A Note on Abbreviation Used

The following novels by Amitav Ghosh are abbreviated thus in the subsequent references related to them to save space.

*The Shadow Lines* ..... *TSL*

*The Glass Palace* ..... *TGP*

*In an Antique Land* ..... *IAL*

*The Hungry Tide* ..... *THT*

*Sea of Poppies* ..... *SP*

*The Circle of Reason* ..... *TCR*

*Countdown* *Countdown*

*The Calcutta Chromosome* ..... *TCC*
Introduction

As the British Empire broke up and attempted to sustain an illusion of unity under the euphemistic title of “Commonwealth”, the department of English Literature in colleges and universities in former colonies swiftly named the course they offered as “Commonwealth Literature”. The ambiguous politics of the term was inscribed in the field that it called into being. “Commonwealth literature” did not include the literature of the centre, which acted as the impossible absent standard by which it should be judged. The term also occluded the crucial difference between the old and the new commonwealth between the White settler’s colonies and Black/Brown nations. These Asian and African colonies had a very different colonial experience and faced exploitations in many forms, notably the exploitation of their natural resources and human labour. They found political independence after they were found to be ungovernable by their colonial masters.

The whole enterprise of “Commonwealth Literature” was jeopardized from the start by the heavily ideological overtone of its name. However, a critical study of literature, culture and history of former Spanish, French, Dutch and English colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, needs a term that is all embracing and less problematic; only the term “post-colonialism” comes closer to defining the new mode of critical discourse. Imperialism, colonialism, anti-colonialism, neo-colonialism, neo-imperialism, “Commonwealth Literature,” “Third-world Literature,” and “New Literatures in English” are some of the terms very commonly used in this post-colonial discourse though every term is clearly nuanced. The prefix “post” in post-colonial is as definite a marker or an indicator of time or history as Anno Domini. It signifies the end
of colonization and marks the beginning of a condition called “post-coloniality.” Since
the end of the Second World War there have been steady attempts at re-visioning and
re-fashioning of concepts like identity, nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexuality,
subjectivity, language and power in this new critical enterprise. And theories of post-
coloniality concern themselves with a wide range of metaphysical, ethical, political and
ideological issues. In short, post-colonialism works with different maps, chronologies,
narratives and political agendas.

It has been found that the new term “Post-colonialism” or “Post-colonial” has
many advantages over the former term. It foregrounds a politics of opposition and
struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery. It has
helped to destabilize the barriers around “English Literature” that protected the primacy
of the canon and the self-evidence of its standards. The The Empire Writes Back, which
is a lucid, judicious and representative text, is destined to play a decisive role in the
conceptualization and theorization of emergent literature in the former colonies.

Linda Hutcheon, whose reading of postmodern as a parody, has been taken up
by so many post-colonial writers, generates her own discussion of the two terms,
postmodernism and post-colonialism, by emphasizing their distinct political agendas.
Implicit in the diverging political agendas for postmodernism is the subject as defined
by humanism, with its essentialism and mistaken historical varieties, its unities and
transcendental presence. But for post-colonialism the object is the imperialist subject,
the colonized as formed by the processes of imperialism. Hutcheon’s warning is
salutary and should be quoted:

The current post-structuralism/ postmodern challenges to the coherent, autonomous
subject have to put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourse, for both must
work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical postmodern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses. (Linda Hutcheon 151)

The work of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, that is *The Empire Writes Back*, is a timely contribution to the post-colonial debate. The strategic moves they adopt in their unenviable task for comprehensive post-colonial theory have paved the way for our own critique. One needs to make a strong distinction between the post-colonialism of settler and non-settler countries. But within each of these, there is a greater continuity between the colonial and the post-colonial. In some way, the post-colonial is a rallying point, a splinter in the side of the colonial self and the kind of rebellions that we find in the post-colonial are not unlike the reaction of the child against the law of the father. (Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra 282).

Post-colonialism is not a homogeneous category either across all post-colonial societies or even within a single one. It is a typical configuration which is always in the process of change, never consistent with itself. In settler countries like Australia, for instance, writers such as Harpur, Brennam, Richardson and Patrick White can be read as aspirants to the canon, extending but not challenging the standards of the imperial centre. But even while this was going on, the indigenous people whom the settlers had silenced could not be ignored, and their ghosts began to invade the texts of the dominant tradition. This kind of parasitism found in the original settler literature vis-a-vis the Mother Country is at first a prominent feature of the emerging writing of the Australian Aborigines, the New Zealand Maoris and the Canadian first nation writers. Then the distinctive form of the post-colonial arises, as defiant as oppositional post-colonialism but without political independence or autonomy. This symbolic post-colonial formation
has many of the same features in the more exciting post-colonialism of the non-settler countries as they establish their national identity. From here begins the attempt to establish an identity which is either originary or newly acquired through a form of writing, leading to a shift of balance within post-colonial identity formation.

This takes us to the next level which is one of identity formation. Identity is not absolutely transparent or unproblematic. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think instead of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in the process, and always constituted within, not outside representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term “cultural identity” lays claim. There are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first position defines in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective “one true self”, hiding inside the many others, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves”, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experience and shared cultural codes which provide as “one people”, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This “oneness”, underlies all the other, more superficial differences, the truth, the essence, of say “Indianness” or Indian ethos or Indian experience. It is the identity which an Indian must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cultural representation in literary text.

Such a conception of cultural identity plays a critical role in all post-colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world. It places at the centre the vision of the poets of “Negritude”, like Aime Cesaire and Leopald Senghor, and of the Pan
American political project, early in the century. It continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst the hitherto marginalised people. In post-colonial societies, the rediscovery of this identity is often the object of what Frantz Fanon once called: “a passionate research .... directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to other” (Fanon)

New forms of cultural practice in these societies address themselves to this project. As Fanon puts it, “Colonialism is not satisfied merely withholding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form of content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (Fanon 170).

The second view of cultural identity is much less familiar, and more unsettling. If identity does not proceed, in a straight unbroken line, from some fixed origin, it becomes well nigh impossible for us to understand its formation. We might think of identities as framed by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative. Identities always have to be thought of in terms of the dialogic relationship between these two axes. The first one gives us some grounding in, some continuity with the past. The second reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity of people dragged into slavery, transportation, indentured labour, forced migration, and so on. These people came predominantly from Africa and from the Asian subcontinent. In the history of the modern world, there are few more traumatic ruptures to match these enforced separation from Africa—already figured, in the European imaginary, as “the
Dark Continent”. But the slaves and indentured labourers were also from different countries, tribal communities, villages, languages, and races.

Post-colonial literatures are a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the indigenous cultural practices. As a consequence, post-colonial theory had existed long before that particular name was used to describe it. Once colonized people had cause to reflect on and express the tension that ensued from this problematic which they contested, but eventually relented to create a vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience.

The term “post-colonial” is resonant with all the ambiguity and complexity of the many different cultural experiences it implicates and it addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact. Post-colonial critics and theorists should consider the full implications of restricting the meaning of the term to “after-colonialism” or “after-independence”. All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and political independence has not solved this problem. The development of new elites within independent societies, often buttressed by neo-colonial institutions and legacies, has led to a piquant situation with them becoming the unwitting protectors and guarantors of the continuation of colonial projects in new formats. The development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religion discriminations, the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invader societies—all these testify to the fact that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. This does not imply that post-colonial practices are seamless and homogeneous but indicates the impossibility of dealing with any part of the colonial process without considering its antecedents and consequences.
Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experiences of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is essentially post-colonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field. Like the description of any other field, the term has come to mean different things to different people. However, one can argue that post-colonial studies are based on the historical facts of European colonialism and the diverse material effects to which this phenomenon gave rise to. One needs to keep this fact of colonization firmly in mind because the increasingly unfocused use of the term “post-colonial” over the last ten years to describe an astonishing variety of cultural, economic and political practices also meant that there is a danger of it losing its effective meaning altogether. Indeed the diffusion of that term is now so extreme that it is used to refer to vastly different and opposed activities. In particular, there is the tendency to employ the term “post-colonial” to refer to any kind of marginality with all the risk of denying its basis in the historical process of colonialism.

While drawing together a wide variety of theoretical and critical perspectives, this researcher attempts to redress a process whereby post-colonial theory may mask itself and even perpetuate unequal economic and cultural relations. This happens when the bulk of the literary theory is seen to come out of the metropolitan centres, “adding value” to the literary “raw material” imported from the post-colonial societies (Mitchell 3). Such a situation simply reproduces the inequalities of imperial power relation. Post-colonial theory has been produced in all societies into which the imperial force of Europe has intruded, throughout always in the formal guise of theoretical texts. But this
might not be so clear today given the privileging of theory produced in metropolitan centres and the publishing network that perpetuated this process. It is relatively easy, for instance, to obtain the classic texts of colonialist discourse theory in metropolitan societies since they appear in publications widely circulated in these areas. But critical material by post-colonial theorists such as E. K. Brathwaite, Michael Dash, Raja Rao and Wilson Harris (not to mention the “theory” located in “creative” text) are either not available or ignored in many contemporary metropolitan discussion of the field.

The researcher has attempted to show how the theorization of the post-colonial condition has emerged from a study of an immense range of literatures, and in so doing has placed the more publicized recent concerns of colonialist discourse theory in a wider geographic and historic context. Colonialism was usually a brutal force employed by one country to exploit another country/community in order to obtain economic wealth. Colonialism most commonly was the abuse and exploitation of the natural resources or wealth and labour of the native people.

Indian Writing in English reveals the dialectics of imperialism in its journey from the periphery to the centre and echoes the deep core of neo-colonialism based on power politics. Literary stalwarts like Salman Rushdie, Khushwant Singh, Mukul Kesavan, Vikram Chandra, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh and others wrote/ writing in the post-colonial space, using novel as the means of cultural representation. These writers of the 1980s, says Jasbir Jain, “aimed at enhancing an Indian cultural identity and projecting Indian culture and historical heritage to enable an assertion of the Indian self” (Dhawan 28). The Indian novels in English, as the “Third World Novel”, refer to representation of colonialism, nationhood, and postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers and corruption. One sees the novels as engaged in raising postcolonial
consciousness, but the study of Ghosh’s novels’ thematic range indicates that his novels also attempt to universalize humanistic gesture, for human nature and social relationships are as important as the interplay of power and national relationship. Ghosh’s novels deal with various aspects of post-colonial identities. The novels are not simple recapitulation of historical events in the sub-continent. To call Ghosh’s novels as mere political allegories would be facile. Instead they show the impact of politics on the life of ordinary people and on human relationships. Historical events have provided him with the raw material against which the author studies the historical truth like the meaning of nationalism and political freedom in the modern world. There is a nexus between the historical moments and the world of fiction. The past is reconstructed through reference to houses, photographs, maps, road/street names, newspapers and other such concretizations. This technique allows the reader to examine the text with diverse co-text and validate the author’s perception of his time and milieu covered by the novel.


The First Chapter entitled “Transnational Characters” explains the nature of characters who transcend their national boundaries and yet retain the ethos and mores of
their nation/community. The first section deals with the crucial aspects of identities in *The Shadow Lines*. The development of Thamma’s character encapsulates the futility and meaninglessness of political freedom which was otherwise supposed to usher in an era of peace and prosperity for all. During the days of her childhood and youth she had sympathies with all those who were fighting for the cause of freedom. The city of Dhaka was Thamma’s place of birth but now her nationality is Indian as she lives in Calcutta. As a young girl, she had thought of fighting for freedom in East Bengal. But those very same people for whom she had been willing to lay down her life are enemies now in 1964. Feeling of nationalism had after all motivated the fight against the British in Khulma. Transnationalist spirit in a broader sense means the ability in an individual to accept the new cultural landscape without any complaint or yearning for one’s cultural roots.

The second section deals with Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*. Dolly’s son Dinu, one of the survivors in these vast intertwined families runs a modest photo studio in Burma, The Glass Palace is the place where the young people shifted by the military dictatorship of the present day Burma gather to open their minds to discuss books, pictures and ideas. The symbolism of the title is not laboured and it is hard to miss.

The third section deals with *In an Antique Land*, the story of two Indians in Egypt, Abraham Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant originally from Tunisia who came to India around A.D 1130. The other Indian is Amitav Ghosh, who in 1980 went there to trace the story of Bomma. His search lasted more than ten years in a small village, two hours south of Alexandria. Tracing the life history of real life characters who lived and died in times yore is a postcolonial practice of establishing one’s national identity through the prism of history.
The Second Chapter is entitled “Transitional Characters”. These characters are always caught between two different eras or two different worlds. They usher in transition by their resolve to change with time. The first section of *The Hungry Tide* deals with Kanai who is someone from modern India. His world keeps moving so fast and continues to change. He is rich and he continues to make oodles of money. The novel is set in the extensive archipelago of tiny islands and labyrinthine waterways known as the Sundarbans. Piya, a young Indian – American has come to the Sunderbans to study a rare species of the river dolphin. Piya and Fokir are part of the experience in these novels. The novel deals with the life and problems of the people of the Sunderbans. These unfortunate people face changes in their life wrought by time.

In the second section, *The Sea of Poppies* is taken for interpretive analysis. It begins with a description of Deeti, a simple, pious lady, caring mother and an efficient housewife. Married to Hukum Singh, a crippled worker in the Ghazipur opium factory, the unfortunate Deeti figures out that on her wedding night, she was drugged with opium by her mother in law, so that her brother-in-law could rape her and consummate the marriage in place of her infertile husband. When her husband dies, Deeti was forced to consider Sati (immolation on her husband’s funeral pyre) as the option in the face of threat of more rapes by her brother-in-law. Kalua comes to her rescue; the couple flees and are united. Deeti and Kalua become indentured servants on a schooner named *Ibis*. These transitional characters also stand for social and political transition and in a way they are change agents.

The Third Chapter is entitled “Transgressive Characters”. Transgression is the nature of literary characters who feel confined by the norms and expectations of society and they try to break free of those norms in unusual or illicit ways. These characters
rebels against the basic norms of the society and in transgressive fiction they may seem mentally ill, anti-social or nihilistic. The first part of *The Circle of Reason* deals with Balaram who is attracted to science that apparently reasons out the relationship between the inner life and the external phenomena. It is the omniscient narrator who comments on the head of Balaram, the most powerful man in the village. The novel is divided into three parts: *Satwa, Rajas* and *Tamas*. Ghosh translates the Sanskrit terms through the subtitle, *Reason, Passion, and Death*.

The other work *Countdown* is a travelogue that deals with the mastermind behind India’s nuclear test policies, K. Subrahmaniam, a civilian defence affairs expert. He says that nuclear weapons are the currency of global power. Many scholars, scientists and politicians share their different opinions about nuclear tests in this novel. Here the characters are historical figures and are burdened with identity assertion in terms of military power and regional supremacy. The power vacuum created by the departing colonial power is somehow ought to be filled by any one of the regional powers. This book examines the mad rush towards mutually assured destruction and balance of power in the South Asian context.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* deals with the story of Murugan who has a strange theory about Ronald Ross, the Nobel Laureate and British entomologist who discovered how mosquitoes transmit Malaria. Murugan’s disappearance in Calcutta on the “World Mosquito Day”, August 20, 1995 creates furore. Murugan meets Urmila, a journalist struggling with conflicting demands of career and family. She investigates a military hospital in Secunderabad where Ross was to have begun his malaria research in 1895.

Critics of different hues with different ideological proclivities have given their views of identity based on what they perceived as identity insistence or resistance. Old
ideologies have submerged paving for “globalism” and “supranationalism” to be the natural expression of the new economic order. And “videocracy” rules the world through global imagery via internet. So modern technology with all its underlying logic, mediates the reality of the environment through various media, the latest being telematic media, that is combination of telecommunication and informatics. The process of deterritorialization, especially that of national, cultural and ideological boundaries, is completed by media through their interconnectedness and interactive potentials. A low degree of regulation and the levelling of distinction between “high” and “mass” culture have undermined the very concept of dominant and alternative paradigms. One can see the postmodernist spirit, if it could be called the zeitgeist, englobing the nations as it makes no distinction between the developed and the developing countries. These are the times of no fixed belief or commitment or standard and there is a certain loss of faith in gods of reason and science. Novelty, invention, momentariness, and high individualism make a “bizarre jouissance”. Jameson calls this postmodernism as “cultural logic of late capitalism”.

Gustava Flaubert in his *Bouvard et Pecuchet* declares that “Europe will be regenerated by Asia. The historical law of civilization moves from orient to occident.....the two forms of humanity will at last be soldered together.” The new found interactivity, mobility, connectivity, ubiquity and globalization cannot wholly separate people across the border with absoluteness. Multiculturalism or cultural hybridity has become the new experience as well as the expression. The human possibilities have been enhanced by the technological base and the cultural transformations. Instead of one “global village” multiple global villages are emerging with humanism as its governing ideology. So, one is really at a loss to know which culture regulates or
regenerates the other. The traditional dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’, though still present, has started showing signs of haziness as problems related to technology and economy prove to be interwoven and inseparable. This again proves that there is no absolute freedom from ideology in our thinking and governing.

Ranajit Guha identifies the coexistence of two domains, “elite” and “subaltern”, in a colonial nation. But the presence of the third domain, comprising urban or metropolitan middle-class cannot be ignored. In fact, they act as a thermostat for stable auto-regulation of a nation. To the middle-class, frontiers and borders are only shadow-lines etched on maps as they embrace internationalism of the Left and globalism of the Capitalists. What is national identity or Indianess or Indian subjectivity then? What has happened to the people of colonial nations is a “crisis of belonging” and lack of image of themselves. Paul Ricoeur says that “ideology is linked to the necessity for a social group to give itself an image of itself.” Althusser agrees with Ricoeur that ideology is a necessary feature of society and it can give a social group its collective personality. But if a society itself stands fragmented into so many minority groups then ideologies as well as identities suffer. Ideology not only determines and shapes identity but also ensures that each person knows his or her place in the social order.

Karl Mannheim says that “ideology is not a psychological phenomenon occurring in the individual mind; it is part of more deep lying social condition. Marx believes that the “material production” or the economic condition forms the basis of the society. Ideology forms the superstructure and is determined by the economic base. The superstructure also in turn influences the base. For Althusser, ideologies are “autonomous superstructures” independent of economic base but can certainly influence the economic base. In the postcolonial society like ours, which espouses philosophies
like “welfare state” and “mixed economy”, the path is middle of the road. And rightly it has produced ideologically cleaved social classes. The first group includes socially and geographically mobile “westoxicated” modern elites. They view themselves as progressive and elitist in their attitudes, behaviour, tastes and language. They acknowledge and reflect the “dominant” culture. They have strong faith in the triumph of “laissez faire” economy and the “technonationalism” of the west. The so-called brokers of English also fall in this category. Many have even indulged themselves in either “Raj nostalgia” or “colonial aesthetics”. Others swing to the extreme of displaying a deeply critical attitude to the regions of their birth or the land of their forefathers. V.S.Naipaul is a good example.

V.S.Naipaul avers that West Indies and Africa lack history. According to him the Caribbean societies are half-finished, fractured and unproductive. He warmly acknowledges India’s colonial past. At the same time he makes too many, uncomplimentary and unsavoury observations against India and its civilization in his book *India: A Wounded Civilization*. Here is one of his choice observations:

The Indian past can no longer provide inspiration for the present. In the matter of artistic vision the West is too dominant, and too varied; and India continues imitative and insecure . . . . India, without its own living traditions, has lost the ability to incorporate and adapt; what it borrows it seeks to swallow whole. For all its appearance of cultural continuity, . . . India is incomplete: a whole creative side has died. (126)

V.S.Naipual’s characters, like Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, reveal their sense of deracination and cultural disaffection by trying to exorcise the past. On the contrary, the characters of R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao seek sustenance in their roots.
The second group bemoans the break in historical continuity of culture by the oppressive intrusion of language, dress, food, drama, art and architecture that are culturally alien. They are either reactive nationalists or insouciant nativists, who are sworn to “swadeshi spirit”. Ludditism is their credo and they violently oppose import of technology and culture. The reactive nationalism thrives on kindling atavistic emotions. They oppose all hegemony and homogenising cultures and structures. On the political side, the Dravidian Movement in the south which was essentially an anti-Brahmin movement viewed the English educated Brahmins as collaborators and abettors of colonialism and perpetuators of ancient myths to promote self-aggrandisement. They talked of social revolution but later seized on the linguistic sentiments of the people and launched anti-Hindi agitation whipping up anti-North passions, time and again. Political power came to them but lack of ideological grounding saw the Dravidian parties, relying heavily on emotive issues like race or language to stay in power. Insurrection by minority racial groups in the name of “national self-determination” in the North-East of India gave a new fillip to groups elsewhere. “Hindutva” or “Syndicated Hinduism”, as Romila Thapar would term it, has become a political ideology and equated with patriotism, which in this case is xenophobic nationalism. Strangely enough it finds new converts among politicians of all shades as they sense political power is theirs. An analyst version of the reactionaries shows that they have their own agenda to decolonise the minds from all liberal and latitudinarian spirit. The effort toward replacing one ideology with another ideology either political or cultural always creates tensions. As Antonio Gramsci thinks, the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons work not through domination but by what he calls consent. Otherwise tensions and violence will further divide and degenerate the already fissured and fractured society.
The third is the syncretic group which finds itself caught between opposing and shifting ideologies. They are often on “borderland” where there are multiple crossings of borders both literal and conceptual. Their principle occupation is one of “social navigation” and survival in a world where the needs and desires have been irrevocably homogenised. A new breed of nomadic sybarites and diasporic intellectuals strive to retain core Indian values in their lives and writing while enjoying the pleasures and benefits that western technology has made possible. A novel like *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh, seeks answer by exploring the lives of characters that are English speaking, bilingual, metropolitan and middle-class. They express their Indian sensibility or any acquired sensibility better in English. As O.M. Juneja says “competing languages and discourses contribute to dialogic dynamism’ in the postcolonial narratives.’’ The narrator in the story is rooted in Calcutta but his imaginative universe has no boundaries. Ila is the daughter of a diplomat and a world traveller whose landscapes keep shifting. Even when she plays house with the narrator in Calcutta as a child, the house they inhabit is in London and Magda, their fantasy child is blue-eyed and blonde. Later when Ila, the narrator and Robi go drinking in the nightclub of Calcutta Grand Hotel, Robi and the narrator enforce their patriarchal authority. Robi restrains Ila from dancing with a businessman. To an irate Ila, Robi says “Girls do not behave like here” and then “you can do what you like in England..... But here there are certain things you cannot do. That’s our culture, that’s how we live.” Ila replies icily, “Do you see why I’ve chosen to live in London? Do you see? It’s only because I want to be free....Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you.”

Tham’ma, another character tells her story and the national adventure of anti-imperialism. She was fascinated by the ideologies of terrorist organisations like
Anushilan Samithi and Jugantar and stories of Kudiram Bose and Bagha Jatin. She feels that Indians have to create a nation drawn with blood. She says, “That’s what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget that they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. That’s what you have to achieve for India, don’t you see?” So much for her is nationalism that believes in shedding blood and forging a national identity. Tham’ma’s grandson finds her concept of nationhood affecting a whole generation: “All she wanted was a middle-class life, like the middle-class world over, she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power, that was all she wanted- a modern middle-class life, a small thing”.

A modern middle-class Indian knows nations conduct wars on different turf to protect their trade through economic sanction or tariff. We no longer live in world where countries fight for land but for creating economic spheres of influence. Even the Gulf war of 1991 was started by Saddam Hussein to correct the imperial blunder which had sliced off Kuwait from Iraq. India still engages itself in low intensity conflicts to protect its territory, if not to redeem the territory arbitrarily demarcated during partition. The theatres of war are many like in the urban concrete jungles fought between mafia gangs or in deep forests between poachers and environment protectors or between small time religious or racial extremists and the state forces everywhere. The concerns are both local and global, especially when they are issues related to environment trade, terrorism, disease or even culture.

To the middle-class, centrality is identity as they constantly fight against marginalisation. One has to attempt that their affiliations are multiple and identities are varied. Althusser believes that “Ideology interpellates individuals as subject.” Since
ideology is the grid of ideas through which we come to know the world, the new experience comes to us only through the grid. And the entrapment of humankind in ideology is complete. Maybe as Paul Ricoeur observes, “we think from it (ideology) rather than about it”. (D.E.Benet 43-48)

Literature and culture are always regarded as sites of political and ideological struggles. According to Robert Young, “the founding moment” of post colonial theory was the journal Tricontinental, launched by the Havan Tricontinental of 1966, which initiated the first global alliance of the peoples of the three continents against imperialism. However, the year 1950 saw the publication of two seminal texts of post-colonialism: Aime Cesaire’s Discourse on Colonialism in French and Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks. And in 1958 Chinua Achebe published his novel Things Fall Apart. George Lamming’s The Pleasures of Exile appeared in 1960 and Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth followed in 1961. Edward Said’s landmark work Orientalism appeared in 1978. More recent works include The Empire Writes Back (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin and Gayatri Spivak’s The Post-Colonial Critic (1990).

Post-colonialism re-examines the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized to determine the economic, political and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers. It further analyzes the process of decolonization, contestation of various forms of domination and articulation of political and cultural identities. According to Edward Said, it all began with European search for markets, resources and colonies. Till then “the Orient” remained as the “other”, that is “a living tableau of queerness.” But it became the colonial space to execute European imperialist projects aided only by capitalism. Thus the oriental nations became
investment centres for European finance capitalists. Imperialism is primarily exercising of power (economic and military), dominion and authority by a dominant country over other people (nations) to promote an economic system that gives free access to material and human resources. Economic imperialism always comes with a baggage, namely cultural imperialism.

It is interesting that colonial aesthetics had its origin even in the seventeenth century itself. Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is full of colonial overtones and it examines the master-slave relationship unabashedly. In the twentieth century, colonialism found ideological justification in the form of Rudyard Kipling’s “whiteman’s burden.” For centuries, colonialism was believed by the colonisers as the continuation of the “Enlightenment” project that began at the time of Renaissance. E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, Paul Scott’s *The Raj Quartet*, J.G.Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur* and Jim Corbett’s *The Maneater of Kumaon* explore the various aspects of colonial Raj. Colonial discourse itself can be divided into two varieties – the first one is anti-colonial, accommodating both nationalist and nativist strands in discourses resulting in literature of resistance or combat. It calls the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation and moulds the national consciousness. They mostly found expressions in vernacular songs and folksongs. For example, the Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi’s patriotic songs aroused patriotic fervour in the colonial times. The second variety is one of hybridity and in-betweenness. Hybridization takes place at the racial, linguistic, ideological and cultural levels. For instance, Mahatma Gandhi borrowed the Western concepts of liberal democracy and individual freedom and hybridized it by juxtaposing it with an indigenous idea of Rama Rajya. The same is true of Negritude which drew upon French intellectual tradition. Linguistic cross-fertilization resulted in
“creolization” in the Caribbean context and “chutnification” in the Indian context as Salman Rushdie famously put it. In the post-colonial times too, the practice of hybridization continues and new elements like diaspora and cross-over get added to the writing practices. Thus we hear both in Canadian and Australian Literatures polyphony of voices that are truly representative of multiculturalism in these nations. For example, the voices of Indian migrant writers such as Rohinton Mistry and Uma Parameswaran commingle with the Jewish and Cree voices of Canada.

In India, post-colonial writing has really come of age with writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundathi Roy, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga winning the prestigious Booker Prize for literature. Their writings are exotic, parodic and even ludic at times, abounding in local description. As Homi Bhabha claims that both mockery and mimicry continue to be part of post-colonial writing as it was during the colonial times. But the dilemma of cultural resistance is manifest in all literary production. Though decolonization has become a political reality, intellectual indenture and mental servitude to the colonizer’s language and culture remain in some form. Moreover, the subaltern groups in India have found their voices and speak in a voice that is strident, aggressive and assertive. For example, Bama’s works which have been translated from Tamil into English are truly representative of the Dalit voice and of the doubly oppressed woman’s voice. Translations of literary works from the multihued regional literatures of India into English have also made post-colonial writing authentic and celebratory of new-found identities and subversive of internal colonization, especially of the mind. Thus the works of Maheswatha Devi, U.R.Ananthamurthy, M.T.Vasudevan Nair, D.Jeyakanthan and a host of others are post-colonial in every sense.
On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975-6 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that ‘it had once seemed to belong to ... the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval’ (Desjardins 14). He was right about the place, of course, especially so far as a European was concerned. The Orient was almost a European invention and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes full of remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over. Perhaps it seemed irrelevant that Orientals themselves had something at stake in the process, that even in the time of Chateaubriand and Nerval Orientals had lived there, and that now it was they who were suffering; the main thing for the European visitor was a European representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate, both of which had a privileged communal significance for the journalist and his French readers.

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestants, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. It will be clear to the reader that by Orientalism means several things, and all of them are interdependent. The most readily accepted designation for Orientalism in an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the
Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism. Compared with Oriental Studies or Area Studies, it is true that the Orientalism is less preferred by specialists today, both because it is too vague and general and because it connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth century and early twentieth century European colonialism. Nevertheless books are written and congresses held with the “the Orient” as their main focus, with the Orientalist in his new or old guise as their main authority. The point is that even if it does not survive as it once did, Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental.

Related to this academic tradition, whose fortunes, transmigrations, specializations, and transmissions are in part of the subject of this study, is a more general meaning for Orientalism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novel, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, mind, destiny, and so on. This Orientalism can accommodate Aeschylus and Victor Hugo, Dante, and Karl Marx so to speak.

The interchange between the academic and the more or less imaginative meanings of Orientalism is a constant one, and since the late eighteenth century, there has been a considerable, quite disciplined – perhaps even regulated – traffic between the two. The third meaning of Orientalism, which is something more historically and
materially defined than either of the other two. Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for describing it, by teaching it or settling it. In short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. It is useful here to employ Michel Foucault’s notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. It may be contested that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post–Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity “the orient” is in question. It is interesting to note how the European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.

A second qualification is that ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power. To believe that the Orient was created or “Orientalized” and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination is to be disingenuous. The
relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.

This brings us to third qualification. One ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or myths which were the truth about them to be told. It is easy to believe that Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is a veridic discourse about the Orient (which is what, in its academic or scholarly form, it claims to be).

In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand. During the period of extraordinary European ascendancy from the late Renaissance to the present, the scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about the Orient because he could be there, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient’s part. Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development. Additionally, the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, than according to a detailed logic governed
not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.

Therefore, Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious “Western imperialist plot to hold down the ‘oriental’ world”. It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts and it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of ‘interest’ which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world. Indeed, the real argument here is that Orientalism is and does not simply represent a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such it has less to do with the Orient than it does with our world.

Since Orientalism is a cultural and a political fact, then it does not exist in some archival vacuum. On the contrary, it can be shown that what is thought, said, or even done about the Orient follows (perhaps occurs within) certain distinct and intellectually knowable lines. Here too a considerable degree of nuance and elaboration can be seen working between the facts of textuality. Most humanities scholars are perfectly happy with the notion that text exists in context, that there is such a thing as intertextuality, that the pressure of convention predecessors, and rhetorical styles limit what Walter Benjamin once called the “overtaxing of the productive person in the name of ... the
principle of “creativity”, in which the poet is believed on his own, and out of his pure mind, to have brought forth his work (Benjamin 1973: 71). Yet there is a reluctance to allow that political, institutional, and ideological constraints act in the same manner on the individual author.

Modernity is inherently globalizing and this is evident in some of the most basic characteristics of modern institutions, including particularly the disembeddedness and reflexivity. But the difficulty lies in conceptualising globalisation and how best or worst is this phenomenon. This question must be considered at some length here since the central importance of globalising processes today has scarcely being matched by extended discussions of the concept in the sociological literature. Globalisation can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away. *Local transformation* is very much a part of globalisation that has the lateral extension of social connections across time and space.

Another example is the rise of local nationalism in Europe and elsewhere. The development of a globalised social relation probably serves to diminish some aspects of nationalist feeling linked to the nation state. But casually involved with intensifying of more localised nationalist sentiments in circumstances of accelerating globalisation, the nation state has become too small for the big problems of life and too big for the small problems of life at the same time as social relations become laterally stretched and as part of the same process, we see the strengthening of pressures for local autonomy and reasonable cultural identity.

Theorists of international relations characteristically focus upon the development of the nation state system, analysing its origins in Europe and its subsequent worldwide
spread. Nation states are treated as actors engaging with one another in the international arena and with other organisations of a transnational kind (intergovernmental organisations or non state actors). Although various theoretical positions are represented in the literature, many authors describe a similar picture in analysing the growth of globalisation. Sovereign state at first emerged largely as separate entities, having more or less complete administrative control with their borders. Nation state is becoming progressively less of sovereign than earlier in terms of control over their own affairs.

The other approach concerns its portrayal in the increasing unification of the nation state system. The sovereign power of the modern state was not formed prior to their involvement in the nation state system, even in the European state system, but developed only in conjunction with it. Indeed sovereignty of these modern states was from the the first dependent upon the relation between states, in terms of which each state recognised the autonomy of others within their own borders. No state, however powerful, held as much sovereign control in practice as was enshrined in legal principle. The history of the past two centuries is not one of the progressive losses of sovereignty on the part of the nation state. Loss of autonomy on the parts of some states or groups of states has often gone along with an increase in that of others and as the result of alliances or war or political and economical changes takes place. In other words sovereign control of some of the classical Western nations may have diminished as a result of the accelerations of the global divisions of power over the past many years.

According to Wallersten, the worldwide reach of capitalism was established quite early in the modern period. Capitalism was such a fundamental globalising influence previously because it is an economic rather than a political order. Capitalism was able to penetrate far flung areas of the world the states of its origins could not have
brought wholly under their political system. The colonial administration of distant lands helped to consolidate their economic expansion. In the late twentieth century, colonialism in its original form has all but disappeared. The world capitalist economic countries are involved in massive imbalance between core, semi-periphery and periphery.

Humanist literary studies have long been resistant to the idea that literature (or at least good literature) has anything to do with politics, on the grounds that the former is too subjective, individual and personal or else too universal and transcendent to be thus tainted. Accordingly, the relationship between colonialism and literature was not, until recently dealt with by literary criticism. Today the situation seems to be rapidly reversing itself, with many, if not a majority of analysts of colonial discourse, coming from training in or professional affiliation with literary studies. It does not mean that the orthodoxies within literary studies have simply evaporated. Oftentimes the analysis of colonialism is still regarded as “special interest” topic which will not seriously alter teaching and research in the rest of the discipline. The recent attention to the relationship between literature and colonialism has provoked serious reconsideration of each of this term.

Literature’s pivotal role in both colonial and anti-colonial discourses has to be explored. Ever since Plato, it has been acknowledged that literature mediates between the real and the imaginary. Marxist and post-structuralist debate on ideology increasingly try to define the nature of this mediation. It has been suggested that earlier language was the site where different ideologies intersected and clashed with one another, and then literary text became a complex clusters of languages and science can be identified as extremely fecund site for such ideological interactions. More over there
are the complex articulations between a single individual, social contexts and the play of language. Literary text circulates in a society not only just because of their intrinsic merit, but because they are part of other institutions such as the market or the education system. Via this institution they play a crucial role in constructing a cultural authority for the colonisers, both in the metropolis and in the colonies. The tales in the European Renaissance were an amalgam of fiction, attitudes received from the earlier times and fresh observations. Encounters with what lies outside of its own boundaries are central to the formation of any culture and the line that separates insides and outsides, the “self” and the “other”, is not fixed but always shifting. The outside worlds encountered by European travellers were interpreted by them through ideological filters, as ways of seeing provided by their own cultures and societies.

If literary and cultural theory had widened the scope of studies on colonialism, it also posed real problems for historically specific materialist critical practice. The idea that historical processes and practices can be analysed by looking at them as “texts” has proved to be both enabling and problematic. In the recent post colonial theory and criticism, some critics allege that the literary text begins to stand in for all social process analysis of representation and discourse replaces all discussions of events and material realities. It has been suggested that the tendency emanates from orientalism, which situates literary texts as a colonial battle field. But if orientalism analyses the political centrality of texts, quiet a different notion of discourse as “text” emerges, as can be seen in the following statement by leading scholars of the field:

Imperial relations may be established initially by guns, guile and disease, but they were maintained in their interpolative phase largely by textuality, both instructionally... and informally. Colonialism (like its counterpart racism), then, is a
formation of discourse, as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subject by incorporating them in a system of representations. (Tiffin and Lawson 1994:3)

The counterpoising of “guns, guile and disease” to textuality is precociously what disturbs some scholar. Sumit Sarkar, for example, finds Gauri Viswanathan’s assertion that English studies “became the core of colonial hegemony” and as the exercise of direct force was discarded as the means of maintaining social control, untenable in the face of continuing English brutality in India (1994:218,223). By the 1890s aesthetic display was central to the operations of imperialism (Morris 1982). But as Ellaka Boehmer suggests, discussion of text and image mask this reality of empire: the numbers who died in colonial wars and in labour gangs, or as a result of disease, starvation and transportations (Ellaka Boehmer1995:20).

In any colonial context of economic plunder, the production of knowledge and strategies of representation depend heavily upon one another. Specific ways of seeing and representing racial, cultural and social difference were essential to the setting up of colonial institutions of control and they also transform every aspect of European civil society. Guns and disease, as a matter of fact, cannot be isolated from ideological processes of mothering colonial people. The gathering of information about non-European lands and peoples and classifying them in various ways determined strategies for their control. The different stereotypes of the “mild hindoo”, “the war like Zulu”, “the barbarous Turk”, the “New World Cannibal” or the “black rapist” were all generated through particular colonial situations and tailored to different colonial policies. In Africa and India by attributing particular characteristics to specific tribes and groups, colonial authorities not only entrenched divisions between the native population, but also used particular races to fill specific occupations such as agricultural
workers, soldiers, miners or domestic servants. Of course stereotypes of races or groups were not consistent over time following the 1857 rebellion and the “mild Hindoo” gave way to an image of the Hindu rapist which came much closure to the stereotype of the brute black man generated in the African context.

“Neocolonialism” cannot be discussed without the politics of that very discussion coming under scrutiny. Though colonialism and its aftermath are increasingly being discussed within the umbrella of “theory”- literary or critical, their political effects (or the very demand that literary theory have a politics) are being questioned. In the first place, particular kind of theory gets institutionalized in the Western academy, and we enter what Stephen Health has called “the age of fictions and end of truth”. Secondly both the possibility of knowledge and its relation to the political are problematized and as third reason events in Europe make it possible to think of the next few decades as those in which “ideology” and “commitment” will be unfashionable terms. They seem to be stubborn and naive twins that the politics of the colonialism and neo-colonialism cannot be entirely dissociated from those of its various examinations today (Health:41).

Reading of western literature by nineteenth century Indian nationalist reveals similar double bind because they question the history of the teaching of English literature in India, under Bhabha’s notions of interrogation. Such history demands an analysis of both discourses and institutions. In the case of both we can locate the interplay of colonial and indigenous educational practices. Gauri Viswanaathan’s work uncovers the ways in which the history of English literature teaching in India can be read as one of the divisors of imperial governance. It shows how the English literary
texts came to function as the surrogate English man in his highest and most perfect state.

South Asian novelists writing in English have arrived on the international literary scene on a grand scale. The publication of Salman Rushdie’s Booker Prize-winning novel *Midnight’s Children* in 1981 followed by the unprecedented popularity of his subsequent works, the many best-sellers written by Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, and others, Bharati Mukherjee’s National Book Critics’ Circle Award in 1988, the cinematic adaptations of Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, Arundhati Roy’s Booker Prize in 1997 for her *God of Small Children*, and the selection of Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* acclaimed by talk-show hostess, Oprah Winfrey, are just a few of the notable achievements in recent years that have contributed to drawing the world’s attention to South Asian literature written in English.

It is worthwhile to examine the reason for international literary interest in South Asian writing. Most obviously, the languages in which these novels are written in English is a paramount factor. The beginning of South Asian literature in English may be traced back to the early days of English education in India. The tradition of English studies in colonial India has been brilliantly documented by Gauri Viswanathan, a protégé of Edward Said in her book titled *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989). Viswanathan traces the origin of English studies in the colony from the passing of the Charter Act of 1813 when the East India Company took on the responsibility for native education. In 1857, the British Crown took over the company and formally patterned the Indian university system after the curriculum at London University. The development of an English curriculum in upper-class Indian schools
was the direct result of moral and political issue that were outlined in Thomas Macaulay’s famous 1835 Minute of Indian Education, as well as by William Bentinck’s English Education Act, which made the study of English mandatory in India. Although there was a great deal of dissension among Indian scholars who felt that the indigenous languages would suffer because of the wide-spread proliferation of English, there were many Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who favoured and encouraged the study of the English language in India.

One of the most direct outcomes of British colonialism is the growth of a post-independence generation of writers in the Indian subcontinent who speak and write primarily in English. This tends to be the elite stratum of society, concentrated most often in the urban centres that house prestigious schools and universities. Although most of them know at least one or two other Indian languages, for many, English is the first language. Sometimes it is the only language in which they can claim a degree of fluency. Furthermore, quite a few of the South Asian novelists have been educated in England, Australia, and the United States, while some have even immigrated to these countries. This privileged background helps them to use the English language with ease and elegance.

Another reason why South Asian novels in English have garnered so much acclaim is that this literature represents a writing of great power and relevance. Theses novelists insist on their own perspectives, providing largely alternative views of the South Asian sentiment to those that fuelled the imagination through the nostalgic, idealized imagery found in the novels of Rudyard Kipling, E.M.Forster, Paul Scott, and others. Moreover, South Asian novels do indeed provide something different. They show us a vibrant, exotic and chaotic world where people seem more robust and spirited
than in most other contemporary fiction; where exuberance and compromise infuse daily life; where religion and politics matter profoundly; where the follies and foibles of humanity are showcased with precise satires and where ancient traditions are brought face to face with the conventions of modern living.

It should be noted, however, that although the novels written in English have attained immense popularity around the world, there is in fact a long and sophisticated tradition of novel writing in the numerous indigenous languages in South Asia. South Asia literature, unlike Latin American, Russian, French, German, British, or American literature, is not language specific. There are numerous South Asian writers who have produced brilliant works in language other than English. Sadat Hasan Manto (Urdu), Premchand (Hindi), O.V. Vijayan (Malayam), Bibhuti Bhusan Banerjee (Bengali), Jayakanthan (Tamil) and U. R. Anantha Murthy (Kannada) are just a few from quite a lengthy list. These writers of the vernacular languages continue to have a crucial impact on the evolution of South Asian literature and they, too, like their counterparts writing in English, provide unique articulations of local and national spaces. Although their work is virtually unknown in the rest of the world owing to, among other reasons, the lack of adequate translation in English. In recent years, there have been certain systematic attempts to describe and popularize the breadth and scope of the various regional literatures.

For instance, Amit Chaudhuri’s *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literatures* (2001) anthologizes the amazing polyphony of literary practices; this volume includes English translation from Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, and so on and shows how modern Indian writing is actually made up of multiple traditions; Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha’s *Women Writing in India* (2 volumes: 1991 and 1993) is an excellent collection
showcasing women’s writing in a host of languages; and Nalini Natarajan’s *Handbook of Twentieth-Century Literatures of India* (1996), is a compilation of historical and critical essays on fifteen vernacular literatures. By focusing on South Asian novelists in English, the agenda is not to sideline or to discredit the work of novelists writing in the indigenous languages. This volume focuses on novelist in English because English is a language that occupies a dominant place in South Asia today.

English is very much the language of culture and commerce in this part of the world. Within the past twenty-five years or so, English has gradually become more prevalent within a larger cross section of society. Moreover, with the presence of more than thirty official languages, the presence of English has, to a great extent, succeeded in drawing together a mass of people that would otherwise remain segregated along linguistic boundaries. The authority of English as a literary medium in South Asia today (mainly, albeit not exclusive in its standard form) is unmistakable. Also unmistakable is the enduring quality of writing in English despite its presence in a huge, multilingual area of the Asian continent. Admittedly, as Amit Chaudhuri points out, English is not an Indian language in the same way that Hindi, Telegu or Marathi are considered Indian languages (“Modernity and the Vernacular” *Times Literary Supplement*, 1997). Nor is English, a Pakistani or Bangladeshi language in the same way that we may think of Urdu as a Pakistani language and Bengali as Bangladeshi language. While the position of English in South Asia may be slightly ambiguous, its authority and permanence are certain. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Sri Lankan literature in English is thus not essentially separate from South Asian literature. It is, in fact, a modern part of it.

As a writer, Amitav Ghosh has been immensely influenced by the political and social milieu of the country. Also the stories and events he heard from his parents
during his childhood made an indelible impression on his mind. He was born several years after India’s independence. His mother grew up in Calcutta and her memories were of Mahatma Gandhi, his non-violence and disobedience, and the terrors that accompanied the partition in 1947. His father worked in British colonial army in India and his stories were about the war and his fellow Indians who fought against the Britishers. The image of the changing India, politically and socially, casts deep shadow on Ghosh’s mind. In his early forties, Ghosh spent his childhood days in Calcutta, Dhaka and Colombo. He graduated from St. Stephen’s College, University of Delhi. For a short period during the emergency, he worked in *The Indian Express*. Later he joined the Delhi School of Economics as a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology. After sometime, he received a scholarship to do a D.Phil. in Social Anthropology at Oxford University. It is for this Anthropological study he came to Alexandria University and consequently to the village of Egypt. He admits that his campus life and travels within and without the country contributed to his development as a creative writer.

Amitav Ghosh published his first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, in 1986 when he was teaching at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. This novel has been translated into many European languages and its French edition received the *Prix Medici Estranger*, a prestigious literary award in France. *The Circle of Reason* is a skilfully constructed novel with the folk tale charm of Arabian Nights. Stretching from a remote village in Bengal to the source of Mediterranean, this is a neatly sculpted work of a master craftsman. It marks a break from the traditional theme of the Indian English novel and the form of the structure of the well made novel. In “Magic and Irony as Principle of Structures: A Reading of *The Circle of Reason*,” K. Damodar Rao shows how the immediacy of experiences of the reality is conveyed to the readers by a medley
of devices: Ironic mode of narration, recreating a magical world, and uninhibited exhibitions of narcissistic tendencies. The all embracing structural principles of magic and irony eloquently weave the total pattern of the novel. Pradip Dutta, on the other hand, analyses *The Circle as a Reason* as an epic of restlessness. Around the bare outlines of the plot which moves over continents, are clustered an infinite numbers of stories ranging back and forth in time. By showing life as a journey larger than death, *The Circle of Reason* makes death find its identity in the horror and sadness which embalms this process.

Within a few months, Ghosh started his new novel which was eventually called *The Shadow Lines* (1988), a book that led him backward in time to earlier memories of riots, once witnessed in childhood. It became says Ghosh, “a book not about any one event, but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them.” *The Shadow Lines* is by common consent, Ghosh’s best work. It is a family saga which is also a roller-coaster ride through the currents of history. The novel covers the story of three generations of the narrator’s family, spread over Dhaka, Calcutta and London. The story begins with a passage about the time in colonial in India where the narrator was not even born. The novel begins thus: “in 1939, thirteen year before I was born, my father’s aunt, Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and son, Tridip.”

*The Shadow Lines*, in the opinion of the eminent critic A.N. Kaul is concerned with the theme of crossing frontiers, especially those of nationality, culture and language. Amitav Ghosh gives it a new twist in his novel which covers three countries-India, East Pakistan and England. However, *The Shadow Lines* is not an international novel in the sense of E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, which involves the study of
confrontation of two different cultures—those of East and the West. Amitav Ghosh acknowledges no separate national or cultural realities because for all such demarcation are shadow lines, arbitrary and invented divisions. While crossing the border, the grandmother cannot see the countries. A.K. Ramanujan remarks: “He evokes things Indian with an inwardness that lits and darkens by intimacy with elsewhere”.

*The Shadow Lines* (1988), as a novel resists classification. It is basically a memory novel that weaves together past and present, childhood and adulthood, India and Bangladesh and Britain, Hindus and Muslims. It is a social document and a political novel, *bildungsroman* and post modernist work of fiction. In her article “Imagination and Reality in *The Shadow Lines*,” Urbashi Barat points out that “the novel belongs to long traditions of fiction which examines its symbiotic relationship with fact and explores the role of imagination in creating and evoking reality.”(Urbashi 148)

Amitav Ghosh’s third book, *In an Antique Land* (1993), shows that he is not a mere fictionist but an indefatigable researcher, a social anthropologist and a keen traveller as well. It bears testimony to Ghosh’s interaction with at least four languages and cultures spread over three continents and across several countries. Unlike some of the other contemporary writers, his canvas keeps on conquering new images, giving expression to new ideas and themes. In an interview, Ghosh talks about the book’s theme and form: “No this time I am not writing a novel. Not even sociology, history or belles-letters based on historical research. My new book cannot be described as any one of these. It’s a strange sort of work. Within the parameters of history, I have tried to capture a story, a narrative, without attempting to write a historical novel. You may say, as a writer, I have ventured on a technical innovation. It was in 1978 while going through manuscripts in Oxford library that Amitav Ghosh read about Abraham Ben
Yiju, a Tunisian Jewish merchant who came to India via Egypt around 1130 A.D and Ben Yiju’s slave Bomma who is from Tululand of ancient India.

In his scholarly article “Beyond the ‘Shadow Lines’: Amitav Ghosh’s Quest for the Remains of an Antique Civilization,” Tapan Kumar Ghosh argues that the book clearly defies the “shadow lines” of language, religion and culture, and explores some basic traits of human character and some fundamental human feelings and attitudes that persist through the ages despite socio-political upheavals and geographical changes. One finds a successful recuperation of medieval Egypt and Mangalore. The novelist makes a comparative study of the two oldest cultures and civilization of the two most important continents- Asia and Africa, that of India and Egypt. The novelist’s inquisitive mind re-constructs the historical Egypt-India relations over a period of time.

The Shadow Lines and In an Antique Land concentrate on the history of World War II, Indian Independence and the partition of the country and they provide Amitav Ghosh with raw material against which he studies the historical truths – the meaning of nationalism and political freedom in the modern world – in The Shadow Lines. The 1964 riots are described in In an Antique Land from the other side of the border. Ghosh has drawn parallels between war and riot, Europe and Indian sub–continent, colonialism and freedom.

In his next novel entitled, The Calcutta Chromosome (1996), Amitav Ghosh makes a unique experiment by combining various themes and techniques. He amalgamates here literature, science, philosophy, history, psychology and sociology. The result is a complex, fascinating and highly imaginative story of quest and discovery that weaves past, present and future into an intricate texture. The novel has two major strands of storyline: the first narrates the life story of Antar, an Egyptian computer clerk
working on his super-intelligent machine Ava in the early twenty-first century to locate the whereabouts of Indian-born American scientist L. Murugan who had mysteriously disappeared in Calcutta in August 1995; the second revolves around Ronald Ross’s discovery of the malaria parasite in 1902. The novel is divided into two sections: “August 20, Mosquito Day” and “The Day After.” It reads like science fiction with multiple characters and swift turns in the plot. The novel however is no mere thriller, for a fuller reading reveals that it is the work of a social anthropologist than that of a detective novelist. In order to render an entertaining tale into a serious one, Ghosh pushes in arguments and ideas which are forever knocking and undermining the rational view of science and the universe. His treatment of history in this novel is unique. He succeeds in evoking the places and times with touching details. Antar’s New York exists in an apocalyptic twilight and Ross’s Secunderabad and Cunningham’s Calcutta are colonial. Ghosh is in full control of the intellectual topography and geographical locale.

In her scholarly article, “Enigma as Ontology in The Calcutta Chromosome,” Babli Gupta traces the link between Ghosh’s two work, In an Antique Land and The Calcutta Chromosome, it is almost as if Ghosh is exorcising the gloom which had crept upon him in the writing of the former book where he recounts the tales of two ancient civilizations, Egypt and India, and chronicles their inevitable decline. In The Calcutta Chromosome, Ghosh looks in the direction of magic, conspiracy and silence to overturn the logic of Europe’s conquest of the East. Essentially a novel of ideas, it works like a brain teaser undermining conceptual certainties and reads the world as a mighty conundrum, where questions and problems are given conjectural answers.
The opening scene of *The Glass Palace* (2000) introduces us to a question that is repeated throughout this momentous epic narrative, the question of authority and in particular, the authority to interpret new signs as they appear on the constantly changing landscapes of colonized territory. Questions of economic, artistic, cultural and national authorities emerge in the novel’s portrayal of two families over three generations, pushed apart and pulled together by the forces of capitalism. It is Ghosh’s particular talent to interlace this question with the telling of his characters, live and to use them to probe deeply into the intricate nature of colonialism as it is lived on a daily labour and its legacy is transmitted over time. Amitav Ghosh explores different story telling forms and its complicated pictures of pre-and postcolonial South Asian identities in *The Glass Palace*. The novel is about geographical entities, space, distance and time. Many stories have been woven together. There are many characters; it is a saga of many families, their lives and the connection with each other.

Amitav Ghosh’s new novel *The Hungry Tide* (2005) is set in the extensive archipelago of tiny islands and labyrinthine waterways known as the Sundarbans. Stretching from India to Bangladesh, this little known tide country offers no visible borders between the river and the Sea, and sometimes not even between land and water. In this isolated and mysterious place of mangroves and water, in this desolate and mysterious place of mangroves and mudflats, the poor village experiences a precarious existence. *The Hungry Tide* involves Piya, a young Indian-American cetologist, who has come to the Sundarbans to study a rare species of the river dolphin. There, she meets Kanai a Bengali business man living in Delhi, who acts as her translator, and Fokir, an illiterate fisherman, who guides her through the dangerous waters. The novel
dramatically weaves their stories together with the environment and political history of this isolated region.

_The Hungry Tide_ is a great swirl of political, social and environment issues, presented through a story that is full of romance, suspense and poetry. It does not have all the answers, but it frames the problem with great energy and sympathy. Ghosh takes us into the Sundarbans, a vast mangrove forest on the coast of India and Bangladesh where the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Irrawaddy rivers empty into the Bay of Bengal. This constantly changing biome poses a challenge to the native species to survive. Though it is remote and impassable, in Ghosh’s treatment this beautiful, treacherous and dynamic place becomes a provocative symbol of the modern world. In our legends it is said that the goddess Ganga’s descent from the heavens would have spilt the earth had Lord Shiva not tamed her torrent by tying it into his ash smeared locks. To her this story is to see the river in a certain way as a heavenly braid, for instance, an immense rope of water, unfurling through a wide and thirsty plain.

_The Sea of Poppies_ (2008) was listed for the Booker Prize soon after its publication. The postcolonial novelist has dealt with modern postcolonial themes like migration, existential crises like alienation, loss of identity, rootlessness, displacement and hybridity with historical vision. His multidimensional novel explores the problem related to immigration and other socio-cultural problems with a humanist and postcolonial perception that makes his narration interesting.

Deeti, the woman protagonist’s life in the oppressive structure of patriarchal society is linked with the arrival of the ship. Her voyage is not merely a physical one but it is much more a voyage of the spirit. The novel has three parts- Land, Rivers and Sea. The characters try to discover their true selves journeying through these which
symbolically stand for the mental, spiritual and physical journey. Those who journey in *Ibis* (Ship) are people with a lot of aspiration and new hopes. Ghosh’s cosmopolitan mission of the world and his humanitarian outlook make him a global writer. He is aware of the impact of colonization and the resultant pain and disappointment of the colonized and his postcolonial depiction of female psyche deconstructs the patriarchal structure of womanhood. It was immense and constantly evolving archipelago of islands, large and small, permanent and short lived. The tide reaches as far as two hundred miles inland, drowning thousands of acres everyday and remaking the land.

*River of Smoke* (2011), one of the grand scale historical epics, follows its storm tossed characters to the crowded labour of China. There, despite efforts of the Emperor to stop them, ships from Europe and India exchange their cargoes of opium for boxes of tea, silk and silver. Among them are Baharam Modi, wealthy Parsi opium merchant out of Bombay, his son Ah Fatt, the botanist Paulite and mostly a collection of characters in pursuit of romance and richness.

Amitav Ghosh’s *Ibis* trilogy is over after publishing his third novel *Flood of Fire* (2015). He shares his experience and difficulty faced while doing a research on his trilogy. In a recent interview he shares his research experience. Ghosh says, his placid exterior giving way to frank expression. If water seems to be the element with which one book flows into other, every book in this *Ibis Trilogy* stands by itself, independent of the other two novels. The series is high on research. Ghosh went to many places in China, besides Hong Kong and Singapore to go through sepia- tinted papers and wrinkled documents in libraries. It was started in 2004 but he thinks of trilogy before that, ever since wrapped up *The Glass Palace*. 
It is not an easy journey to complete the trilogy, considering not much is written about the Opium War in China in the 19th century and the Indian connection. Ghosh says it was very different and difficult research. On the Indian presence in Canton, it is true so little was written. Historians had tended to write the military history of the war but the Opium War was very much an Indian War “finances, transport, vessels, Indian Parsis and Bohras”. His books have introduced the readers to the war and its Indian angle. (The Hindu 4)

This thesis examines the life of characters in Amitav Ghosh’s novels, particularly their different given identities, the identities they seek and they possess. Identities are important whether they are pre-colonial or post-colonial. Only from identities the characters speak of their existence and their world.