

**AMITAV GHOSH AND HIS DEPICTION OF HISTORICAL  
ASPECTS AND GLOBAL INTERACTION, AND  
EXPERIMENTATION WITH LANGUAGE**

Dipa Biswas  
Student ID: 11163001

**Department of English and Humanities**

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BRAC University  
66, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka 1212.

Amitav Ghosh and his depiction of Historical Aspects and  
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Dipa Biswas

ID: 11163001

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate my thesis to my grandfather Dilip Kumar Biswas.

## **Declaration**

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is my original work to the best of my knowledge and belief. Wherever contributions of other sources and information have been used, they have been acknowledged, I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in a whole or part, for a degree or award at this or any other institution before.

Dipa Biswas

ID: 11163001

BRAC University

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## **Abstract**

The thesis, looks at the novels of Amitav Ghosh (1956), especially *In An Antique Land* (1992), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011), to show the historical aspects of the cultures and customs of India as well as larger South Asia; the global interaction that occurred as a result of travel which was often the consequence of trade and commerce, or migration; and Ghosh's experimentation with language in his novels.

## Introduction

Many writers of previously colonized countries have adapted English as their language of communication and also many of them write their poems, novels and other literary works in English. Indian writers have created literary work in English from the middle of the nineteenth century or even earlier. Raja Ramohan Roy (1774-1833), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) are some of the early Indian writers who wrote in English. The writers often illustrate different cultures, and the writers of the previously colonized countries often try to tell the tales of their own countries in English. Some of the important Indian writers who follow this tradition are Salman Rushdie (1947), Amitav Ghosh (1956), Arundhati Roy (1961), R. K. Narayan (1906-2001).

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most prominent contemporary Indian writers in English. Through his writings, he shows history in the form of fiction and at the same time he is a writer of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism through travelling and movements of peoples and goods. In my thesis, I am taking four of his novels, *In An Antique Land* (1992), *The Glass Palace* (2000), and the two parts of the Ibis trilogy, that is, *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011), to show Ghosh's depiction of history; travelling and movements resulting from trade and commerce as well as different types of migration; and his experimentation with language.



### Historical aspects of Different Post-colonial Countries

According to Frantz Fanon “the demand for a national culture and the affirmation of the existence of such a culture represents a special battle-field”<sup>1</sup> and in the course of this “men of culture take their stand in the field of history”<sup>2</sup>. Post-colonial writers often consider it important to tell their tales to the whole world. In *Nation and Narration* (1990), Homi Bhabha says that all narration narrates history and this narration of history is important in post-colonial literature as colonizers have a tendency to misrepresent the colonized countries. In this book, Bhabha says that, “Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which - as well as against which - it came into being.”<sup>3</sup> Also, “*Nation and Narration* seeks to affirm and extend Frantz Fanon’s revolutionary credo: ‘National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension’.”<sup>4</sup> So, the writers are often found to express the culture or society in which they have grown up, the society that is close to their hearts and their places of origin. This is true for the English writers of previously colonized countries as well as the Indian writers in English who have a tendency to write about their own country and history. A good example of this is Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*

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<sup>1</sup> Fanon, Frantz. “On National Culture”. Williams, Patrick. Chrisman, Laura. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. England: Pearson Education Limited, 1994. Pg. 36

<sup>2</sup> Fanon, Frantz. “On National Culture”. Williams, Patrick. Chrisman, Laura. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. England: Pearson Education Limited, 1994. Pg. 36

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, Homi. “From the Introduction (“Narrating the Nation”) to *Nation and Narration*”. Routledge, 1990. 18/03/2013 & 9:00 pm. <

<http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/nation.html>> Web.

<sup>4</sup> Bhabha, Homi. “From the Introduction (“Narrating the Nation”) to *Nation and Narration*”. Routledge, 1990. 18/03/2013 & 9:00 pm. <

<http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/nation.html>> Web.

(1981). Among the Indian English writers Salman Rushdie is especially remembered for setting a new and different trend of writing.

Salman Rushdie's new trend of writing is marked by postmodern playfulness and what he calls the chutnification of language; and the most important contribution that he has made in postcolonial literature is a new way of observing and representing the history of India in English. He mixes history with fiction and it is really difficult to find where history ends and fiction begins. Thus Rushdie gives a new flavor to history recreating it in a different manner. As Rushdie says, regarding his novel *Midnight's Children*:

“I had wanted for some time to write a novel of childhood, arising from my memories of my own childhood in Bombay. Now, having drunk from the well of India, I conceived a more ambitious plan.”

- Salman Rushdie<sup>5</sup>

Salman Rushdie has written *Midnight's Children* in English but the novel tells us the tale of Indian history. *Midnight's Children* deals with Indian history during the time of India's transition from British colonialism to independence as well as the partition of India.

The protagonist of *Midnight's Children* is Saleem Sinai, the narrator of the story. He was born at midnight, at the exact moment of India's independence. Thus he is paired with India and becomes the twin brother of India as Jawaharlal Nehru writes a letter to the baby: “We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own”<sup>6</sup>. Saleem Sinai's growth is parallel to the development of India and as a result their fates are connected. Saleem has telepathic power which he uses

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<sup>5</sup> Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage Books, 2006. Pg.-ix.

<sup>6</sup> Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage Books, 2006. Pg.-167.

to assemble a *Midnight Children's Conference*, with all the children born in India between 12:00a.m to 1:00a.m. in the same night, that is, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, to discuss different issues regarding their life and country. This can be seen as a parallel to various issues faced by India in its early years of independence and the cultural, linguistic, religious, and political differences faced by a vastly diverse nation.

Saleem along with his family begins a number of migrations and endure the numerous wars which plague the subcontinent. Saleem later becomes involved with the Indira Gandhi-proclaimed Emergency and her son Sanjay's "cleansing" of the Jama Masjid slum. According to some critics, "Saleem's body acts as the foundation of his historiography and his narrative technique."<sup>7</sup> Saleem says, "Midnight's children can be made to represent many things...they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation..., twentieth-century economy; or as the true hope of freedom"<sup>8</sup>. *Midnight's Children* successfully shows the vast variety of the cultures of the Indian Subcontinent.

Amitav Ghosh follows on from Salman Rushdie and tells us wonderful stories. Ghosh follows Rushdie's path to display geographical and historical aspects of various postcolonial spaces. Different novels of Amitav Ghosh like, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* (2005) and *Sea of Poppies* is "about recasting the geographies of "India" by

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<sup>7</sup> Kane, Jean M. "The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*". The University of Wisconsin Press: Journal Division and *The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System* are collaborating with JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208752>> Pg-99. Web.

<sup>8</sup> Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage Books, 2006. Pg.-277-278.

interrupting the boundary markers that have arbitrarily carved up the subcontinent and by using ocean worlds as ecumenes.”<sup>9</sup>

*The Glass Palace* connects the history of Burma to the larger South Asian context. It depicts the royal family of Burma along with their traditions, which Queen Supayalat refuses to give up even when she along with the whole family was sent into exile in India. This refers to the real history of the Konbaung Dynasty, which was the last dynasty that ruled Burma from 1752 to 1885. Rajkumar, an Indian boy brought up in Mandalay, makes his fortune in the teak trade and later becomes a part owner of a rubber plantation in Malaya. Teak trade and rubber plantation were important business projects that were carried out by the British traders. On the other hand there is the character of the Uma Dey, the wife of the British Collector Beni Prasad Dey, who after being widowed takes active part in the movement against British rule along with other Indians living in America. Along with it, there are references to the ‘Quit India Movement’ and World War II (1939-1945). *The Glass Palace* thus takes us from the rubber boom of the industrial age to the front lines of World War II, from India’s struggle for independence to Burma’s fall; along with it the novel puts forward the culture of India and Burma, and the larger South Asia with all its habits and beliefs.

*The Hungry Tide* describes the life-style of the people living in the immense archipelago of the Sundarbans along with their culture and beliefs. In this novel two aspects are specially focused on. First, it shows a group of refugees from Bangladesh,

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<sup>9</sup> Burton, Antoinette. “Roundtable: Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*; Amitav Ghosh’s *World Histories from Below*”. *University of Illinois Press* is collaborating with JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0071>> Pg-74. Web.

who are trying to settle in an Island called Morichjhapi. It reminds us of the Morichjhapi Massacre of 1979 when Nirmal Bose's starts writing a book: "he started writing it in the morning of 15 May 1979. In a place called Morichjhapi."<sup>10</sup> In that book, Nirmal gives a scenario of the Morichjhapi massacre: "Then we heard the settlers shouting a refrain, answering the questions they have themselves posed: 'Morichjhapi chharbona. We'll not leave Morichjhapi, do what you may'."<sup>11</sup> The other aspect is the life-style of the people of the Sundarbans, who are trying to cope with the complex and dangerous ecosystem as well as fighting against the animals for survival; and the most important, with other people. The people of Morichjhapi have to fight with other people in order to survive:

"This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers...  
...Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them... ... As I thought of these things it seemed to me that this whole world has become a place of animals".<sup>12</sup>

The Sundarbans is the habitat of Royal Bengal Tigers and government is very active in protecting these tigers even at the cost of human life. So Ghosh argues that tigers are valued more than human life. In this novel, while carrying out her research, Piyali gives us some information regarding historical incidents like, "It was in Calcutta's Botanical Gardens...that Roxburgh had written his famous article of 1801, announcing the discovery of the first-known river dolphin"<sup>13</sup>. In this novel, Ghosh also tells us the tale of

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<sup>10</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2006. Pg. 117

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Pg. 254

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Pg. 262

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Pg. 227

Matla river of Bengal, which got this name because it completely washed away a new born city within few hours.

In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh draws India, China, Britain, and North America together in to the port of Calcutta and the process of migration of indentured labourers on the deck of the *Ibis*, a transport ship destined for Mauritius. It is a historical novel about migration as it gives a picture of migration of indentured labourers. This novel also shows the influence of Imperial rule on the trade of poppies and how the colonized people were included in this trade. Ghosh brings different types of characters onto the same deck, such as, the fallen Raja called Neel, fugitives like Deeti, Kalua, and Paulette, and the women who can be represented as the gossiping indentured sisterhood who remain in the *Ibis*'s lower deck. This novel shows how the small stories of these characters are connected to global history. A botanical theme is introduced by Paulette's interest in the Royal Botanical Gardens of Calcutta. According to some critics "The botanical theme was to be expected, of course, in a postcolonial novel addressing the links of colonization, culture, and cultivation, of plantations and botanical gardens, of grafting and hybridization, of scientific exploration, travel, and diaspora, of labeling plants and labeling people."<sup>14</sup> The importance of lascars that is shown in this novel refers to the tradition of the maritime districts of Bengal supplying lascars to the oceanic trade which appears to have continued until the 1940s. Besides, the novel gives us a hint of the Opium war when Mr. Doughty says, "The trouble, you know, is that Johnny Chinaman thinks he can return to the good old days, before he got his taste for opium. But there's no going back – just won't

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<sup>14</sup> Burton, Antoinette. "Roundtable: Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*; Amitav Ghosh's World Histories from Below". *University of Illinois Press* is collaborating with JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0071>> Pg.87-88. Web.

hoga”<sup>15</sup>, which is elaborated in the sequel, *River of Smoke*. *River of Smoke* focuses on the opium war which took place between the British Government and Chinese Government specifically the Qing Dynasty during the year 1839-42.

*In an Antique Land* is subversive history in the guise of a traveler’s tale. The book frequently moves from the present to the past and from the past to the present. Ghosh uses ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in the Egyptian villages of Lataifa and Nashawy onto his subsequent research into medieval Indian Ocean trade. Ghosh begins the novel by mentioning that “THE SLAVE OF MS H.6” has stepped into modern history. The narrator is in search of this slave of MS H.6, who is mentioned in a letter that the narrator gets in a library. The narrator follows the letter and collects detailed information regarding ‘The slave of MS H.6.’ He traces the history of 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D., and finds that the name of the slave is Bomma. So, the general history and personal history goes side by side in this novel. Here it is really difficult to differentiate between history or fact and fiction. At the same time, the novel shows the cultures, behavior and beliefs of the people of Egyptian villages along with their attitude and ideas about Indian Hindus. The novel shows how the village people are moving towards modernization with television and refrigerators; even the imam has started to use syringes while leaving traditional herbal medicines, which is also true for the narrator who had gone to Oxford for higher education, where English becomes his main language of communication.

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<sup>15</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. India: Vikings by Penguin Books India, 2008. Pg.112.

## Experimentation with Language

The colonizers left their language behind in the previously colonized countries. The previously colonized countries often use English as either second language or foreign language. Though their English is not considered as standard language “yet they have been the site of some of the most exciting and innovative literatures of the modern period.”<sup>16</sup> The same is true for Indian English literature. Indian English writers are often found to experiment with English language while telling their tales in English. Salman Rushdie is considered a master in this, as his novels give an image of the playfulness of language. According to Rushdie, “English has become an Indian language.”<sup>17</sup> In his novels, Rushdie seems to echo what Chinua Achebe said in his essay “The African Writer and the English Language”:

“I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings”<sup>18</sup>.

Salman Rushdie’s Indian experience is well reflected in his experimentation with language or ‘chutnification’ of languages, where he mixes English with Urdu. He often changes different words and phrases of English language so that it can carry his Indian experience. The same can be said for Amitav Ghosh. Ghosh uses Hindi and Bangla in his

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<sup>16</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge, 2003. Pg.8

<sup>17</sup> Rushdie, Salman. West, Elizabeth. “Introduction”. *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*. India: The Vintage Publishers, 1998. Pg.xiii.

<sup>18</sup> Chinua, Achebe. “The African Writer and the English Language”. New York: Anchor Press, 1975. Pg. 434



English novels. He mixes Hindi and Bangla with English with such expertise that it seems they are part of English language. In *River of Smoke*, he depicts a society of Mauritius with their creole language and the Fanqui town of China with its pidgin language. His novels also show how understanding changes with the change or translation of language in different situations.

Amitav Ghosh writes the tales of larger South Asia in English to give it a special position among world history as well as world literature. Though, in the beginning, it seems that he has written the novels in English for Western people, but when we go deeper we find that there are many situations which will only be understood by the people of the respective regions. One of the best examples of this is to be found in *In An Antique Land*. In this book, the narrator, who is an Indian Hindu, goes to Cairo for research. The people of Lataifa, where he is staying, ask him many questions regarding his country and religion. They do not care for the narrator's beliefs as Ustaz Mustafa says to the narrator that "What is this 'Hinduki' thing?"<sup>19</sup> They also try to convert him saying, "You will see then how much better Islam is than this 'Hinduki' of yours"<sup>20</sup>. The narrator also feels that it is very difficult to make the Egyptian understand the importance of religion to the people of India: "I was never able to explain very much of this to Nabeel or anyone else in Nashawy"<sup>21</sup>.

In Ghosh's writing, there are situations which will only be understood by those who can relate to those situations; such as, Piyali in *The Hungry Tide* never understands

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<sup>19</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg. 47

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Pg.51

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Pg.210

why the tiger has been killed and why none of the members of her group, like Kanai and Fokir, protest the killing of tiger. Ghosh gives us an account of the culture of the Sundarbans as well as Bengal. We find Fokir singing the song that is usually sung by the boatmen of Bengal: “he tilted his back and sang a few notes... .. His voice sounded almost hoarse and it seemed to crack and sob as it roamed the notes. There was a suggestion of grief in it”<sup>22</sup>. Besides, there is the tale of Bon Bibi: “Bon Bibir Karamoti or that Bon Bibi Johuranama – ‘The Miracles of Bon Bibi or the Narrative of her Glory’.”<sup>23</sup> It is also called “The story of Dukhey’s Redemption”<sup>24</sup> as this is a story of a boy called Dukhey, who was saved by Bon Bibi from a tiger’s attack; and people believe that Bon Bibi can still save their lives. There is a shrine of this Bon Bibi in Garjontola, where people of every religion living in the Sundarbans perform puja. Piya becomes amazed when she sees Fokir performing puja in front of the shrine:

“a Muslim was hardly likely to pray to an image like this one. What Fokir was performing looked very like her mother’s Hindu *pujas* – and yet the words seemed to suggest otherwise”<sup>25</sup>.

The importance of these stories in the life of the people living in the Sundarbans will never be fully understood by the people living in Western countries. Nirmal tried his best to collect these rural stories in order to show its history: “it was very important for him to believe that he was a historical materialist”<sup>26</sup> and “For him it meant that everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he

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<sup>22</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2006. Pg. 98-99

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Pg. 354

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Pg. 354

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Pg. 152

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Pg. 282

strung them all together, somehow they did become stories – of a kind”<sup>27</sup>. The novel explores the rural culture of the people of the Sundarbans and their conflict with modernity and urbanization.

*The Glass Palace* gives a scenario of history, culture and tradition of Burma as well as India. King Thebaw planned to make a huge golden plate when the birth of the third child comes closer. The Queen Supayalat wants to keep her tradition including customs, rituals and clothing of Burma even after she was sent into exile. Ghosh shows us an Indian boy, Rajkumar’s dedication for his love; he falls in love in childhood but after he becomes a successful businessman, he finds Dolly and marries her. On the other hand, Dolly sacrifices her love for Mohan Sawant for the first princess.

*Sea of Poppies* begins by showing the people of different castes. Deeti, wife of a high-caste Rajput named Hukam Singh, does her daily works including bathing and prayer in the morning and then cooking; on the other hand, lower-caste Kalua does not have the right to do so. It shows a patriarchal society; but at the same time, the novel shows us Deeti’s farsightedness along with her leadership quality in the ship, where everyone comes to her for advice. This novel also shows the effect of British rule on India. For example, the field, that was once used to cultivate wheat and paddy, is now used to cultivate poppies. In *River of Smoke*, the second part, Ghosh shows the downfall of the ship building and textile industries and the rise of British traders in India and China through opium trade and in the course of it, the novel focuses on the Chinese tradition, where we see the sampan restaurants and laundry. In such a sampan Bahram Modi meets

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Pg. 282-283

Chi-mei. This gathering of different types of people reflects global connection that is established here.

### **Global Ties in Ghosh's novels**

Amitav Ghosh establishes global ties through the depiction of travel and movements in his novels. So travel becomes one of the most important themes of Amitav Ghosh's writings. *In An Antique Land* depicts the trade and commerce of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, as the traders move through the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea, from Mangalore to Aden for business purposes. Also, the narrator travels to Cairo to carry out his research. In *The Glass Palace*, traders like Rajkumar and Saya John travel for business, and Arjun for his job but Uma Dey pays a casual visit to England and New York and comes back as a revolutionist. In *The Hungry Tide*, Piyali, whose origin lies in Bengal, is brought up in America. She comes to Bengal to carry out her research on the dolphins. *Sea of Poppies* shows the travel of the indentured labourers who are taken to Mauritius in the ship named Ibis. So, different types of people with different religions, castes, customs and beliefs come in the same deck and form their own multicultural society. Also, in the sequel *River of Smoke*, traders from different countries travel to Canton of China for their business purposes and most important for opium trade. All these people gather in the Fanqui town of Canton making it a cosmopolitan society where different types of people live together maintaining their own culture and at the same time adapting a new culture.

In my thesis, I am going to show the historical aspects, the experimentation with language and the global ties that Ghosh shows through travelling and movements in some of his novels. In the first chapter, I am going to work with *In An Antique Land* and show the global ties from pre-colonial to post-colonial period. In the course of this, I am going to show different historical aspects of 12<sup>th</sup> century of Egypt with its present time and its trade and commerce. Besides, I am going to show the experimentation with language that Ghosh does in this novel.

## Chapter-1

### *In An Antique Land*

*In An Antique Land* (1992) is a novel by Amitav Ghosh, combining events in the past and the present at the same time. In this novel, a student of Oxford University goes to an Egyptian village for research, searching for “the slave of MS H.6”<sup>28</sup>. This document is a record of a person from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. So, two worlds are juxtaposed: that of the modern day researcher and that of the various 12<sup>th</sup> century slaves. This juxtaposition takes the notion of globalization and illustrates Arjun Appadurai’s contention that,

“Historians and sociologists, especially those concerned with translocal processes and with the world systems associated with capitalism, have long been aware that the world has been a congeries of large-scale interactions for many centuries.”<sup>29</sup>

Amitav Ghosh shows various kinds of 12<sup>th</sup> century global interactions in his novels.

*In An Antique Land* straddles the generic borderlines between fact, fiction, autobiography, history, anthropology, and travel book. Ghosh begins the novel with historical incident: “THE SLAVE OF MS H.6 first stepped upon the stage of modern history in 1942”<sup>30</sup>. The narrator is in search of this slave of MS H.6, who is mentioned in a letter which the narrator found in “the National and University Library in Jerusalem”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.34.

<sup>29</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”. (Pg. 324-339). Williams, Patrick. Chrisman, Laura. *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*. England: Longman, Pearson Education Limited, 1994. Pg.324.

<sup>30</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.13.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*. Pg.13.

This letter “was written by a merchant called Khalaf ibn Ishaq, and it was intended for a friend of his, who bore the name Araham Ben Yiju”<sup>32</sup> and this “letter was written in the summer of 1148”<sup>33</sup>; with this he puts forward the history of 1148AD: “On 24 July 1148AD the greatest Crusader army ever assembled camped in the orchards around Damascus”<sup>34</sup> and “After this battle ‘the German Franks returned’ wrote the Arab historian who had so dreaded their arrival, ‘to their country which lies over yonder and God rid the faithful of this calamity’”<sup>35</sup>. The narrator collects detailed information regarding ‘The slave of MS H.6’ and follows them in order to know the name and identity of this slave of MS H.6. So, besides the general history, the book becomes more a personal history that the narrator tries to trace down.

In the novel, *In an Antique Land*, we observe Ghosh or the narrator exploring the connections established by the 12<sup>th</sup> century global trade and the movement of people and goods between the Middle-East, India, and China. This novel shows the spread of trade and commerce that was established with India and other countries of the East before the colonial period. Ghosh analyses the present times showing different practices prevalent in Egypt, especially in the two villages of Lataifa and Nashawy, along with them the conditions of the rural economy of Egypt. When the narrator arrives in the Egyptian village for the first time, he stays in a tiny village called Lataifa. There he resides on a rooftop chicken coop as a lodger in Abu-‘Ali’s house with Abu-‘Ali’s family. This Abu-‘Ali had managed to gain a license to dispense government – quota goods, such as food.

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<sup>32</sup> ibid. Pg.13.

<sup>33</sup> ibid. Pg.13-14.

<sup>34</sup> ibid. Pg.17.

<sup>35</sup> ibid. Pg.15.

The proprietor, Abu-‘Ali, has used his mercantile position to trade in all sorts of local goods including information and secrets. The narrator returns back to his university and revisits the Egyptian village at the end of 1980s. During this time, the narrator sees a different picture of the same Egyptian village. When Ghosh, or the narrator returns to the village at the end of the 1980s, Abu-‘Ali has turned his small home into a lavish multi-storied dwelling. This shows the modernization and the growing prosperity of Egyptian villages. Modernization is seen to be entering Egyptian villages through the use of televisions, fridges, radios and other things that the people of villages like Lataifa and Nashawy have started using. Even the Imam is “on fire with a vision of the future”<sup>36</sup> and that is why he has given up dispensing the herbal medicines and has bought in syringes for treating the people of his village. He says “There was a huge market of injections in the village; everyone wanted one, for colds and fever and dysentery and so many other things”<sup>37</sup>. The conversation between the narrator and the Imam is more like a debate between the representatives of two different civilizations. The narrator analyses his conversation with the Imam and comes to the conclusion that:

“it seemed to me that the Imam and I had participated in our own final defeat, in the dissolution of the centuries of dialogue that had linked us: we had demonstrated the irreversible triumph of the language that has usurped all the others in which people once discussed their differences. We had acknowledged that it was no longer possible to speak, as Ben Yiju or his Slave, or any one of the thousands of travelers who had crossed the

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<sup>36</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.193.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*. Pg.192



Indian Ocean in the Middle Ages might have done...for they belonged to a dismantled rung on the ascending ladder of development”<sup>38</sup>.

The narrator comments on the Imam, regarding their conversation that: “At that moment, despite the vast gap that lay between us, we understood each other perfectly. We were both travelling, he and I: we were travelling in the West”<sup>39</sup>. Here modernization is closely related to ‘the West’. But the narrator understands the irony of the situation and says that “We would have known, both of us, that all that was mere fluff: in the end, for millions and millions of people on the landmasses around us, the West meant only this – science and tanks and guns and bombs”<sup>40</sup>. There is a realization that modernization includes “the technology of modern violence”<sup>41</sup>. This violence is portrayed through the Iran-Iraq war. In the nearby village of Lataifa called Nashawy, many young Egyptians travel to Iraq in search of work. These workers bring modern technology to Nashawy, often in the form of refrigerators, televisions and trucks. The relation between modernization and the ongoing war is witnessed when the narrator says that “Earlier that day, I had talked at length with Ustaz Sabry about the changes in Nashawy, the war between Iran and Iraq, and the men who’d left to go ‘outside’.”<sup>42</sup> That is why when Nabeel goes to Iraq, his house with the “mud-walled rooms...were gone and in that place stood the unfinished shell of a large new bungalow”<sup>43</sup>, and he has also “sent money for a television set and washing-machine”<sup>44</sup> and many other things; but he is not able to return to Nashawy and has to stay away from his family members and his home. Migration is part of the modernizing

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* Pg.236-237

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* Pg.236

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* Pg.236

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* Pg.236

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* Pg.321

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* Pg.318

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* Pg.319

process for the village of Nashawy but it brings isolation, alienation and displacement with it.

Trade and commerce create interaction between the people around the world. Trade and commerce include transaction or exchange of goods as well as give opportunity for contact between various types of people. It plays an important role in the process of globalization; as it gives opportunities for interaction between people of different countries, cultures and societies. Trade and commerce are very actively visible in Amitav Ghosh's writings. His stories or plots often revolve around trading, business and incidents relating to various types of business which demand the crossing of borders, lands, seas; and thus roaming around the world gains an important position for trade and commerce.

Amitav Ghosh shows trade and commerce as a means of global interaction in *In An Antique Land*. In this novel, the narrator is in search of 'the slave of MS H.6', who appears to be the servant of Abraham Ben Yiju who was a merchant in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. According to Padmini Mongia, "Eight hundred years before the anthropologists arrival at his field-site, people had been travelling, merchants and traders involved with the trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean...small traders nevertheless moved regularly between continents"<sup>45</sup>. In the novel, the narrator gives an account of the trade

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<sup>45</sup> Mongia, Padmini. "Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh's *In An Antique Land*" (Pg. 73-89). in Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. Pg.85.

route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean by trying to unfold the story of “Abraham Ben Yijû, the master of the slave of MS H.6”<sup>46</sup> through a letter:

“The letter, which now bears the catalogue number MS H.6, of the National and University Library in Jerusalem, was written by a merchant called Khalaf ibn Ishaq, and it was intended for a friend of his, who bore the name Abraham Ben Yijû”<sup>47</sup>.

This shows that slave trading was prevalent during the 12<sup>th</sup> century; as the narrator is in search of this ‘slave of MS H.6’. The slaves name recalled to be “Bomma” and his “story ends in Philadelphia” but there are evidences that “Bomma was with Ben Yijû when he went to settle in Egypt in the last years of his life”<sup>48</sup> as his slave and was helping him with everything, even with money:

“The document mentions several people to whom Ben Yiju owed money for household purchases.....but amongst the sentences that are clearly legible there is at least one that mentions a sum of money owed to Bomma”<sup>49</sup>.

Abraham Ben Yijû, who is Jewish, is introduced as a businessman and thus is involved in trade and commerce and his field of trade extends from Mangalore to Aden to Fustat. The influence of trade and commerce during that period of time, that is, before the colonial period becomes clear to us when the narrator says that “The North Africans appear to have had a particular affinity for the flourishing trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean and over a period of several centuries and the Jewish traders of Fustat

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<sup>46</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.34.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* Pg.13

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* Pg.348-349

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* Pg.349

counted as an integral part of the richly diverse body of merchants who were involved in the conduct of business in Asian waters”<sup>50</sup>. According to Robert Dixon “The metaphors through which Ghosh construct the ‘real life’ of his trading culture are derived by the synecdoche from the historical circumstances of trade”<sup>51</sup>. The route from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean was an important route for trade and commerce as “Aden, served as one of the principal conduits in the flow of trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean”<sup>52</sup>. The main products traded are “iron, pepper and cardamom”<sup>53</sup> and “the merchandise that flowed through its bazaars came from as far afield as East Africa, southern Europe, the western Sahara, China and Indonesia”<sup>54</sup>. Again, this shows a wide range of global interaction due to trade and commerce. To quote Padmini Mongia again, “Bomma’s story is set in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in a world of flourishing trade on the Indian Ocean between Masr (Egypt) and Mangalore in southwestern India”<sup>55</sup>. This shows that India had a very strong economy along with an important trade route, and wide-spread trade since the 12<sup>th</sup> century that means, from the pre-colonial period. At the same time the novel refers to the upcoming changes in the trade route as the narrator says “Soon, the remains of the civilization that had brought Ben Yiju to Mangalore were devoured by that unquenchable, demonic thirst that has raged since, for almost five hundred years, over the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf”<sup>56</sup>. So, Padmini Mongia goes on to say that “The medieval world of

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* Pg.55

<sup>51</sup> Dixon, Robert. “Travelling in the West: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh” (Pg-9-35). *opsit.* Pg.28.

<sup>52</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.16

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* Pg.16

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* Pg.38

<sup>55</sup> Mongia, Padmini. “Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh’s *In An Antique Land*”. (Pg. 73-89). *opsit.* Pg.73.

<sup>56</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.288.

trade between Egypt and India had been running smoothly and graciously until it was interrupted by the Portuguese”<sup>57</sup>. The novel is based on knowledge of the history of the mercantile trade in the Indian Ocean before the arrival of the European traders. “The message becomes clear: India and Africa did very well with each other, living and trading peacefully for centuries, before the European colonizer intervened with violence”<sup>58</sup>.

The novel, *In An Antique Land*, shows the cultures of the Indians and Egyptian-Arabs, Hindus and Muslims. The novel shows the tensions of an Indian Hindu man living in a village surrounded by the Muslims in a Muslim country like Egypt. During the narrator’s visit to Lataifa for his research, he has to face the curiosity of the village people regarding his country and religion. People like Jabir and Ustaz Mustafa, ask questions about India like, “There is a lot of chilli in the food and when a man dies his wife is dragged away and burnt alive”<sup>59</sup>. They also ask him questions about his religion as Ustaz Mustafa asks him, “What is this ‘Hinduki’ thing? I have heard of it before and I don’t understand it. If it is not Christianity nor Judaism nor Islam what can it be? Who are your prophets?”<sup>60</sup> or “What is your God like?”<sup>61</sup>. There is a tension between the narrator based on his country and religion which is excavated by the curiosity of the Egyptians. Here, Zahir and his friends enjoy meeting the narrator, as he requests his uncle

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<sup>57</sup> Mongia, Padmini. “Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh’s *In An Antique Land*”. (Pg. 73-89). opsit. Pg.83.

<sup>58</sup> Hawley, John C. “The Ebb and Flow of Peoples Across Continents and Generations” (Pg. 81-143). *Contemporary Indian Writers in English: Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005. Pg.101.

<sup>59</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.46.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*. Pg.47

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*. Pg.48

“Ask him more about his country... Ask him about his religion”<sup>62</sup>. So Ustaz Mustafa continues “So you are like the Mahi?... You worship fire then?”<sup>63</sup>; in reply the narrator says:

“I shook my head vaguely, but before I could answer, he trapped my arm with his forefinger. ‘No,’ he said, smiling coquettishly. ‘I know – it’s the cows you worship – isn’t that so?’... .. I cleared my throat; I knew a lot depended on my answers. ‘It’s not like that,’ I said. ‘In my country some people don’t eat beef because...because cows give milk and plough the fields and so on, and so they’re very useful’<sup>64</sup>.”

Showing the superiority of his own religion Ustaz Mustafa says to the narrator that “Now that you are here among us you can understand and learn about Islam, and then you can make up your mind whether you want to stay within that religion of yours”<sup>65</sup>. He tries to convert the narrator to Islam asking him to “Come with me to the mosque right now”<sup>66</sup>. The narrator is always made to feel like an outsider and “Like most immigrants he felt alienated when he arrived in Britain for his studies, but that was nothing compared to the alienation that besets him in the Egyptian village of Nashawy”<sup>67</sup>. This is visible when Abu-‘Ali offers him money:

“I stared at the wallet, mesmerized, wondering whether custom demanded that I touch it or make some other symbolic gesture of acceptance or

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* Pg.47

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* Pg.47

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* Pg.47

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* Pg.48

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* Pg.48

<sup>67</sup> Hawley, John C. “The Ebb and Flow of Peoples Across Continents and Generations” (Pg. 81-143). *Contemporary Indian Writers in English: Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005. Pg.91.

obeisance, like falling at his feet. I saw myself shrinking, dwindling away into one of those tiny, terrified foreigners whom Pharaohs hold up by their hair in New Kingdom bas-reliefs”<sup>68</sup>.

The characters of Amitav Ghosh often travel around the world. Padmini Mongia while commenting on travel depicted by Amitav Ghosh, brings into focus James Clifford’s notion of travelling who “describes travel as ‘a figure for different modes of dwelling and displacement, for trajectories and identities, for storytelling and theorizing in a postcolonial world of global contacts’.”<sup>69</sup> Travelling often gives rise to the creation of a multicultural or cosmopolitan world. For Amitav Ghosh, travelling is not just for enjoyment, and his writings show an urge to become part of this cosmopolitan world. “Travel, then, is not so much about physical movement and the journey from here to there as it is a figure for different modes of stasis, movement, and knowledge”<sup>70</sup>. To quote from another novel of Amitav Ghosh; we recall the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* as he debates while talking about Ila, who has travelled to many places, that “Tridib often said of her...although she had lived in places, she had never travelled at all”<sup>71</sup>. Ghosh’s travelling is for achieving a special position in the globe; as it helps to gather knowledge and at the same time gives an opportunity to interact with people of different countries, cultures, societies and religions. For “Ghosh in *In An Antique Land* as well as his other

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<sup>68</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.30.

<sup>69</sup> Mongia, Padmini. “Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh’s *In An Antique Land*” (Pg-73-89) in Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. Pg.74-75.

<sup>70</sup> Mongia, Padmini. “Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh’s *In An Antique Land*”. opsit. Pg.75.

<sup>71</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. Pg.21.

works, travel is a compelling metaphor for knowing”<sup>72</sup>. In *In An Antique Land*, the narrator travels for his research and in order to learn Arabic, so that he can find the identity of ‘the slave of MS H.6’ through carrying out a research on the related area. Throughout this novel Ghosh gives various kinds of information that he has received in the course of his research. According to the Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta,

“who visited Mangalore some two hundred years after Ben Yiju, the expatriate community of merchants from northern Africa and the Middle East lived very sumptuously. Ben Yiju associated more easily with the Muslim traders who were fellow expatriates in Mangalore, and they probably used a pidgin language to conduct business with the locals.”<sup>73</sup>

This shows not only the importance of travel during the 12<sup>th</sup> century; but the new language that developed for the convenience of their conversation between the merchants. We can see that a kind of pidgin helped them to communicate with each other.

The narrator enriches our knowledge regarding the customs that were prevalent in the society of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Through Ben Yiju, the narrator gives us the image of the merchant community along with their customs and rituals. Ben Yiju, while moving around for business, frees a slave girl from whom he has two children, Surur and Sitt al-Dar. He may have married her but “It is also possible that their liaison was modeled upon the institution of ‘temporary marriage’, a kind of marital union that was widely practiced

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<sup>72</sup> Mongia, Padmini. “Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh’s *In An Antique Land*”. *opsit*. Pg.86

<sup>73</sup> Hawley, John C. “The Ebb and Flow of Peoples Across Continents and Generations” (Pg. 81-143). *Contemporary Indian Writers in English: Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005. Pg.87-88.



by expatriate Iranian traders”<sup>74</sup>. Also, the narrator, while describing the relationship between Ben Yiju and Bomma, says that “their arrangement was probably more that of patron and client than master and slave”<sup>75</sup>; and in order to make their relationship clear to us, he informs that “In the Middle East and northern India, for instance, slavery was the principal means of recruitment into some of the most privileged sectors of the army and the bureaucracy. For those who made their way up through that route, ‘slavery’ was thus often a kind of career opening, a way of gaining entry into the highest levels of government..... the ‘slaves’ who entered employment in this way often took a share of their firm’s profits...and even of attaining the rank of partner or shareholder”<sup>76</sup>. In the course of his travel and research, the narrator comes to know the trading history of the Middle East. According to John C. Hawley “*In An Antique Land* is an unusually constructed book that deals with themes of historical and cultural displacement, alienation, something we might call “subaltern cosmopolitanism”.”<sup>77</sup> There is a division between two classes of people where religion and politics belong to the upper class of people as the narrator says:

“in conversations with people like Ustaz Mustafa...I soon discovered that salaried people like him, rural mowazafeen, were almost without exception absorbed in a concern which, despite its plural appearance, was actually single and indivisible – religion and politics – so that the mention of the one always led to the other”<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.230

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* Pg.259

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.* Pg.260

<sup>77</sup> Hawley, John C. “The Ebb and Flow of Peoples Across Continents and Generations” (Pg. 81-143). *op. cit.* Pg.89.

<sup>78</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.50.

This is clearly visible when the narrator along with Ustaz Mustafa encounters some of his relatives and he apologetically says “They are fellaheen...They don’t have much interest in religion or anything important”<sup>79</sup>. Amitav Ghosh feels closer to these relatives of Ustaz Mustafa and shows his interest to “those barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world”<sup>80</sup> as he tries to recover the “tiny threads, woven into the borders of a gigantic tapestry”<sup>81</sup>.

The narrator’s visit to Egypt for research gives him the opportunity for interaction with Egyptian cultures as well as civilizations; and people’s urge to become modern by adapting to Western culture. He sees the process of modernization in the Egyptian villages and in sharing his life with his Egyptian neighbours, a form of cosmopolitanism can also be seen to emerge. In this context, cosmopolitanism refers to “the ideology that all human ethnic groups belong to a single community based on a shared morality.”<sup>82</sup> As we know the narrator is in search of a person called Ben Yiju, who is originally from Ifriqiya but had travelled to different places like Mangalore and Aden, which is a major gateway on the trade route between India and Pakistan, and Fustat, also known as Old Cairo. According to John C. Hawley “The synagogue to which Ben Yiju belonged, (remember that he was Jewish), was made up of some very cosmopolitan individuals who had close ties with the Indian trade”<sup>83</sup>. Abraham Ben Yiju has a slave called M.S H.6;

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* Pg.51

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* Pg.17

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.* Pg.95

<sup>82</sup> Wikipedia. “Cosmopolitanism”. 10/01/2013 & 8:00 PM.

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmopolitanism>>. Web.

<sup>83</sup> Hawley, John C. “The Ebb and Flow of Peoples Across Continents and Generations” (Pg. 81-143). *Contemporary Indian Writers in English: Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005. Pg.85.

whose name he finds out to be Bomma who is an Indian. Bomma remains not only as a slave but also supports him in his last days, during the time of his great need of money and food. This shows that people of different cultures and religions worked together from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. “Bomma’s medieval world is richly created by Ghosh as a vital, cosmopolitan one that puts to shame our current notions of cosmopolitanism. Intermarriage between communities and peoples is just a simple instance of that cosmopolitanism”<sup>84</sup>. The narrator has to roam the world to find the real identity and name of this slave of MS H.6 or Bomma:

“Ghosh’s reconstruction of Bomma’s life and times is intercut by accounts of his search for textual evidences, which takes him to archives in England, North Africa and the United States, and of his field work in Egypt in 1980-1, 1988-9, and in 1990, just before the outbreak of the Gulf War”<sup>85</sup>.

Ghosh puts forward the possibility of a pre-colonial space produced by trade and travel that enabled contacts between people in the past in which Europe did not play any role whatsoever.

Amitav Ghosh has established himself as a prominent English-language fiction writer. In his novels, he “exhibits an interest in the nature of language, textuality, and discourse, and the ways in which human perception, comprehension, and experience is

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<sup>84</sup> Mongia, Padmini. “Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh’s *In An Antique Land*” (Pg-73-89) in Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. Pg.82.

<sup>85</sup> Dixon, Robert. “‘Travelling in the West’: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh” in Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. (Pg-9-35). Pg.27.

invariably shaped and, to varying degrees, determined by them”<sup>86</sup>. The novel *In An Antique Land*, shows the connection between different languages by showing their different origins. For example, “the Arabic word sukkar (hence the English ‘sugar’) is itself ultimately derived from a Sanskrit source”<sup>87</sup>; “the name of the Amr’s city, al-Fustât, was derived from...the Latin-Greek word ‘fossaton’, which is also the parent of an archaic and unglamorous English word, ‘fosse’, or ditch”<sup>88</sup>; “the term ‘adobe’” has been derived “from the Arabic al-tûb, ‘the brick’”<sup>89</sup>.

*In An Antique Land*, depicts different languages, dialects and mixtures of Hebrew and Arabic, the language of Egyptian Muslims and Jews:

“what Ghosh had first to do was to master the language of those in whose midst he would be settling. Ghosh apparently took to Arabic quite readily, but that is not all. Ben Yiju’s letters and some other documents from that time were written in what today would surely be construed by many as an unimaginable monstrosity, that is, Judaeo-Arabic. As one might surmise from the name, Judaeo-Arabic was a colloquial dialect of medieval Arabic, written in the Hebrew script”<sup>90</sup>.

Ghosh uses Egyptian Arabic name like Abu-‘Ali, Jabir, Shaikh Musa etc.; and names of places of Egypt like Lataifa and Nashawy to let us know about the setting. Ghosh uses

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<sup>86</sup> Mondal, Anshuman A. *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers*. New Delhi: Viva Books Ltd., 2010. Pg.20.

<sup>87</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.269

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.* Pg.36

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.* Pg.37

<sup>90</sup> Lal, Vinay. “A Meditation on History: *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh”. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 21, No. 7/8 (Jul. - Aug., 1993), pp. 89-98. 02/01/2013 and 08:55. *Social Scientist* is collaborating with JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3520348>> Web. Pg.91.

words like 'khiyar', 'Amshir', 'Tûba', 'jallabeyya', 'shiyu'eyya', 'mowazzafeen' and many other Arabic words that are used in villages of Egypt. The dialogues appear in their native style which seems puzzling; for example, when Mabrouk comes to call the narrator he says, "Come with me, ya doctor,"<sup>91</sup> or Ustaz Mustafa says, "'Insha'allah,' he cried, 'God willing he will soon be one of us'"<sup>92</sup>. This dialogue also shows the attachment of the Egyptian people to their religion. It can be also seen during the celebration of "Sidi Abu-Kanaka's mowlid", as one of the college students says "When you deliver the Friday's sermons, ya Ustaz Sabry, it's so inspiring"<sup>93</sup>. Ghosh sometimes gives the English connotation of Arabic words, "she is Jabir's bint 'amm, his father's brother's daughter"<sup>94</sup>; and sometimes does not as, "Jabir and his cousins were soon bored by the zikr"<sup>95</sup>. Ghosh shows his efficiency in using languages that are not his own and at the same time mixing different languages. According to critics, "If Ghosh's reputation in literary circles (and beyond) was not already assured, *In an Antique Land* should establish him as the most significant voice in the world of (Indian) English literature, and indeed as one of the most gifted and nuanced writers anywhere in the world today"<sup>96</sup>.

Along with the technique of blending different languages, Ghosh reveals his own concept of language. *In An Antique Land* shows how understanding can change as a

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<sup>91</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.71.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.* Pg.45-46

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.* Pg.141

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.* Pg.52

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.* Pg.68

<sup>96</sup> Lal, Vinay. "A Meditation on History: *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh". *Social Scientist*, Vol. 21, No. 7/8 (Jul. - Aug., 1993), pp. 89-98. 02/01/2013 and 08:55. *Social Scientist* is collaborating with JSTOR < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3520348> > Web. Pg.89.

result of translation. Translation of words from one language to another can make someone feel uncomfortable:

“‘You mean,’ he said in rising disbelief, ‘there are people in your country who are not circumcised?’

In Arabic the word ‘circumcise’ derives from a root that means ‘to purify’; to say of someone that they are ‘uncircumcised’ is more or less to call them impure.

‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘yes, many people in my country are “impure”.’ I had no alternative; I was trapped by language.”<sup>97</sup>

Language varies in different countries and societies making a ‘trap of language’ where one gets trapped in another language. This ‘trap of language’ is also found in *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Ghosh likes to play with language which is clearly seen in the conversation the narrator and Tha’mma in this novel when Tha’mma says “I could come to Dhaka whenever I wanted” and “Tha’mma, Tha’mma! I cried. How could you have come home to Dhaka? You don’t know the difference between coming and going!... .. But of course, the fault wasn’t hers at all: it lay in Language”<sup>98</sup>. Besides in *In An Antique Land*, in the conversation between the Imam and narrator, language becomes a medium of knowledge and experience, “we had demonstrated the irreversible triumph of the language that has usurped all the others in which people once discussed their differences... ..the universal, irresistible metaphysic of modern meaning”<sup>99</sup>. “The insertion of the complex word ‘metaphysic’ here is a bold stroke which confirms that by ‘language’ Ghosh does not mean a particular linguistic formation – such as English, or Arabic, or Hindi – but rather

<sup>97</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *In An Antique Land*. Sixth Ed. New Delhi: Pauls Press, 2005. Pg.62.

<sup>98</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. Pg.152-153.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* Pg.237.

a *rationale*, a general system of ideas and an ensemble of knowledge that enables a particular way of thinking and being which encompasses all aspects of experience”<sup>100</sup>.

Robert Dixon says that “The characters in Ghosh’s novels do not occupy discrete cultures, but ‘dwell in travel’ in cultural spaces that flow across borders”<sup>101</sup>. This travel is a means of gaining knowledge and an attempt to become a part of the world. “Although Ghosh’s fiction and non-fiction throws light on both pre-colonial and colonial movements and displacements in general..... Through uncovering these on-going histories of migration and transnational flows that began several centuries ago as well as through the construction of borders, Ghosh interrogates the idea of the nation and borders.”<sup>102</sup> *In An Antique Land* represents the movements of people to different countries in such a way that unfolds the history of movements, travels and inter-cultural crossing of different classes of people in different periods; along with a representation of the culture and tradition of different places, countries and societies from the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the modern period.

In this chapter, I have tried to show the world of the 12<sup>th</sup> century along with the modern times that Amitav Ghosh represents in *In An Antique Land*. This chapter illustrates the history of Egyptian merchants concerning their trade and commerce, and the trade route of India that they used during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Trade and commerce

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<sup>100</sup> Mondal, Anshuman A. *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers*. New Delhi: Viva Books Ltd., 2010. Pg.42.

<sup>101</sup> Dixon, Robert. “‘Travelling in the West’: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh” in Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. (Pg-9-35). Pg.10.

<sup>102</sup> Roy, Anjali Gera. “Ordinary People on the Move: Subaltern Cosmopolitanisms in Amitav Ghosh’s Writing”. *ASIATIC*, VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1, JUNE 2012. India: Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur.

requires travelling, which creates opportunity for global interaction. Creating global ties through travelling is an important theme of Amitav Ghosh's writings, which can also be seen in the next chapter, where I have elaborately discussed *The Glass Palace*. In the next chapter, we will also find historical aspects, global interaction and experimentation with language that Ghosh has depicted in *The Glass Palace*.



## Chapter 2

### *The Glass Palace*

*The Glass Palace* (2000) is a historical novel narrating the history of the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty of Mandalay in Burma, which was the last dynasty that ruled Burma from 1752 to 1885. The last King and Queen of Konbaung Dynasty were King Thibaw and Queen Supalayay, who were sent to exile in India. From there it moves through the Second World War (1939-1945): “There are indications that Japanese were about to enter the war”<sup>103</sup>. The novel depicts the British colonial conquest and India’s independence movement with Uma Dey who after being widowed takes active part in the movement against British rule along with other Indians living in America: “Among Uma’s contemporaries, in New York there were many who took their direction from a newsletter published from the University of California, in Berkeley, by Indian students. This publication was called *Ghadar*, after the Hindustani word for the uprising of 1857”<sup>104</sup>, and the people who served the British Empire as soldiers now have “become dedicated enemies of the Empire”<sup>105</sup>. This novel also refers to the mutiny of the British soldiers, as the Indian army of British Empire revolt against them: “They mutinied shooting a couple of officers”<sup>106</sup> and along with this Ghosh shows us the mental state of Arjun, an British army and Uma’s nephew, with the words:

“He was a military man and he knew that nothing – nothing important – was possible without loyalty, without faith. But who would claim his

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<sup>103</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.407.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.* Pg.238

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.* Pg.238

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.* Pg.416

loyalty now? The old loyalties of India, the ancient ones – they'd been destroyed long ago; the British had built their Empire by effacing them. But the Empire was dead now – he knew this because he had felt it die within himself"<sup>107</sup>.

Eventually the novel brings the reader to the present. So, the novel focuses on 20<sup>th</sup> century Burma, India, Bengal and Malaya, trading economic changes along with the change in the social structure. This chapter will focus on the global ties that Ghosh depicts in this novel.

*The Empire Writes Back* states that, “Theories of globalization have moved, over the last half century, from expressions of the process as ‘cultural imperialism’ or neo-imperialism to analyses of the ‘hybridization’, ‘diffusion’, ‘relativization,’ and interrelationship of global societies, ‘the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole’.”<sup>108</sup> These issues find their way into Amitav Ghosh’s writings, as Ghosh focuses on travelling and crossing borders for trade and commerce. Trade and commerce control world markets and world economy which plays an important role in the process of globalization. According to Someshwar Sati, “The trans-nationalism of the forces of production and the widening cosmopolitan scope of the market are rapidly pushing the world beyond national familiar dimensions”<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* Pg.471

<sup>108</sup> Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth; & Tiffin, Helen. “Re-thinking the Post-colonial: Postcolonialism in the twenty-first century” in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. Second Ed. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2003. Pg.216.

<sup>109</sup> Sati, Someshwar. “Interrogating the Nation, Growing Global in *The Shadow Lines*”. (Pg. 49-58). Chowdhary, Arvind. *Amitav Ghosh’s “The Shadow of Lines”*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002. Pg.49.

*The Glass Palace* portrays the economic condition along with trade and commerce in South Asia spanning an area from India to Burma during the colonial period. *The Glass Palace* shows a capitalist economy, mingling it with colonial power and thus relating economic and political aspects. According to Anshuman A. Mondal:

“the novel demonstrates how the economic and political were two sides of the same colonial coin and it explicitly figures economic exploitation of land, resources and people as a counterpart of political oppression.....The meticulous descriptions of the Burmese interior – its jungle, its villages, its lifestyles – that accompany the equally exhaustive accounts of the timber industry are paralleled by the fastidious descriptions of the Morningside estate in Malaya, and the logistics of the rubber plantation”<sup>110</sup>.

*The Glass Palace* depicts different types of trades that were in practice during the British rule in the Eastern part of the South Asian region. The novel gives us a picture of the teak trade in Burma, where the British Government’s conquerors of Burma are trying to capture its teak wood resource. This is clarified when Mathew, the son of Saya John who himself is involved in the teak trade, says to Rajkumar that, “There’s going to be a war. Father says they want all the teak in Burma. The King won’t let them have it so they’re going to do away with him”<sup>111</sup>. The British Empire will do anything to expand their market and thus they had to remove the King from his position. On the other hand, Rajkumar an Indian boy, who by chance, has landed in Burma; now wants to be a successful businessman of teak wood, and he joins Saya John to help him in his business.

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<sup>110</sup> Mondal, Anshuman A. “Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers”. New Delhi: Viva Books Ltd., 2010. Pg.113-114.

<sup>111</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.16.

He collects detailed information regarding the collection and transportation of logs of teak wood and gathers knowledge about trade so that he himself can start a new business. In order to start a business of his own he earns and collects money by manpower import from India or more accurately he brings workers from India for the Burmese oil fields which are controlled by the British. With this he starts his own teak wood business and establishes a profitable plantation, and ultimately becomes a tycoon in the timber industry. The story then shifts from the heights of colonialism to the depths of the Second World War and the trade shifts from timber to rubber. Seeing this change Rajkumar, who is already married to Dolly, starts a new business of rubber plantation in association with Mathew, the son of Saya John, his first employer. Mathew had been in the USA where he had married an American named Elsa Hoffman. The plantation he and Mathew establish is near the island of Penang in northern Malaya. The plantation that his father has bought is near the island of Penang in northern Malaya. This shows that even during the colonial period, the people of different areas were involved in business, often in partnership with British traders.

*The Glass Palace* shows people travelling around the world for different reasons, such as, for trade or just tourism; Migration is also shown as people of one country settle in another country. *The Glass Palace* “focuses on the familial, commercial and cultural links that connect the Indian diaspora in South-East Asia”<sup>112</sup>. The plot of this novel portrays the family ties of three families – the royal family of Burma with King, Queen, their three daughters and their retinue of servants, one of whom marries Rajkumar who is

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<sup>112</sup> Mondal, Anshuman A. *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers*. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Ltd., 2010. Pg.15.

a Bengali orphan brought up in Mandalay and thus forming a family with their children; and the family of Saya John, who is also an orphan brought up by Christian missionaries, who acts as Rajkumar's mentor. All these families are not only depicted separately but the family ties that exist between them, somewhere in the form of friendship, somewhere because of marriage or some other reason. Rajkumar is a Bengali-born peasant, who finds his fortune in Burma through trade. Rajkumar can be seen as a hybrid character as "hybridity refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone"<sup>113</sup>. "Hybridity has frequently been used in postcolonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural 'exchange'" and "It is the 'in-between' space that carries the burden and the meaning of culture"<sup>114</sup>. Rajkumar in the course of becoming a Burmese businessman adopts the culture and language of Burma. Rajkumar's urge to become a successful businessman leads him to dress like an Englishman. For his first business meeting he dresses like an Englishman: "his suit is appropriately plain and black, and his tie neatly tied, the collar turned to just the right angle"<sup>115</sup>. Rajkumar's hybrid identity is clearly observed when he, even after being dressed as an English man touches Saya John's feet and says "Give me your blessings, Saya"<sup>116</sup>. Rajkumar is an Indian boy, who settles in Burma, adopting Burmese culture, and tries to learn the manners of the Englishmen. In all these processes, Saya John is his biggest inspiration and mentor. The teak trader, Saya

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<sup>113</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *Key concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg.118.

<sup>114</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *Key concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg.119

<sup>115</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.140.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.* Pg.141

John “would always change into European clothes, a white shirt, duck trousers”<sup>117</sup> to hide his own identity whenever he would go on business with Englishmen. He becomes a world traveler because of his work. Saya John had been brought up as an orphan by the “Catholic priests, in a town called Malacca. These men were from everywhere – Portugal, Macao, Goa”<sup>118</sup>. So, Saya has been in touch with people from different cultures since his childhood. His hybridity becomes clear to us when he narrates his conversation with the soldiers at the military hospital, where he used to work as an orderly: “The soldiers there were mainly Indians and they asked me this question: how is that you, who look like Chinese and carry a Christian name, can speak our language? When I told them how this had come about, they would laugh and say, you are a *dhobi ka kutta* – a washerman’s dog – *na ghar ka na hat ka* – you don’t belong anywhere, either by the water or on land, and I’d say, yes, that is what exactly I am”<sup>119</sup>. Saya John’s son Mathew also portrays hybridity, growing up in Singapore and he goes to America for studies, where Mathew adopts American culture and wishes to stay there after marrying Elsa Hoffman. Even Ma Cho, who runs a small food stall where Rajumar works in the beginning, is half-Indian and half-Chinese.

The royal family of Burma of the Konbaung Dynasty includes King Thibaw, Queen Supayalat and their daughters. The fall of the Konbaung Dynasty is the result of British colonial expansion; after their defeat at the hands of the British, the King, Queen and their daughters are sent to exile in India in a place called Ratnagiri, where they,

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<sup>117</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.76.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.* Pg.11

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.* Pg.11

especially the daughters, adopt Indian culture including clothing, food habits and language. The eldest princess, Ashin Hteik Su Myat Phaya Gyi, marries an Indian coachman Mohan Sawant and settles in India. Dolly, the servant of the royal family suffers exile with the royal family. Growing up in India from her childhood Dolly feels more at home in India, so she says “If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner – they would call me kalaa like they do Indians”<sup>120</sup>. She meets Rajkumar in Mandalay for the first time during the time when the soldiers of the royal family lost the battle with the British soldiers and Mandalay was ransacked. Here, Rajkumar catches a glimpse of her and falls in love with Dolly. Rajkumar and Dolly are different people with completely different temperaments, Rajkumar being born in India and brought up in Burma and Dolly being born in Burma and brought up in India. These two people, with mixed culture and hybrid identities, marry and lead a family life together.

In Ratnagiri, the Royal family of Burma meets the Collector Beni Prasad Dey and his wife, Uma Dey. Beni Prasad Dey is an Indian-Bengali and an employee of the British Government of which he is a dedicated huge supporter. He tells King Thibaw about the Japanese victory over Russia:

“Japan’s victory has resulted in widespread rejoicing among nationalists in India and no doubt in Burma too... The Empire is today stronger than it has ever been. You have only to glance at a map of the world to see the truth of this..... Britain’s Empire is...already more than a century old, and you may be certain, Your Highness, that its influence will persist for

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<sup>120</sup> *ibid.* Pg.120

centuries more to come. The Empire's power is such as to be the proof against all challenges and will remain so into the foreseeable future"<sup>121</sup>.

This dialogue reminds us of 'hegemony' which means ruling or dominating by consent; "Hegemony is important because the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial power in colonized regions"<sup>122</sup>.

Hegemony refers to the domination which is "exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class's interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted"<sup>123</sup>.

This was reflected among the soldiers of the British army where "about two-thirds – were Indian sepoys...The Indians were seasoned, battle-hardened troops"<sup>124</sup>. Arjun, an important character in the next generation of characters in the British army, is an Indian officer. He calls his group "First True Indians'... Punjabs, Marathas, Bengalis, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims. Where else in India would you come across a group such as ours – where region and religion don't matter – where we can all drink together and eat beef and pork and think nothing of it?"<sup>125</sup> He feels proud of being in the British army: "Look at us!'Arjun would say, after a whisky or two 'we're the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we're the first

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<sup>121</sup> *ibid.* Pg.114

<sup>122</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *Key concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg.116.

<sup>123</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *Key concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg.116.

<sup>124</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.27.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.* Pg.298-299



Indians who're not weighed down by the past"<sup>126</sup>. This however is part of the hegemony, techniques used by the British Empire to rule Indian people. As the narrator says, "though they might know themselves to be ruled by England...most of the day-to-day tasks of ruling were performed by Indians"<sup>127</sup>. This reminds us of Macaulay's concept of mimic men. To quote Homi Bhabha: "Macaulay can conceive of nothing other than 'a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'."<sup>128</sup> Homi Bhabha goes on to say that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite"<sup>129</sup>. In *The Glass Palace*, "Indian officers were a band of elect; they lived in proximity with Westerners...They shared the same quarters, ate the same food, did the same work"<sup>130</sup>; and Arjun agrees that "When we joined up we didn't have India on our minds: we wanted to be sahibs and that's what we have become"<sup>131</sup>. Later Arjun understands that this is last of the process to rule Indians, which is clearly visible in Hardy's speech when he talks about "duty, country, freedom"<sup>132</sup>. This realization leads them to join Mohun Singh to fight against British rule.

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<sup>126</sup> *ibid.* Pg.299

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.* Pg.300

<sup>128</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse". *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Pg.124-125.

<sup>129</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse". *op. cit.* Pg.122

<sup>130</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.300

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.* Pg.469

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.* Pg.470

Uma Dey, wife of Beni Prasad Dey, is an aunt of Arjun. She is an Indian-Bengali, who wears her sari in a modern way. The process of her modernization is a part of her marriage with the collector of Ratnagiri, Beni Prasad Dey. She understands the irony and the limit of her modernity when she tries to discuss the awful things that she heard about Queen Supayalat with Dolly who replies that, “Don’t you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in Queen Victoria’s name? It must be millions, wouldn’t you say? I think I’d be frightened to live with one of those pictures”<sup>133</sup>. She wonders “How was it possible to imagine that one could grant freedom by imposing subjugation? That one could open a cage by pushing it inside a bigger cage? How could any section of a people hope to achieve freedom where the entirety of a populace was held in subjection?”<sup>134</sup> After her husband’s death, Uma visits Europe and America. In London and New York she joins the movement against colonial rule in India and ultimately becomes a leader of the movement to free India. She can be seen as placed within the theory of ‘mimicry’ which says that “When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subjects to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer that can be quite threatening”<sup>135</sup>. In the course of this revolt against the British to make India free, she comes across Giani Amreek Singh, an old soldier, who himself inspires Indian soldiers rebel against the British Empire. When Uma asks him “why did it take you so long to

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<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* Pg.122

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.* Pg.202

<sup>135</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *Key concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg.139.

understand that you were being used to conquer others like yourself?”<sup>136</sup>; he replies that, “You don’t understand. We never thought that we were being used to conquer people. Not at all: we thought the opposite. We were told that we were freeing those people. That is what they said – that we were going to set those people free from their bad kings or their evil customs or some such thing. We believed it because they believed it too. It took us long time that in their eyes freedom exists wherever *they* rule.”<sup>137</sup>

Uma Dey becomes a part of the revolution against British rule. In Singapore she is received by “A group called the Indian Independence League”<sup>138</sup>. She even shows her anger as “she considers Rajkumar as a neo-colonialist”<sup>139</sup>, so she says “It’s people like you who’re responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you are transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans”<sup>140</sup>. Later, she joins Mahatma Gandhi’s movement “In the past, she had been dismissive of Mahatma Gandhi’s political thinking: non-violence, she had thought, was a philosophy of wish-fulfillment. She saw now that the Mahatma had been decades ahead of her in his thinking. It was the rather the romantic ideas of rebellion that she had nurtured in New York that were pipe dreams”<sup>141</sup>. Thus, being

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<sup>136</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.240.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.* Pg.240

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.* Pg.233

<sup>139</sup> Hawley, John C. “The Ebb and Flow of Peoples Across Continents and Generations” (Pg. 81-143). *Contemporary Indian Writers in English: Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005. Pg.119.

<sup>140</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.265.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.* Pg.273

widow of a distant collector and a modern woman, she becomes a political figure working for Indian independence.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair comments about Rajkumar that he “is a boundary–crosser, who make several transitions across national frontiers during his life-time”<sup>142</sup> in the essay “The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*”. Being an Indian-Bengali boy Rajkumar feels more at home in Mandalay and later in Rangoon. Here, Mandalay appears to be a multicultural place as, “The number of foreigners living in Mandalay was not insubstantial – there were envoys and missionaries from Europe; traders and merchants of Greek, Armenian, Chinese and Indian origin; labourers and boatmen from Bengal, Malaya and the Coromandel coast; white-clothed astrologers from Manipur; businessmen from Gujrat – an assortment of people such as Rajkumar had never seen before he came here”<sup>143</sup>. Mandalaya is a cosmopolitan world in itself. ‘Cosmopolitanism’ can in this context be defined as “the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, do (or at least can) belong to a single community, and that this community should be cultivated”<sup>144</sup>. Rangoon is a similar type of place where the Thonzai Prince finds the whole world encapsulated: “the Chinese junks and Arab dhows and Chittagong Sampanns and American clippers and British ships-of-the-line...the Strand and its great pillared mansions and buildings, its banks and hotels; about Godwin’s wharf and the warehouses and timber mills that lined Pazundaung Creek; the

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<sup>142</sup> Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. “The Road from Mandalaya: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*” in Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. (Pg-162-174). Pg.166.

<sup>143</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.17.

<sup>144</sup> Stamford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. “Cosmopolitanism”. 10/01/2013 &12:50 AM. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/>> Web.

wide streets and the milling crowds and the foreigners who thronged the public places: Englishmen, Cooringhees, Tamils, Americans, Malays, Bengalis, Chinese”<sup>145</sup>. Cosmopolitanism is not only limited to these places, people like Rajkumar and Saya John display cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism as they cannot be limited to being seen a citizen of any particular nation or region. The same can be said for Uma Dey as she is the character with maximum variety in this novel. Uma, before marriage, was a simple girl, who after marriage moves toward modernity for her husband, who wanted a modern wife. Uma’s tour towards modernity is reflected through her modern way of wearing her sari. But her view began to change when she realizes the cruelty of the British Empire or the British Queen. After her husband’s death, she inherits huge wealth that her husband had left for her and she decides to visit European countries. There she joins the revolt against British rule in India which she continues even after coming back to India and ultimately joins with Mahatma Gandhi to make India free from British rule. Thus a simple Indian-Bengali woman becomes a revolutionary.

As far as use of language is concerned Amitav Ghosh embraces the newness of Salman Rushdie’s language. “As a linguistic experimentalist, Rushdie attempts to destroy ‘the natural rhythms of the English language’ and to dislocate ‘the English and let other things into it’.”<sup>146</sup> Ghosh follows these traits of language while writing his English-

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<sup>145</sup> *ibid.* Pg.52

<sup>146</sup> Dwivedi, O.P. “Linguistic Experiments in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*” in “Transnational Literature”, Volume 1, no.1, November 2008. 5/01/2013 & 1:20 AM. <[https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:w30wEGiaeokJ:dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/2328/3244/1/Dwivedi.pdf+Rushdie%27s+experimentation+with+language&hl=en&pid=b1&srcid=ADGEESjQuNENr1i1o5MQwgcBg2j0d663pRuo72ocsjE3G2sZJ\\_dVmt3kmv13fUdYIHUxsqJ8ckv1AIDSdoJtYTkzawcBbf2OxI24Ejje8C9YJTkyUHIBWfKP3B9vRO2EQCCUunP59PP&sig=AHIEtbSS0sxDsUm8eT9yNc9EfUeXTIPffQ](https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:w30wEGiaeokJ:dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/2328/3244/1/Dwivedi.pdf+Rushdie%27s+experimentation+with+language&hl=en&pid=b1&srcid=ADGEESjQuNENr1i1o5MQwgcBg2j0d663pRuo72ocsjE3G2sZJ_dVmt3kmv13fUdYIHUxsqJ8ckv1AIDSdoJtYTkzawcBbf2OxI24Ejje8C9YJTkyUHIBWfKP3B9vRO2EQCCUunP59PP&sig=AHIEtbSS0sxDsUm8eT9yNc9EfUeXTIPffQ)> Web. Pg.1.

language fiction. He mixes English with the language of the Indian subcontinent along with its style and form as if introducing Indian English to his audience to give the essence of the place he writes about. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh depicts a scenario from India to Burma and the intrusion of the British into it; and the mixture of their languages. Rajkumar, an Indian boy, settles in Burma and come across the Burmese language and words like, ‘Ba le’, ‘longyi’, ‘baya-gyaw’, ‘aingyi’, ‘Mebya’, ‘wungyis’, ‘wundauks’, ‘myowuns’ and many others. Ghosh shows Indian society as King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat of Burma along with the whole family are exiled in Ratnagiri of India. Indian expressions like, ‘ande-ka-bhujia’, ‘Chalao goli’, ‘Sabar karo’, ‘jhanda’, ‘chalo’, ‘jaldi’, ‘bhangra’ and many others are used. Here, the Indian language has become a part of English: “Kanhoji would issue scoldings from his bench, telling the villagers to clear the way for the Collector’s gaari”<sup>147</sup>. Here ‘gaari’ is used with such ease that it seems like part of the English language. English is often said in Indian style, such as, Arjun says to Hardy, “Go, yaar, it’s your birthday isn’t it? Jaa”<sup>148</sup>; though this dialogue is said in English but with an Indian tone or accent. The English language seems to be contaminated with the Indian language as even the English people are sometimes found to speak in Indian language. Lieutenant-Colonel Buckland, while talking to the soldiers, says that “There was a ceremony and a *burra khana* for the men”<sup>149</sup>. So, in this novel we find mixture of languages which is not only true for the Indians and Burmese but the English people. Through the mixture of different languages Ghosh depicts different societies. Amitav Ghosh, like Salman Rushdie, changes, breaks and blends different

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<sup>147</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Glass Palace*. India: Viking by Penguin Books India and Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2008. Pg.124.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.* Pg.344

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.* Pg.431

words to make his own words or phrases or his own language, and thus shows his way of experimenting with language.

Amitav Ghosh represents the movements of people to different countries in such a way that it seems he is trying to unfold the history of movements, travels and intercultural crossing. In the course of this he puts forward the culture and tradition of different places, countries and societies along with their mixture. This chapter focuses on the global ties that *The Glass Palace* represents through movement, travelling and crossing of borders. It illustrates Ghosh's representation of how people move to different places as a result of which they come in contact with different cultures and thus become a multicultural persona. This multiculturalism can also be found in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, which is discussed in the next chapter. In the next chapter, I am going to show how a cosmopolitan world arises as a result of the contact of different types of people in a particular place.

### Chapter 3

#### *Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke*

*Sea of Poppies* (2008) is the first book of the Ibis Trilogy planned by Amitav Ghosh. The novel tells the story of the time prior to the opium war. It is set in India, where British traders were forcing farmers to cultivate opium. The novel begins with Deeti, who after a lot of sufferings elopes with Kalua and ultimately travel in the ship called Ibis as an indentured labourer to Mauritius. In the ship they come across others who are also travelling as indentured labourers as well as lascars and sailors. The labourers are like poppy seeds, uncertain about their future. As the novel progresses, characters like Jadu, Paulette, Deeti, Kalua along with some others get together and plan to escape from the ship. They are successful in escaping from the ship. This takes us to the sequel or second part of the Ibis Trilogy, that is, *River of Smoke* (2011), which tells us how the Ibis had safely landed in Mauritius with few passengers. The latter story focuses on the condition of the opium trade a year before the first opium war in 1839-1842; and it is set in a town called Fanqui Town of China, where traders from all over the world arrive for the sake of their business. The novel opens with Deeti in the island of Mauritius; but shifts to the opium trade in China where Bahram Modi, an Indian trader, is trying to compete with the British traders. These two novels show the global interaction through the fate of indentured labourers and the opium trade.

The British Empire building of the eighteenth century was accompanied by the developments and spread of trade, commerce and industry. The British entered the Indian



subcontinent through the East India Company. Some of these trades were oppressive including the opium trade, slave trade and most discussed in Bengal, indigo cultivation and trading. In *Sea of Poppies* we come across some of these oppressive trading strategies of the British traders. This novel begins with Deeti's vision:

“The vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean, came to Deeti on an otherwise ordinary day, but she knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny for she had never seen such a vessel before, not even in a dream... .. it was the chasm of darkness where the holy Ganga disappeared into the Kala-Pani, ‘the Black Water’.”<sup>150</sup>

This vision gives a hint of the future journey that Deeti is going to take as an indentured labourer. Slave trading or taking labourers on the basis of contract is established at the very beginning of the novel. The novel primarily focuses on Deeti who comes from a remote village in Eastern India. She is married to a man called Hukam Singh, who works in an opium factory called Ghazipur Opium Factory. The villagers are forced to cultivate poppy in their lands. After her husband's death, Deeti decides to be a ‘Sati’ and commit suicide on the funeral pyre of her husband. But she is saved by Kalua who “was of the leather-workers’ caste”<sup>151</sup> and who used to take Hukam Singh to the opium factory in his ox-cart. Deeti and Kalua run away from their village together and eventually they board the ship called *Ibis* where they become a part of a group who are being taken to Mauritius as labourers. *Ibis* is a coolie ship which is used to send labourers overseas. Passengers are of diverse origin, as for example, Neel Ratan Halder, a zaminder of Rashkhali, who was once associated with the opium trade ends up in the *Ibis* as a prisoner after being betrayed

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<sup>150</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. India: Vikings by Penguin Books India, 2008. Pg.3

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.* Pg.4

by a British opium trader Mr. Burnham; or Paulette, daughter of a French botanist, who travels in disguise as a part of a group of indentured labourers but she has her own plan to start a new life in Mauritius. Besides, there is Zachary Reid, an American sailor, who is a mulatto with an American slave mother and white American father, which gives a hint of American slavery. *Sea of Poppies* works to expose the ruthless, inexorable destruction wrought by the opium trade in India, the degradations of coolie indentured servitude and its links to slave trading by the British traders. In the book *The Empire Writes Back*, it is said that “A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial and cultural model”<sup>152</sup>. As these people are carried out of their country as indentured labourers and they are going to a new place leaving their own people and home behind, they feel uprooted. “The Black Water”<sup>153</sup> through which the *Ibis* sails becomes an image of dislocation from their culture and history, which reminds us of dislocation as “a term often used to describe...Heidegger’s term *unheimlich* or *unheimlichkeit* – literally ‘unhousedness’ or ‘not-at-home-ness’.”<sup>154</sup>

In *Sea of Poppies*, people of different cultures, religions, castes and country are brought under the same roof or more specifically, in the same ship *Ibis*. This ship provides us with an image of cosmopolitanism. The novel begins in a village, where

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<sup>152</sup> Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth; Tiffin, Helen. *The Empire Writes Back*. Second ed. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group; 2002. Pg.9.

<sup>153</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. India: Vikings by Penguin Books India, 2008. Pg.395.

<sup>154</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *Key concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg.73.

people of different castes and classes such as Deeti, Hukam Singh and Kalua live. Deeti and Kalua board the Ibis with other people like Heeru, Sarju, Champa, Ratna, Dookhane and others. Besides, there are other people like Paulette, daughter of a French Botanist, who is on the ship in order to get away from people like Mr. Burnham and start a fresh life. There are also two prisoners, one of them is Neel Ratan, a zamindar of Rashkhali who escapes from the ship and later becomes a Munshi; along with another prisoner, Ah Fatt who is half Parsee and half Chinese. His mixed origin makes him a hybrid character. The people on the ship have been uprooted from their own culture and home so they create their own society, their own culture by mixing different cultures that they separately belong to. So, we can say that, “The descendents of the diasporic movements generated by colonialism have developed their own distinctive cultures which both preserve and often extend and develop their originary cultures. Creolized versions of their own practices evolved, modifying (and being modified by) indigenous cultures with which they thus came into contact”<sup>155</sup>. This brings us to the opening of the *River of Smoke*, the sequel of *Sea of Poppies*. It opens on the island in Mauritius where Deeti had settled after running away from the Ibis. People of different regions have settled in this place giving rise to a hybrid society where they speak Creole. The same is true for the Fanqui town of Canton in China. Robin, a painter, in his letter to Paulette describes Fanqui-town as a place which is a cluster of everything:

“Everywhere you look there are khidmatgars, daftardars, khansamas, chuprassies, peons, durwans, khajanadars, khalasis and lascars. And this, my Puggly dear, is one the greatest of the many surprises of Fanqui-town

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<sup>155</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *Key concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pg.70

– a *great number* of its denizens are from India! They come from Sindh and Goa, Bombay and Malabar, Madras and the Coringa hills, Calcutta and Sylhet – but these differences mean nothing to the gamins who swarm around the Maidan. They have their own names for every variety of foreign devil: the British are ‘I-says’ and the French are ‘Merdes’. The Hindusthanis are by same token, ‘Achhas’.”<sup>156</sup>

Besides, in *Sea of Poppies*, the sailors in charge of the steering of Ibis are also from different regions. English sailors like Mr Crowle, Mr Doughty and the American Zachary Reid to the Indian lascars like Serang Ali and Subedar Bhyro Singh, from pawn brokers like Baboo Nob Kissin to the indentured labourers. People of different professions and classes, common village people, English merchants, Indian and Bengali lascars, zaminders, prisoner opium cultivators, foreign botanists, prisoners, policemen, American sailors, coolies, sahibs, which reflect cosmopolitan racial and socio-economic growth are brought together here. Ibis in *Sea of Poppies* and Fanqui town in *River of Smoke* becomes a “gathering of people in diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned.”<sup>157</sup>

In *Sea of Poppies*, Zachary Reid’s hybridity is shown through his mixed origin being born out of the union of a white American and a black American slave. Paulette also turns out to be a hybrid character as she, being daughter of a French botanist Pierre Lambart, is brought up in Calcutta by an Indian-Bengali woman, and so she behaves like a sari-clad Indian woman speaking Bangla like the people of Calcutta, and her name is Indianised to Putli. She is separated from her people, culture and original home. Her

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<sup>156</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *River of Smoke*. India: Hamish Hamilton by Penguin Books, 2011. Pg.185

<sup>157</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. “Dissemination: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation”. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Pg.200.

displacement can more conveniently be described from Edward Said's point of view. The loss of history or a sense of displacement that Paulette suffers can be compared to Edward Said as he describes in *Out of Place*, where he shows his feeling of displacement because of his mixed upbringing. His feeling of being "out of place"<sup>158</sup> begins with his name where "Edward", a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic name Said"<sup>159</sup>. In case of language the Said's family sometimes uses Arabic and sometimes English, so their language is a mixture of Arabic and English. This shows Said's hybridity, which leads to loss of history and his urge to find his origin. Edward Said's ultimate sense of displacement is noticed when he says that "Could "Edward's" position ever be anything but out of place?"<sup>160</sup> In the second part of *River of Smoke*, Paulette decides to leave every attachment behind and start an expedition with Fitcher Penrose for finding a new species of flower; she sails towards uncertainty where there is no past or future.

"*River of Smoke* narrates the emergence of an incipient global ecological consciousness"<sup>161</sup>. Where *Sea of Poppies*, is more concerned with the indentured labourers of the Ibis, the sequel, *River of Smoke* focuses on trade especially the opium trade which ultimately leads to the Opium war. In the course of this, Ghosh introduces a wide cast of new characters, most compelling of whom is Seth Bahram Modi, a trader from Bombay who has built his fortune by exporting and selling opium in China and like

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<sup>158</sup> Said, Edward. *Out of Place*. First ed. USA: Knopf, 1999. Pg.3.

<sup>159</sup> Said, Edward. *Out of Place*. First ed. USA: Knopf, 1999. Pg.3.

<sup>160</sup> Said, Edward. *Out of Place*. First ed. USA: Knopf, 1999. Pg.19.

<sup>161</sup> Mossarrap Hossain. "Ficton Reviews: Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke*" in Unerring Human Emphathy, "Hyphen – Asian American unbridged". 09/01/2013 & 1:00 PM. <<http://www.hyphenmagazine.com/blog/archive/2012/10/books-unerring-human-emphathy>> Web.

other traders partially settles in Canton. Bahram makes his way to the Committee of the British traders and becomes a member of the Chamber of Commerce, where he is the only Indian member. He finds his fortune in the Opium trade but when the Chinese Government refuses to give any further license for this trade he takes part in the act of “Free Trade, Universal Free Trade”<sup>162</sup> revolt against the Chinese Government. Bahram successfully competes with the British merchants but at times feels guilty for what he does; so he says, “Democracy is a wonderful thing Mr. Burnham... .. It is a marvelous tamasha that keeps the common people busy so that men like ourselves can take care of all matters of importance. I hope one day India will also be able to enjoy these advantages – and China too, of course”<sup>163</sup>. In Bahram Modi, Ghosh brilliantly captures the struggles of an individual whose desires and interests are ultimately defeated by far-reaching historical, economic, and political events. On the other hand, Paulette is involved in another kind of exploration to find rare species of plants, which takes her near to China. This shows China’s richness in flowers and floral beauty: “Flowers and opium, opium and flowers! It is odd to think that this city, which has absorbed so much of the world’s evil, has given, in return, so much beauty...chrysanthemums, peonies, tiger lilies, wisteria, rhododendrons, azaleas, asters, gardenias, begonias, camellias, hydrangeas, primroses, heavenly bamboo, a juniper, a cypress, climbing tea – roses and roses that flower many times over – these and many more”<sup>164</sup>. This hints at the different types of flowers that have been traded from China; but later, the gardens of China were closed for foreign traders. *River of Smoke* also refers to the Bombay ship building industry; as Bahram’s father-in-law Seth Rustamjee Pestonjee Mistrrie had ship-building industry in

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<sup>162</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *River of Smoke*. India: Hamish Hamilton by Penguin Books, 2011. Pg.406.

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.* Pg.404

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.* Pg.536

Bombay where “the export division was Bahram’s personal creation and it was he who had built this small unit into a worthy rival of the famous shipyard”<sup>165</sup>. This family is a Parsee family. There are also references to the textile industry in India in which Bahram’s family had prospered; “his grandfather had been a well known textile dealer, with important court connections in princely capitals like Baroda, Indore and Gwalior”<sup>166</sup>. These industries that had once flourished in India have suffered a lot by the British Government or East India Company through the imposition of different types of taxes in India. India always had an important position in the global market, which the East India Company tried to subjugate in order to establish their own trading companies and controlling them with their own policies. People of Canton provided the new field of trade and commerce. Besides, overseas and international traders, the local people are carrying out their own business in boats such as Chi-mei and her laundry-boat, and Asha-didi and her kitchen-boat. So both large-scale and small-scale businesses can be found here side by side. This Chinese town represents the flowing cosmopolitanism. “It is a cosmopolitanism of relative prosperity and privilege founded on ideas of progress that are complicit with neo-liberal forms of governance, and free-market forces of competition”<sup>167</sup>.

“The second novel of his Ibis trilogy, “River of Smoke,” wanders through the gateways between various dimensions of cosmopolitan existence around the Pearl River

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<sup>165</sup> *ibid.* Pg.45

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.* Pg.46

<sup>167</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. “Dissemination: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation”. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Pg.xiv

during the years leading up to the Opium Wars of the early nineteenth century”<sup>168</sup>. In *River of Smoke*, the city of Canton, which is situated on the banks of the Pearl River, becomes the representation of a cosmopolitan multicultural society. In a letter Robin writes to Paulette: “I have the impression that the village is to the Pearl River what Budge Budge is to the Hooghly – a ramshackle cobbily-mash of godowns, bankshalls and customs-khanas”<sup>169</sup>. The similarities between two distant villages where “cosmopolitanism is the ideology that all human ethnic groups belong to a single community based on a shared morality”<sup>170</sup> is worth noting in the given line. “A global cosmopolitanism of this sort readily celebrates a world of plural cultures and peoples located at the periphery, so long as they produce healthy profit margins within metropolitan societies”<sup>171</sup>. In Canton, the Indian opium trader, Bahram Modi and his munshi, Neel Rattan adapt to a new multi-culture. The opium trade in China brings together Indians and British traders with the Chinese; and Neel Rattan and Ah Fatt get involved in this opium trade. Neel Ratan and Ah Fatt first make their appearance in this novel. Ah Fatt can be called hybrid in the sense that he is half-Parsee and half-Chinese, “mixed-kind-boy”<sup>172</sup>. To clarify his position, he says to Neel that “Many that live along Pearl River – in Macau, Whampoa, Guangzhou. In any port, any place where man can buy woman, there is many *yeh-jai* and “West-ocean-child”.”<sup>173</sup> At the centre of the

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<sup>168</sup> Peacocke, Antonio M. R. “Ghosh’s River is Shimmering but Shallow: ‘River of Smoke’ by Amitav Ghosh”. The Harvard Crimson. 11/01/2013 & 11:30 PM.  
<<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2011/10/25/ghosh-river-smoke-review/>> Web.

<sup>169</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *River of Smoke*. India: Hamish Hamilton by Penguin Books, 2011. Pg.179.

<sup>170</sup> Wikipedia. “Cosmopolitanism”. 10/01/2013 & 8:00 PM.  
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmopolitanism>>. Web.

<sup>171</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. “Dissemination: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation”. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Pg.xiv

<sup>172</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *River of Smoke*. India: Hamish Hamilton by Penguin Books, 2011. Pg.92.

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.* Pg.92



opium trade is Bahram Modi, a Parsee merchant from Bombay, who is a frequent visitor to China. Bahram Modi and Paulette mark a new way of being global. Paulette's botanical explorations bring to focus the sharp rivalry between the European imperial powers launching expensive undertakings in search of rare plants in places like China that had closed off much of its gardens to people like Paulette. Along with imperialists, there were botanical entrepreneurs like Penrose who scoured the earth for exotic plant varieties.

The use of language in these novels follows the trend set by Salman Rushdie who injected his idea of 'chutnification' to English. Amitav Ghosh follows this trend of writing, where he writes in English but makes the language his own. According to Salman Rushdie, "as far as Eng. Lit. itself is concerned, I think that if *all* English literatures could be studied together, a shape would emerge which would truly reflect the new shape of the language in the world"<sup>174</sup>. Salman Rushdie further suggests that:

"Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to the Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures

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<sup>174</sup> Rushdie, Salman. "'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist" (Pg. 61-70). *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Vintage Books, 2010. Pg.70.

within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free”<sup>175</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh writes about a multicultural world where the birth of a new language becomes essential. To represent such a society Ghosh uses the new language that emerged by mixing different languages.

*Sea of Poppies* focuses on trade and travel, which results in the merging of different types of people from different countries and the intermingling of their languages. In this novel, the English translation of the Hindi phrases and sentences are sometimes given: “Arré sunn! Listen there”<sup>176</sup>. But at the same time Hindi words that have an English are also used, such as ‘sheeshmahal’, ‘budgerow’, ‘Halders’, ‘piyadas’, ‘nalki’, ‘paiks’, ‘chowkidars’ and many others. Indian words are mixed with English giving rise to a hybrid language or hybrid words like, ‘jillmilled’, ‘ghumta’d’, ‘punditry’, ‘calputtee’. Other languages are blended with English in such a way that it seems those words are part of the English language like, “The disturbance had caught Bhyro Singh’s attention and he began to advance upon Kalua, lathi in hand”<sup>177</sup>. The floating boats are described as:

“In this floating bazaar there was everything a ship or a lascar might need: canvas by the gudge, spare jugboolaks and zambooras, coils of istingis and rup-yan, stacks of seetulpatty mats, tobacco of the batti, rolls of neem-twigs for the teeth, martabans of isabgol for constipation, and jars of

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<sup>175</sup> Rushdie, Salman. “Imaginary Homelands” (Pg. 9-21). *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Vintage Books, 2010. Pg.17.

<sup>176</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. India: Vikings by Penguin Books India, 2008. Pg.33.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.* Pg.367

colomboroot for dysentery: one ungainly gordower even had a choola going with a halwai frying up fresh jalebis”<sup>178</sup>.

In this description it is really difficult to differentiate between English and other languages, even the language of English people is contaminated with other languages. This is evident when different members of Mr Burnham’s family talk, such as, in the sentences where Mr. Burnham’s daughter Annabel says “Mama! she forgot to bundo her jumma! And oh dekkko mama, do: there’s her ankle! Do you see it? Look what the puggly’s done!”<sup>179</sup>. Also, Mrs. Burnham tries to convince Paulette to marry Mr. Kendalbushe by saying “Ever since he lost his wife every larkin town’s been trying to bundo him. I can tell you, dear, there’s a paltan of mems who’d give there last anna to be in your jooties”<sup>180</sup>. The name of Mauritius is “Mareech-dip”<sup>181</sup>; and Nobokrishno-babu has become “Baboo Nob Kissin Pander”<sup>182</sup>, and he along with some other characters use English with an Indian Bangla tone: “Lambert-shahib always discussing with me in Bangla... But I am always replying chaste English”<sup>183</sup>. The spelling of words change to show the difference in pronunciation and accent such as, when a schooner was coming towards Jadu, “he did not fail to recognize that this was no ordinary ship bearing down on him, but an iskuner of a new kind, a ‘gosi ka jahaz’.”<sup>184</sup>

*River of Smoke* opens with Deeti and some other people who have settled in Mauritius after escaping from the Ibis. At the opening of the novel, people are going to

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<sup>178</sup> ibid. Pg.400-401

<sup>179</sup> ibid. Pg.127-128

<sup>180</sup> ibid. Pg.273

<sup>181</sup> ibid. Pg.137

<sup>182</sup> ibid. Pg.134

<sup>183</sup> ibid. Pg.136

<sup>184</sup> ibid. Pg.141

“Deeti’s shrine” which “was hidden in cliff, in a far corner of Mauritius, where the island’s eastern and southern shorelines collide and form the wind-whipped dome of the Morne Brabant”<sup>185</sup>, where people of different regions have settled. So, they have given rise to their own “Kreol”<sup>186</sup>. This new language is visible when Deeti says “Levé té! We’re not here to goggle at the zoli-vi and spend the day doing patati-patata! Chal!”<sup>187</sup>. These uses of different languages depict the multilingual society. Besides, Deeti mixes Bhojpuri with the ‘Kreol’: “Revey-té! É Banwari; é Mukhpyari! Revey-té na! Haglé ba?”<sup>188</sup>. In Canton, a pidgin or a mixed language emerges. A good example is the conversation between Bahram Modi and Chi-mei: “‘You name blongi what-thing?’ She blushed: ‘Li Shiu-je. Mistoh name blongi what-thing ah?’”<sup>189</sup>. So, other languages become a part of the English language. Describing the group going to ‘Deeti’s shrine’: “the whole clan would be on the march; accompanied by paltans of bonoys, belsers, bowjis, salas, sakubays and other in-laws, the Colver phalanxes would converge on the farm in a giant pincer movement”<sup>190</sup>. Fanqui town of Canton in China is portrayed as an economical gathering, which give rise to a new language. A reflection of this language is clearly visible in the conversation between Bahram Modi and Chi-mei:

“Remember, later I came to Mister Barry house and he give me cumshaw? Big cumshaw?

‘Yes. Remember.’

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<sup>185</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *River of Smoke*. India: Hamish Hamilton by Penguin Books, 2011. Pg.3

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.* Pg.3

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.* Pg.5

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.* Pg.4

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.* Pg.67

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.* Pg.4

In the meanwhile Allow's face had turned grave, as if to reflect Bahram's expression. 'Allow too muchi sad inside, Mister Barry. Too muchi sad Number-One Sister make die.'

Bahram narrowed his eyes. 'What happen to Number-One Sister? Allow savvy, no-savvy?'

Allow answered with a vehement shake of this head. 'No-savvy. Allow that-time go Macau. Too muchi sorry, Mister Barry'."<sup>191</sup>

The language is a wonderful mixture of English and Chinese called pidgin even by the people living there: "They think-la, pidgin is just broken English, like words of a baby. They do not understand. Is not so simple bo"<sup>192</sup>. A multicultural society with different languages and pidgins give a lively picture of a cosmopolitan place. For example, while living in Canton Bahram Modi greets his friends from different places in different languages: "sometimes in Gujrati (*Shahib kem chho?*); sometimes in Cantonese (*Neih hou ma Ng sin-saang? Hou-noih-mouh-gin!*); sometimes in pidgin ('Chin-chin, Attock; long-tim-no see!'); and sometimes in English ('Good morning, Charles! Are you well?')"<sup>193</sup>. Indian accents are audible when Bahram Modi says "Emperor-shemperor and all"<sup>194</sup>, "Huzoor, he said, you are our *maai-baap*, our parent and sustainer"<sup>195</sup> and "*Bas!* You know who I mean, Vico!"<sup>196</sup>. Besides, various Indian languages are used like "pucka sahib", "qaidis", "haramzadas", "chull", "Chor Gali", "falto" and many others. Bahram Modi is often found to speak in "Gujarati: *Atlu sojhu English bolwanu kahen thi seikhiyu*

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<sup>191</sup> *ibid.* Pg.261

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.* Pg.272

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.* Pg.222

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.* Pg.163

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.* Pg.320

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.* Pg.386

*deekra*”<sup>197</sup>. Besides, Bangla is also spoken as Neel says in Bangla to Baboo Nob Kissin “*Achha to aro bolun*”<sup>198</sup> or Asha didi greets Neel with “*Nomoshkar Anil-babu!*”<sup>199</sup>.

Amitav Ghosh in both these novels, *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, shows globalization and cosmopolitanism through trade and travel, and movement to different parts of the world either as indentured labourers or for trading. He shows how different cultures mix to create a multicultural society or community, in the Ibis in *Sea of Poppies* and in the multicultural society in the Fanqui town in *River of Smoke*. In the course of this, Ghosh presents a beautiful blend of different languages. Though Amitav Ghosh focuses on the opium trade in India in *Sea of Poppies* and in China in *River of Smoke*, it seems as though he has brought the whole world within this narration.

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<sup>197</sup> *ibid.* Pg.392

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.* Pg.399

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.* Pg.394

## Conclusion

Travelling or movement from one place to the other is one of the most important motifs in Amitav Ghosh's writings. The travelling takes place because of trade and commerce, migration, forced migration or voluntary migration. The travels or movements often result in displacement or diaspora. There are many other reasons for displacements as well. Amitav Ghosh himself while talking about diaspora in India says that, "The modern Indian diaspora – the huge migration from the subcontinent that began in the mid-nineteenth century – is not merely one of the most important demographic dislocations of modern times: it now represents an important force in world culture."<sup>200</sup> In order to depict this world culture Ghosh shows different types of displacement in his novels.

In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh shows travelling through the migration of the indentured labourers. Here, Deeti, Kalua, Paulette and other people travel in the ship called Ibis to Mauritius as indentured labourers. In this novel, different types of people come on the same deck and form their society which is new and formed by the mixture of different cultures. This type of travelling or migration often results in diaspora or displacement, which is suffered by the people who are separated from their own culture, society and people. Diasporic situation can also be witnessed in *River of Smoke*, the sequel of *Sea of Poppies*. Some of the indentured labourers escape from the Ibis and settles in a part of Mauritius, where they make their own culture by mixing different

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<sup>200</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. "The Diaspora in Indian Culture". *The Imam and the Indians: Prose Pieces*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2002. Pg.-243.

cultures and speak a creolized language. Thus they give rise to a new separate culture. Amitav Ghosh himself comments on this type of situation as – “India exported her unique methods of adapting to linguistic diversity with her migrants. Wherever they went, Indian migrants proved to be linguistically adaptable in ways that British or French or Chinese migrants were not... As a result the principal language of Mauritius – despite the numerical preponderance of Indian migrants on that island – is not Hindi (which appears at best to have the status of a domestic solidarity language) but a French creole.”<sup>201</sup>

Besides, in this novel, travel is a part of the opium trade in which people from different countries are involved. In this novel, the people of different places, which includes both British and Indian traders, come and gather in the Fanqui Town of Canton, China for trade and commerce especially opium trade. These people from different countries come together in the Fanqui Town and make a multicultural cosmopolitan society. This Fanqui Town gives rise to hybridity where people coming from different places adopt a new culture which itself is hybrid. The best example can be shown through Ah Fatt, son of Bahram Modi, an Indian Parsee, and Chei-mei, who has a laundry boat in Canton. Ah Fatt is a hybrid character as he is half-Parsee and half-Chinese. Besides, there is Paulette, a French girl brought up in Calcutta in an Indian-Bangla culture; or Zachary Reid, who is a mulatto with a white father and black mother. So, hybridity is another dominant characteristic of Amitav Ghosh’s writings displayed through characters as well as the society in which they live.

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<sup>201</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. “The Diaspora in Indian Culture”. opsit. Pg.-245.



Amitav Ghosh comments in an interview regarding his own writing that, “In the end it’s about people’s life; it’s about people’s history; it’s about people’s destiny”<sup>202</sup>. Ghosh puts forward many historical incidents through fiction. In *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh portrays the trading history of 12<sup>th</sup> century. In *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, he gives us a picture of British rule in India and their influence on world trade, especially opium trade. He also hints at the opium war of 1839-42. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh paints a portrait of colonial rule in India and Burma; and the revolt against oppressive British rule. Regarding this novel, Amitav Ghosh comments in an interview that, “I realized at some point that my book was about much more than just individual characters. It was also about the history of the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia, which is an epic history, a very extraordinary history”<sup>203</sup>. Besides, in his novel *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh gives a description of the communal riot of 1964. In this novel, he shows the personal history side by side with the national history. Anushuman Mandol comments on the feeling of the narrator regarding his uncle, Tridib’s death, who died in a riot, that “The novel demonstrates the fraught nature of ‘identity’ in the subcontinent, and how national identities are always troubled by their intimate yet conflicting relationship with identities that traverse national boundaries that mock the ‘security’ – physical, political, existential”<sup>204</sup>. Along with history, Ghosh portrays cultures and customs, and the urge of people to protect their own culture. For example, in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh narrates the

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<sup>202</sup> Aldama, Frederick Luis. “An Interview with Amitav Ghosh”. *World Literature Today*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Spring, 2002), pp. 84-90. 06/11/2012 & 6:26 pm. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40157268>> Web.

<sup>203</sup> Aldama, Frederick Luis. “An Interview with Amitav Ghosh”. *World Literature Today*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Spring, 2002), pp. 84-90. 06/11/2012 & 6:26 pm. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40157268>> Web.

<sup>204</sup> Mondal, Anshuman A. *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers*. New Delhi: Viva Books Ltd., 2010. Pg.-5.

story of Bon Bibi and shows the puja that is done by the people of all religions in order to protect themselves from tigers. Ghosh shows how the people of different regions try to preserve their beliefs and customs, and in the course of this he himself is preserving these beliefs and customs through his writings.

Amitav Ghosh represents the characters of his novels in the context of their surroundings and the society. For Ghosh, “the question of ‘identity’ is always implicated in representations of the ‘self’ and of the world around it; identity does not stand alone nor is it derived from some inborn ‘essence’ within a given human being; rather it is made or ‘fashioned’ by language and representation”<sup>205</sup>. Experimentation with language is an important characteristic of Ghosh’s writings. Ghosh makes us familiar with creolized languages like that of Fanqui Town and Mauritius of the *River of Smoke*, and mixes different languages especially Bangla and Hindi with English in most of his novels. So like Rushdie, Ghosh gives us an essence of chutnification, where he makes chutney of different languages. Through chutnified language we get a picture of the hybrid society and their characters that are portrayed in Ghosh’s novels.

In this thesis, I have tried to show different aspects of Amitav Ghosh’s writing style through some of his novels. I have mainly taken four works of Amitav Ghosh, that is, *In An Antique Land*, *The Glass Palace*, and the first two part of the Ibis Trilogy – *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* – to show that the people are in move due to various reasons and most often for trade and commerce. So, trade and commerce, which demands

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<sup>205</sup> Mondal, Anshuman A. *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers*. New Delhi: Viva Books Ltd., 2010. Pg.- 20.

travelling around the world, occupies a special position in Amitav Ghosh's writings. Travel builds global ties which gives rise to multicultural and cosmopolitan societies. Along with these, I have tried to bring out the cultural and historical aspects that Amitav Ghosh has represented in his novels.

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