antique Land* "...returns to a rigorous mode of empirical research to recover the historically situated subjectivities of a network of traders and their slaves operating between North Africa and South-west India during the Middle Ages. This cultural space is a vast, borderless region with its own hybrid languages and practices which circulate without national or religious boundaries..." (Dixon 10). Ghosh's writing, therefore, reflects the recent concern of anthropologists with the porosity of cultural boundaries. The characters in his novel do not occupy discrete cultures, but dwell in travel – in cultural spaces that flow across borders, the 'shadow lines' drawn around modern nation states.

The jacket-blurb of *In an Antique Land* describes the book as "subversive history in the guise of a traveller's tale". It is true that the novel is at once a travel narrative, ethnography, history and fiction. By mixing all these genres, it offers alternate histories and challenges the boundaries of travel writing, fiction, anthropology and academic history writing. On the other hand, Leela Gandhi reads this novel "... as a subtle recasting of Hegel's master-slave paradigm, as a rejoinder to the claims of historicist teleogy" (57). Jasbir Jain characterizes the novel as "... the narrative of a third space" which moves "... outside both the culture of origin and that of adoption" (84). M.K.Naik notes that *In an Antique Land* "... demonstrates

how history can be enriched by imaginative reconstruction of the past" (205). There comes a moment in the narrative when the narrator is struck by the remark of one of the Egyptian villagers, among whom he is living. He comments: "[I]t was the first time when anyone in Lataifa or Nashway had attempted an enterprise similar to mine - to enter my imagination and look at my situation as it might appear to me" (*Antique Land* 152). Such an attempt at imaginative empathy characterizes all Ghosh's writing to date and seems to be the product of a humanist concern to transcend culturally constructed differences.

While undertaking doctoral research in Egypt, Ghosh developed an interest in the routes of cultural exchange through which the pre-colonial Indian Ocean cloth trade operated. Ghosh's practice here put flesh to Said's contention that orientalism operated both textually and through direct military intervention of Napleon's invasion of Egypt. While the inner narrative of *In an Antique Land* thus begins an archival detective-story, in which the narrator tries to unearth the identity of the "slave" of a twelfth-century Jewish merchant, this investigation gradually expands into a quietly stated polemics against the European violence that destroyed the centuries-old "peaceful traditions" of the Indian ocean trade, built upon "the rich confusion that accompany a culture of accommodation and compromise" (*Antique Land* 287-88). In this sense *In an Antique Land* is a story of a low class Indian bought as a slave by a Jewish merchant in the twelfth century. It is also an exciting combination of history, documentary, travelogue and social portraiture. Emphasizing the representation of the marginalized in the novel, K.C. Beliappa remarks that "...an ordinary slave provides the narrative both the impetus and significance"; but "... the extortion and rapacity of colonialism put an end to the possibility of the kind of relationship that existed between individuals as different as Ben Yiju and Bomma" (233-35).

In an Antique Land, thus, moves between two narratives, although apparently it is a

factual "history in the guise of a traveller's tale." The travel narrative is certainly the more

extensive of the two. In this narrative the narrator is engaged in anthropological research in

Egypt and describes his experiences living in a fellaheen village. In the shorter narrative, how-

ever, the narrator pursues the fugitive traces of the "slave" Bomma and his master Abraham

Ben Yuji. The text of the novel transgresses generic categories by drawing on the conven-

tions of travel book, novel, ethnography and academic history in a subtly subversive way. It

also shows the connections between Egypt and India in much the same way as *The Circle of*

Reason weaves connections between the sub-continent, the Middle East and North Africa and

The Shadow Lines exemplifies both the artificiality of national borders and the

interconnectedness of supposedly separate places and experiences. In the words of Richard

Cronin, therefore, writers like Ghosh "...prefer to fracture time and move sinuously between

contiments, so that the text becomes a picture of a consciousness forever in transit between

different orders of experience" (214-15). Likewise Vijay Mishra holds the view that "...the act

of displacement makes diasporic subjects travellers on the move; their homeland is a series

of objects, fragments of narratives that they keep in their heads or in their suitcases" (68).

The narrative of the quest for the slave draws one into an anthropological detective-

story, which serves as a metonymy for the excavating of subaltern identity. At the same time,

in piecing together a skeletal biography of Ben Yiju, the text also engages with the equally

fascinating historiographical project of narrativizing the life of a liminal merchant, who is the

personification of Indian Ocean trade-routes that confound the East-West bifurcations of

orientalist cartographies. Ghosh represents Ben Yiju as a cultural broker who moves un-self-

consciously between the discrete worlds, just as he himself points out analogous Indian-Egyptian

links in the contemporary Egyptian narrative. Ghosh himself emphasises the significance of such links and believes that "...in the circuitry of imagination, connections are of greater importance than disjunctions" (*The Imam and the Indian* vii).

The technique of finding links is also used in the connection between research and fiction. For example, speaking of Ben Yiju's marriage to a non-Jewish woman, the narrator says, "[I]f I hesitate to call it love it is only because the documents offer no certain proof" (*Antique Land* 230). Commenting on how Bomma became Ben Yiju's slave, he writes, "[F]rom certain references in Ben Yiju's papers it seems likely that he took Bomma into his service as a business agent and helper soon after he had established himself in Mangalore. [...] the terms [...] were probably entirely different from those suggested by the word 'slavery' today" (259). Starting with the comment that Bomma's first appearance on "the stage of modern history" is little more than "a prompter's whisper" (13), Ghosh opens up a "trapdoor into a vast network of foxholes where real life continues uninterrupted" (16) by "grand designs and historical destinies" (15). Likewise, his account of contemporary fellaheen village life focuses on microhistories, "tiny threads, woven into the borders of a gigantic tapestry" (95). Ghosh's Egyptian characters, who otherwise would be relegated to the margins of more conventional histories, come alive as individuals in their own right. At the same time they become representatives of the subalterns emancipated by Nasser's Revolution, whose lives are now undergoing rapid change as a result of "the real and desperate seriousness of their engagement with modernism", their desire to escape from what they see as their "anachronistic" (200) situation, by ascending a ladder of technological development. The central tension of the contemporary narrative emerges from the Ghosh Persona's accounts of his dialogues with villagers bent on learning about Indian customs, in order to make comparisons between the two cultures' suc-

cess in engaging with modernity. Such conversations reach a climax when the Persona finds himself arguing with the local Imam as to which nation is technologically superior. He is horrified, however, to realise that he has competed by using the rhetoric of modern violence and in so doing has become "a conspirator in the betrayal of the history that had led me to Nashawy; a witness to the extermination of a world of accommodations that I had believed to be still alive and in some measure still retrievable" (*Antique Land* 237).

When after an absence of seven years the narrator returns in 1988 to the Egyptian village, he finds that the village life has changed dramatically; that two or three million Egyptians have migrated to Iraq, to provide a work-force to replace Iraqis fighting on the fronts in Iran and Kurdistan. The focus on the transnational movement of peoples, with its accompanying emphasis on the hybrid, unsettled aspects of cultures, is typical of Ghosh's writing. When these Egyptian workers' Iraqi lives are suddenly terminated by the outbreak of the Gulf war, it signals the end of a way of life, however. The text closes with the narrator watching television in Egypt, along with a dozen villagers, all desperately hoping to catch a glimpse of one of their number, another subaltern who appears to "have vanished into the anonymity of History" (*Antique Land* 353).

The narrative of *In an Antique Land* begins with the crusade and ends with the gulf war. In the novel, Ghosh obtains a 'dialogic' relation between past and present. The very title of the novel is ambiguous, suggesting that although he is researching the history of medieval Egypt, the narrator historian at every turn discovers continuities between past and present. In the words of Brinda Bose, "Ghosh's imagination is as necessarily diasporic as it is postcolonial..." (16). In the narrative energy of this mammoth novel, therefore, Ghosh's diasporic imagination mingles with the trajectory of postcolonial history.

Ghosh's fourth novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) is ostensibly more fictive

than *In an Antique Land*, but it also interweaves a network of traces – from the history of

malaria research, theological movements generally deemed to be heretical in the west and

slightly futuristic computer technology *interalia* to provide the possibility of an alternative

subaltern history, which exists in parallel to colonial history as an equally-or possibly more

potent epistemological system, albeit one which has traditionally operated through silence.

Tabish Khair proposes that the main concern of Ghosh in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is "...the

question of subaltern agency *vis-a-vis* alienation" (145). He further remarks that "...Ghosh's

use of history" seems to be "...very complex and significant rewriting of the beginnings of the

Indian National Congress" (Khair 156). In other words, Khair concludes that "[B]y construct-

ing and 'deconstructing' histories and stories, Ghosh opens up space for various 'presenta-

tions'..." (Khair 160). The main narrative of the novel involves a re-examination of the history

of late nineteenth-century malaria research by a possibly deranged Calcutta-born man named

Murugan, who is convinced that Ronald Ross, the British scientist who was awarded the 1902

Nobel Prize for Medicine for his work on the life-cycle of the malaria parasite was not a lone

genius" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 57), a brilliant British dilettante who outstripped all of

his contomporaries. Murugan believes that there is a secret history that has been erased from

the scribal records of the colonial society and from medical historiography more generally

and therefore he has set out to uncover the hidden truth, a project which can be seen as a

metonymy for the attempt to recuperate subaltern agency.

John Thieme posits that in *The Calcutta Chromosome* "...Ghosh is concerned to exca-

vate a labyrinthine network of traces...making it clear that essentialist versions of national

and regional cultures ... inherent in orientalist discourses, are unsustainable" (129). The protagonist of the novel, Murugan, also known as Morgan, works for an international public health company called Lifewatch and uses an Americanized slang register, which characterizes him as a diaspora subject. Murugan is first encountered through another diaspora subject, Antar, a New York-based computer systems operator, who has been a former colleague of Murugan's and now works for an international water agency which has absorbed Lifewatch. Antar comes across a fragment of an ID card on the screen of his super-computer which sets him off on a quest to reconstruct the recent life-history of its missing owner. The owner in question turns out to be Murugan, whom Antar had interviewed a few years before, to try to dissuade him from a request to be transferred to Calcutta, so that he can pursue his "theory that some person or persons had systematically interfered with Ronald Ross's experiments to push malaria research in certain directions while leading it away from others" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 36). Antar makes use of the World Wide Web to locate Murugan. This is exactly a metaphor for its narrative which reminds one of the weaving in *The Circle of Reason*. Antar, however, undertakes a quest for the missing colleague which becomes nodal to the other similar narrative quests. This novel, therefore, has been described as a kind of mystery thriller. It brings together three searches. The first is that of Antar; the second pertains to Murugan's obsession with the missing links in the history of malaria research; and the third search is that of Urmila Roy, a journalist in Calcutta in 1995 who is researching the works of Phulboni, a writer who produced a strange cycle of "Lakhan Stories" that he wrote in the 1930s but suppressed thereafter.

In other words, *The Calcutta Chromosome* is an anthropological detective thriller which narrates the lives of the people who are completely disconnected with their families.

The unfolding process of Ross's research becomes a kind of subnarrative within the text. Likewise the malaria parasite may be taken as a symbol of storytelling when it mutates and passes from person to person. The strange experience of Phulboni at Renupur is repeated again and again but each time it presents different versions. This numerous interlocking narrative establishes linkages across time and space. The text is also full of Phulboni's hallucination or fantasy which may have arisen due to malaria delirium. Antar, Murugan and Ross undergo the similar recurrent bouts of malaria deririum and become prone to hallucination. In the narrative of Mangala, however, Ghosh discredits the Western scientist and instates an Indian female subaltern in his place. Both Mangala and Laakhan / Lutchman are the subaltern plotters who practise the tradition of counterscience against western science.

Tabish Khair observes that Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* "...marks the restoration of history to the subaltern..." who "... have been plotted out of extant histories" (152). In this sense the novel's intricate plot not only imparts the comprehensibility and agency to the subaltern, but it also dismisses the arbitrary and essentialist dichotomies between the 'west' and 'India'. And like his earlier novel In *an Antique Land*, here, too, Ghosh has established a connection between India and Egypt *via* Murugan and Antar. Furthermore, the novel grapples with colonialist notions of science ('discovery') and the 'native' East (counter-scientific, 'fevers' and 'delirium') without reducing them to an essentialized binary opposition. That is, it reconsiders Eurocentric dualisms set up between science and Magic/Mysticism in which the colonies supposedly embody the latter, and re-plays the Man-machine wars on native territory with surprising turns of 'discovery'. This 'Discovery' in the novel is an abstract personification of agency and as Tabish Khair points out, "[T]he failure of, say, Ronald Ross or D.D.Cunningham to discover the 'Calcutta chromosome' and the ability of Mangala-Laakhan to do so stems

from the failure of the coloniser's concept of rationality in comprehending the colonial sub-altern... is a consequence of discursive alienation" (150). To sum up, it may be said that *The Calcutta Chromosome* is an experimental novel which employs different strands of narrative like science-fiction, detective-novel, anthropology, outcome-studies and cyber-novel. At the same time it is also a wrestle with the history of malaria as much as that of the fevers and deliriums of colonial exigencies.

Ghosh's writing travels not only in history but also in the various geographical locations. If he takes up the setting of New York and Calcutta in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and thereby dismantles the rigidities of space, then in his next novel *The Glass Palace* (2000), he narativizes the multiple space of India, Burma, Thailand and Malasiya with their postcolonial histories. In his article "The Slave of M.S.H.6" which has been included into the text of *In an Antique Land*, Ghosh comments that "[I]n the geography of human history no culture is an island..." (qtd. in Dixon 9). In this way, *The Glass Palace* is yet another step of critiquing the intricate corridors of diasporic history. In this novel Ghosh returns yet again to his own distinctive brand of the historical novel that he had introduced with *The Shadow Lines*. The novel is specifically an elegy for the diasporic condition which is the product of history that leaves behind kingdom and palaces and in an exilic mode moves towards a near-hopeless regeneration. While *The Circle of Reason* and *In an Antique Land* move westwards from India, *The Glass Palace* travels eastwards – to Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Malasiya and Singapore–again tracing the genealogies that traverse national frontiers.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair characterises diasporic sensibility as an "exit-ential anxiety" and thinks that diaspora takes the place of doubt and homelessness becomes the principal trope typifying a historical condition as well as a state of mind. Commenting on *The Glass Palace*,

therefore, she remarks that it "... is ... condemned to record the exit-ential dilemma–wherein the subject is necessarily partitioned, a bewildered immigrant never quite in focus nor contained within the frame" (162). The characters in this novel, thus, make such "exit" and "entry" every now and then. The novel employs the form of the family saga to tell an epic tale that moves between Burma, India and the Malay archipelago and, beginning in the late nineteenth century, spreads across several generations. At times Ghosh himself makes analytical comments through the mouths of his characters. For instance, the deposed Burmese Queen Supayalat, in exile in India, predicts that her family's fate foreshadows that of "Golden Burma", saying that "[A] hundred years hence you will read the indictment of Europe's greed in the difference between the Kingdom of Siam and the state of our own enslaved realm" (*Glass Palace* 88). Elsewhere a similar pessimistic view of the enduring consequences of imperialism is attributed by reformist Uma and her American Indian friends : "They could see that it was not they themselves, nor even their children who would pay the true price of this Empire : that the conditions being created in their homeland were such as to ensure that their descendants would enter the new epoch as cripples, lacking the most fundamental means of survival" [...] (*Glass Palace* 222).

Several characters in *The Glass Palace* are the native people from different South Asian countries and the tragedy and triumph of their lives is narrated against the backdrop of colonial history. Here Ghosh narrates the conflictual relationships between colonizer and the colonized. According to Sami Rafiq, the "conflict of this ruling ideology with the colonized people as they become aware of the superioirty of their own culture is a theme..." of the novel (124). Likewise Jayita Sengupta maintains that *The Glass Palace* "... is a novel not so much about the epic dimensions of historicism as it is about historical representation" (26). That is,

the novel poses a pertinent question – are the facts, objectively, neutrally recorded or does interpretation inevitably enter with narrativization ?

The Glass Palace covers a time-span of almost a hundred years – from the end of the nineteenth century to the near end of twentieth century. It also maps a landscape stretching across more than five-thousand kilometres. The family ties are likewise bonded across races– Indian, Burmese, Malayan, Tamil and English. There is vastness of racial or cross-cultural spread emphasizing the essential humanity of the characters. Personal frailties and foibles, on the other hand, find their parallels in the political aberations of empires and potentates. The early parts of the novel are dominated by the two characters whose separation becomes the pivot on which the action moves. The Bengali Rajkumar seeks to find Dolly, the girl he has only seen briefly as a ten-year-old attendant in the Royal Palace in Rangoon at the time of the Burmese monarchy's deposition by the British. Such a plot, with its stress on love at first sight, separation and reunion is, of course, the stuff that romantic fiction is made of. It is only one-third part of the narrative, however; after some time, Dolly and Rajkumar are reunited and after an initial refusal, she agrees to marry him. Subsequently the narrative travels onwards, snaking its way through the lives of later generations and not only showing the older couple ceasing to occupy centre-stage as they age, but also depicting Dolly leaving Rajkumar and eventually entering a Budhist nunnery.

Through the character of Rajkumar Ghosh depicts the bewildering and often poignant accounts of a family scattered through post imperialist dislocation in various parts of the Asian continent. He also charts the complex sociological and political repercussions of such disbanding through the experiences of loss, exile and the search for a homeland. Rajkumar is a true transnational figure in that he inhabits multiple space first by virtue of being a Kasaq, a

foreigner, then by participating in the deposition of the Burmese kingdom. He also undergoes a turbulent experience in imperial India and his forays into the Malayan forest resources make him a hybrid character. Out of the interstices of race, class and nation in which his life is enmeshed, there emerges the 'in-between' space that his culture and identity obtain. In the words of Rakhee Moral, "[W]hat is peculiar about the experiences of these people caught in the moment of the breaking of nations is their relatively easy sliding into alien cultures..." (148). Ghosh's own family once lived in Burma and so in the novel he has drawn on the experience of his uncle — the timber-merchant Jagat Chandra Dutta.

In comparison with Ghosh's other novels, *The Glass Palace* is the least concerned with any allegorical configuration. Its extended canvas spreads over a multitude of particular experiences and tells the story of diverse individual lives which intersect but do not fit into any neat pattern. The only impulse that links the various stories lies in a humanist approach in narrating the specifics of particular life-histories and refuses to reduce them to historiographical generalizations. Ghosh maintains, however, his revisionist perspectives on particular historical events. In depecting the British raj, instead of focussing on the subaltern narrative, Ghosh emphasizes the elite historiography. In doing so, he gives his corrective to earlier histories which he views as propaganda justifying British actions. He provides a minutely researched account of the lives of Indian soldiers in the British army in World War II, which deftly avoids anti-colonial reductionism by showing varying positions, but neverthless succeeds in telling this history from an alternative point of view. It was also perhaps for this reason that Ghosh refused to accept the commonwealth writers' prize for this novel by pointing out that "[T]he issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace*" (qtd. in Punekar 52). In a way, *The*

Glass Palace is also seriously engaged with memory and its representation as it did in *The Shadow Lines*. Novy Kapadia rightly observes that *The Shadow Lines* is "... basically a memory novel, which skilfully weaves together personal lives and public events in three countries..." (137). Like its predecessor, then, *The Glass Palace* also deals with memory and its narrative role in the creation of revisionist fiction.

Ghosh's rendering of British colonialism and its aftermath in the three countries is thus an interplay of fact and fiction. Here his intention is to enable the reader to visualize many histories which entwine with the main strand of story-line. Ghosh points out that the British colonization messed up the roots and ancestries of many people by its ruthless transportation of men and women from their native soils of Burma and India to other parts of the colonial world. The colonial history mingles with personal histories and thereby recreates new histories and cultures in their multiple spaces. In the words of Brinda Bose," ... the diasporic imagination of Amitav Ghosh – that wrestles with an understanding of bi-culturalism as it "yokes by violence together" discrete and distant identities – is essential to our understanding of our history even as it is being created" (235).

As *The Glass Palace* projects the devastating effects of British colonisation, it also reveals another side to the same story, however. Not everyone does badly out of the British invasion in Burma. The Indians and Malaysians like Rajkumar and Saya John as plantation merchants benefit with the expanding economy of teak and rubber. Their tragedy begins with the World War II, when the Japanese bombing devastates the country and the exodus of Indians and Nepalis begins. Rajkumar loses his elder son and daughter-in-law and his property, to return to Calcutta and turn to Uma for shelter. History moves in a circle or perhaps in a spiral. Rajkumar had begun his life as a destitute orphan, rose to

heights of eminence and power, then lost it all again. What he gained, however, is the Burmese connection. He could no longer see himself exclusively as an Indian or Burmese. Though nationalism is one of the major concerns in the novel, the fractured consciousness of the characters does not entitle them to conform to a particular national identity. To quote Meenakshi Mukherjee : [H]uman lives spill over national boundaries, refusing to stay contained in neat compartments. A person is remembered not as Burmese, Indian, Chinese, Malay or American, but merely by virtue of their first names" (151). For example, Dinu's other name as Tun Pe and Neel's as Sein point to their bifurcated identities which need not conflict with each other. Both the brothers could be perfectly at home as Indians and as Burmese. Rajkumar himself, born as a Bengali, is quite comfortable in the Burmese culture. Dolly, a Burmese, is at home in her exile in Ratnagiri in India and Saya John, who is a Chinese Catholic, goes over to Malasiya after making his money in Burma. In this way, all the principal characters display 'in between; hybrid space in their diasporic identity.

For Bhabha, in-between nations or at the margins of nations is another kind of "dissemination". Bhabha says that there are communities living in these interstitial spaces whose counter-narratives "continually evoke and erase" the totalizing boundaries of the modern nation-state (*The Location of Culture* 149). The diasporic experience by its very nature must involve, therefore, a significant crossing of borders. It is only such a crossing that results in the unique consciousness of the diasporic. The crossing of passage or borders, however, also involve some conflict between the two cultures — adopted culture and source culture. It is through such conflict, tension, displacement and ambivalence that the diasporic is engendered. South Asian communities, for instance, constitute a varied and

rich diaspora in the global scenario. It is as Ghosh puts it, not only" ... one of the most important demographic dislocations of modern times..." but also" ... represents an important force in world culture" (*Imam and the Indian* 243). For the Indian diaspora crossing of frontiers – especially those of nationality, culture and language – has, therefore, increased in the recent times. And Ghosh's fiction reflects, as Brinda Bose has rightly pointed out, "... a vital and energizing footnote to the documentation of South Asian history" (235).

While the diasporic identity of his characters in its inherent fracturedness clearly intrigues him, Ghosh analyzes this space with reference to its histories. Patterns begins to emerge as the Ghosh narrator travels between cultures / lands that diasporas straddle – India, Bangladesh and England in *The Shadow Lines*; India and Egypt in *In an antique Land* and India, Burma and Malaya in *The Glass Palace*. Finally, in his sixth novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004), his latest novel so far, Ghosh makes his characters travel in the darkest recesses of the Sunderbans.

It has been said of Ghosh that he never writes the same novel twice. *The Hungry Tide* is, therefore, quite different from his other novels. And yet Ghosh's novels are profoundly linked together by some common concerns. These pre-occupations are travelling, history, issues of 'hegemony' and subaltern studies. Travel forms the bulk of his first novel *The Circle of Reason*, and subsequent novels also incorporate the journey narrative. At its last full stop the protagonists in *The Circle of Reason* are poised for further travel, except for one character who travels west, the rest journey from Calcutta to North Africa. Likewise in his novel In *An Antique Land*, Ghosh is engaged with the theme of journey. In his non-fictional work, *Dancing in Cambodia : At Large in Burma* (1998), Ghosh focuses on his own travels in Cambodia and Burma in 1993 and 1995-96. These travels

relate the interlink between recent events and the bygone past. His other non-fictional work, *The Imam and the Indian* (2002), though not entirely about travels, but neverthe-less reflects Ghosh's interest in other travellers. What is peculiar about such travels is that Ghosh is not merely interested in the travel by itself. Rather he endeavours to link it with either the alternative or subaltern histories in his text. This is precisely what he does in his novel *The Hungry Tide*.

In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, too, there is a setting of Sunderbans, but it is an allegorical trope there and not a real place. In *The Hungry Tide*, on the contrary, Ghosh has portrayed a real picture and the whole archipelago of islands between the sea and the plains of Bengal is vividly evoked. Some islands are quite vast and some no larger than sandbars; some have lasted through recorded history while others have just washed into being. In this exotic and beautiful place of the Sunderbans, there are no borders to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea, even land itself from water. Here, for hundreds of years, only the truly dispossessed have braved the man-eating tigers and the crocodiles. It was here, again, at the beginning of the last century, that a visionary Scotsman Sir Daniel Hamilton founded a Utopian settlement in Gosaba, where peoples of all races, classes and religions could live together. Ghosh's own uncle, the last Shri Chandra Ghosh, was the headmaster in the high school founded by the Scotsman ("Author's Note, *The Hungry Tide* 40). Ghosh has thus juxtaposed the textual narrative of the place with postcolonial history. In particular, he has focused on the highly charged drama of the Marichjampi massacre and its supressed history that took place in the tide country.

The Marichjahapi massacre happened in the 1970s when thousands of East Bengali (Pakistani) refugees had run away from the Dandak aranya refugee camps in Madhya Pradesh

to Marichjhampi, because they felt that the latter region would provide them with familiar environs and therefore a better life. This is a real, but now almost forgotten incident which Ghosh included in the text making it the core of the novel. This event has been faithfully documented in Kanai's uncle's notebook and occupies a large space in the novel. Kanai's uncle Nirmal met with his tragic end in this massacre, but his notebook gives an accurate account of the whole tragedy. In the massacre many refugees were killed, while the rest were brutally evicted by the state because what they were occupying was marked as "tiger territory". In that sense, the theme of history is linked with the theme of immigration, whether voluntary or forced in the narrative of *The Hungry Tide*.
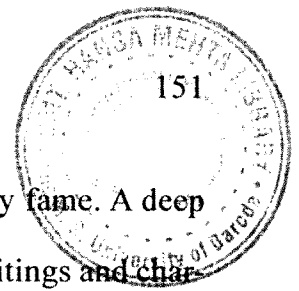
The real historical event is, however, interwoven with the living world of folk-tales and legends. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, each of Ghosh's novels" ... explores new territories, not only geographically...but also areas of the mind, effortlessly weaving strands of scientific and historical research with folk-tale, fantasy, ecology and political events into one seamless narrative of human relationship as seen against the larger forces of change" (4). In the narrative of *The Hungry Tide*, therefore, Ghosh makes the fusion of the local legend of Hindu and Muslim mythology. The Muslim legend of Bon Bon Bibi and her twin brother Shah Jangali is fused with the Hindu deity Dokkhin Rai, who is a demon deity manifesting himself as a tiger. There is a recurrent Bangla word used in the narrative – *Mohona* – which means a confluence of streams. Like a Mohona, Ghosh's narrative is also a meeting point of many currents of idea and therefore unexpected connections are forged between cultures, histories, world-views, classes and even mythologies. For instance, the legend of the Merciful goddess Bon Bon Bibi and the saga of the merciless state's role in the Marichjhapi massacre are skilfully blended together. It shows

that Ghosh takes keen delight in merging the boundaries of myth and history.

Furthermore, the settlers of the Sundarbans believe that anyone without a pure heart who ventures into the watery labyrinth will never return. The arrival of Piyali Roy, who is of Indian parentage but stubbornly American, and of Kannai Dutt, a sophisticated Delhi businessman, however, disturbs the delicate balance of settlement life. Piya comes to this place in search of the Irrawady dolphins which she researches as a cetologist. Kanai has come to meet his aunt who runs an NGO there. Here he helps Piya in translating Bangla while she is searching the dolphins along with the local guide Fokir. Fokir is an illiterate fisherman, but possessing a thorough knowledge of the sea creatures and tiger. Piya is extremely attracted toward Fokir. Despite their language barrier, the proximity brings them so close that Fokir dies in an attempt to save her during a cyclone. In the midst of fierce tigers, dangerous crocodiles and the violent mood of the sea and climate, Piya and Fokir's destiny is interwoven together. Even after Fokir's death, Piya comes back to live in this region because for her : "... home is where the Orcaella are..." (*Hungry Tide* 400).

In *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh has articulated a new space in the form of a new territory by combining its history and myth and bringing it to life. On emphasizing the significance of the place in the narrative of any novel, Ghosh comments that "[I]n storytelling, it is the story that gives places their meaning..." (*Imam and the Indian* 296). He further adds that the novels"... communicate a 'sense of place'; [y]et ... it is the very loss of a lived sense of place that makes their fictional representation possible (303). And it is precisely this that he did in the narrative space of *The Hungry Tide*.

Ghosh, thus, remains a most prominent voice in Indian writing in English today. From his first novel *The Circle of Reason* to *The Hungry Tide*, he has built up an impres-

sive *oeuvre* that will ensure him a permanent place in the hall of literary fame. A deep sense of history, contemporary politics and human destiny inform his writings and characterizes the writer and the man. His non-fictional writings also illuminate his fictional work and his personality in significant ways. His interest in re-visioning of history is determined by his articulation of diasporic space through travelling. In an interview, he has frankly admitted that "...travelling is always in some way connected with my fictional work" (Silva & Tickell 214). Imagination gives support to the journey motif in the narrative of his novels. For example, the young narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is taught by Tridib that imagination gives people "... worlds to travel in" and "eyes to see them with" (*Shadow* 20). He says that a place does not merely exist, but "it has to be invented in one's imagination" (21). For Ghosh, travel becomes a spiritual quest – a quest for narrative design and personal significance in a meaningful world.

On the other hand, speaking on the difference between a historian's verson and that of a novelist's, Ghosh rightly observes :

[...] the difference between the history historians write and the history fiction writers write is that fiction writers write about the human history. It's about finding the human predicament... what happens to individual, characters ... exploring both dimensions, whereas history, the kind of history exploring causes, causality, is of no interest to me. ("Shadow Script" 30)

Reinforcing this statement of Ghosh on his novelistic practice, Nyla Ali Khan adds that Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* not only "... presents a political vision that questions the ethnolinguistic and cultural divides created by the fiery resurgence of nationalist ideologies, but interweaves that vision with the human story he delineates in the novel" (42).

Likewise Suvir Kaul also submits that the novel "... shapes the narrator's search for connections, for the recovery of lost information or repressed experiences, for the details of great trauma or joy that have receded into the archives of public or private memory" (268-69). In this respect, *The Shadow Lines* may be read as Ghosh's paradigmatic text on history. Like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the focal interest of the novel lies in recuperating histories squeezed out of the state's homogenizing myth of the nation. Tridib, therefore, teaches the narrator that all communities are imagined or narrated : "[E]veryone lives in a story ... because stories are all there to live in, it was just a question of which one you chose ..." (*Shadow* 182).

Inter-spatial narrative thus becomes a leitmotif around which all of Ghosh's fictional writing revolves. In stressing the need for re-evaluating one's notion of space, Ghosh suggests to overcome the so-called "shadow-lines" of nations and communities that hem people in the enclosures. In that sense, his engagement with diasporic history becomes a part of cultural studies and informs about the larger issues of inter/intra-cultural spaces. In this matter he shares his vision with the writers like Qurrtulain Hyder, Salman Rushdie and of course Rohinton Mistry. Whereas Rushdie has endeavoured to cover the global space of culture in his writing and thereby focussing on generalities, Ghosh has tried to emphasize the role of specificities inherent in them. In this respect he comes a bit closer to Mistry who is also equally interested in the specific cultural history of the Parsis in his fiction. In the next chapter, therefore, an attempt has been made to deal with this aspect of Mistry's fiction.

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