IN AN ANTIQUE LAND: A TRAVELLERS TALE

Amitav Ghosh seems to think that travel is man’s primordial quest to expand his awareness into realization. The entire world, as Shakespeare said, is a stage, and this for Ghosh is a key metaphor. In his review Homai Shroff points out that the writer explores “a colourful and warmly human picture of people and places, both medieval and modern.” Amitav Ghosh’s In an Antique Land describes himself as a traveller interested in men, places and scenery. Perhaps this is the reason he embarks upon tracing the history (journey into the time) of a Jewish merchant, Ben Yiju from Egypt who spent two decades in Mangalore (a trade centre on Malabar Coast in India) and his relationship with Indian slave Bomma, who worked for him as a business representative in Aden. Ghosh recedes into twelfth century in order to develop his story.

Amitav Ghosh’s Journey reminds one of Hazlitt’s “On Going a Journey” as far as the sincerity of description goes. Like Graham Greene’s priest in Power and Glory and Ernest Hemingway’s The Old Man and the Sea, his spirits remain undaunted till he completes his Endeavour’s. Ghosh like Vikram Seth believes that travel in “antique lands” is an experience for liberty, “perfect liberty, to think, feel, and do just as one pleases.” Curiosity is his first love which enthralls him to go to small villages – Lataifa and Nashawy - South of Alexandria in Egypt. Inquisitive as Ghosh is, he has, to use Samuel Johnson’s phrase, a vigorous intellect to work patiently for little more than ten years or so to weave story of his novel into a fine textures fibre.

As a social anthropologist he introduces his readers not only to the twelfth century Aden and Mangalore but he also points out that Egypt and India unquestionably belong to a socio-cultural tradition based on the religion of hospitality. This remains a
constantly operative factor in the novel, as it could be seen and felt during Ghosh’s stay in Lataifa and Nashawy. It could also be seen during Ben Yiju’s stay in Mangalore and Bomma’s stay in Aden seven hundred years ago.

Amitav Ghosh’s journey is not bed of roses, he carries out his research in the heat and dust of a Synagogue of Ben Ezra near Cairo, and it was here in the forlorn corner of Mass that memories of Abraham Ben Yiju and his slave lay preserved for more than seven hundred years. It is after the seven centuries the author records; the sweat was dribbling off his face on to his notebooks. Manuscripts he could lay his hands on were in Judaeo Arabic and that there was no accepted method of learning to read the manuscripts except through a long apprenticeship with one of the handful of scholars who had made a lifetime’s specialty of the subject.

………for India, like Egypt, was largely an agricultural nation…… our countries were poor, for they had both been ransacked by imperialists and now they were both trying in very similar ways to cope with poverty….. Our two countries had always supported each other in the past: Mahatma Ghandhi had come to Egypt to consult sa’ad Zaghloul Pasha, the leader of the Egyptian nationalist movement, and later Nehru Nasser had forged a close alliance (IAAL 134).

Amitav Ghosh is nostalgic to retrace Ben Yiju’s journey eastward which is “the simplest and most natural means of availing himself of the most rewarding possibilities his world had to offer.” But unlike Battutat, Ghosh is writing a novel and not a historical treatise. His efforts are to provide “magical, intimate insights” not only into
Egypt from the Crusades to Operation desert Storm, but also into its cross-cultural relations with India.

Abraham Ben Yiju could decide for himself his vocation to be the Business. Circumstances drew him near his patron Madmum (the Chief Representative of Merchants). Ben Yiju introduced himself in Madmums’s ‘privileged circle’ and curiously enough at some point before A.D. 1132 Ben Yiju moved to the Malabar Coast and did not return to Aden for nearly two decades. He had three good reasons: first, his trade flourished and he felt no need to travel back to Aden; secondly his camaraderie with Bomma, his slave who looked after his trade in the Middle East; and thirdly, what tempted Ben Yiju to stay in Mangalore was a Nair woman Ashu, whom he married and raised a family. Later when he left Malabar Coast, he took his children with him, leaving behind Ashu.

The story, though unbelievable, is believed by the readers. There is no interference of any kind from the author and hence one doesn’t doubt its authenticity. The tale is narrated in the third person narration and is divided into six sections: Prologue, Lataifa, Nashawy, Mangalore, Going Back, and Epilogue. The reader too travels to each of these places in these sections along with the author. The two stories that of the writer’s encounter with Egyptian people and tracing of slave Bomma, go hand in hand throughout the novel. Within these sections each sub section of Lataifa or Nashawy is followed by a section on Ghosh’s visit to Cairo to do his researches.

The reader is listening to two tales simultaneously. It will not be an exaggeration if one says that the reader goes through the whole process of research in anthropology
as Ghosh puts his research data in the form of a tale. Amitav Ghosh has made the tale lively and vivid by adding touches of humour while describing his characters:

Abu Ali would…. Send his wife in to fetch his best dark glasses, and shout for the moped to be wheeled out into the courtyard. He would hitch up the hem of his jallabeyya and then, lifting up his leg, he would mount the vehicle with a little sidelong hop, while his son held it steady…. He would go shooting off down the road, his jallabeyya ballooning out around him, while the moped, in profile, diminished into a thin, sharp line—it was like watching a gargantuan lollipop being carried away by its stick (28).

Amitav Ghosh is also introducing by beginning a new tale about each of them. During the course of this tale, the characters are introduced, their character is built and they are then allowed to narrate another story about their family or village. This helps the author in establishing them as true characters. Isma’il and Nabeel are introduced to the readers in a story in which the author remembers how he had first met the two of them. Memory plays an important role in narrating this tale of an antique land, as it does in the other novels of Ghosh. The reader almost re-lives the experiences of Ghosh through his memory and narration. The ease with which he moves from one story to another is amazing. One comes across a variety of people residing in villages in Egypt and cannot help comparing them with the people residing in Indian villages. Third person narration is never free from a bias or likes and dislikes of the author.

The author too develops a liking for Nabeel and Isma’il during the course of the novel. However, an objective view of the details regarding the curiosity of Egyptians about Indian customs, burning of the dead, circumcision of sex organ etc. compensates
for any bias. There can be a tendency on the part of the author to protect one’s country or to present it in a better light, which Ghosh abstains from doing. Within this tale of a distant land, Ghosh takes the opportunity to narrate the tale of his also i.e. Calcutta and the formation of East Pakistan. This political event had left a deep impact on the author’s memory, which he never fails to share with his readers at some point in his novels.

The stories of riots are always the same anywhere in the world. Ghosh’s sensitivity to such situations can be felt when he says,

………… the occasional storms and turbulence their (Nabeel’) country had seen, despite even the wars that some of them had fought in, theirs was a world that was far more gentler, far less violent, very much more humane and innocent than mine (210).

The tale is very informative, be it, the Crusade, War between Iran and Iraq, fear of Saddam Hussein Iraq invasion of Kuwait etc, from the point of view of political happenings in that country. Similarly the readers relives the history of the geographical location of Mangalore as a port, its neighboring ports, the trade carried out then, language spoken in Mangalore, Nairs in Kerala, Vaniyas of Gujarat who settled there, rulers ruling at the time Ben Yiju resided in India etc.

The medieval heritage of Mangalore comes alive in the vivid description of the place given by the writer. Ghosh’s knowledge of Arabic language and Tulu is also really admirable. Ghosh proves himself to be a true anthropologist as he unravels one truth after another with a new story. In the last hundred pages or so of the novel, history
has been translated into fiction to trace Ben Yiju’s journey and Bomma’s origins and what happened to him. Each historical detail has been documented with the true sincerity that leads us to Ghosh’s completion of his research work, which he mentioned and the outset. In his quest for Bomma’s, origins and life.

The reader notices Ghosh’s Scholarly knowledge of religion e.g. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or Sufism. The reader witnesses a fusion of fiction and history by a traveler who makes his tale authentic and true by doing so. The novel also offers vivid glimpses of the many small, indistinguishable, intertwined histories Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim, which prevailed until some centuries ago, but which then become partitioned in several areas where they had once existed. The novel, however, works richly with the task Ghosh suggests.

Amitav Ghosh’s novel focuses on the interrelationships of the people rather than of nation-states and their rulers. There are three important spatial tropes India, Egypt and the West. While India and Egypt have ancient ties which are myriad the west is represented as the powerful interventionist in the relationship between the two. More importantly the West, Its rhetoric, its ideologies, its ways of thinking has been superimposed on the histories of the two antique lands. He tries to show that the intervention of the West has destroyed the processes of dialogue, exchange, assimilation and syncreticism of the peoples of the two nations. Instead there is the metaphysic of domination, classification and violence which Ghosh characterizes as Western.

Ghosh describes how in 1500 A.D. a Portuguese fleet came with a letter from the King of Portugal to the Hindu ruler of the city-state of Calicut demanding that he expel all Muslims. As the Hindu ruler remained obstinate in his refusal to comply, the
Portuguese fleet attacked and conquered what is today part of Gujarat. A hastily put together army of the Muslim potentate of Gujarat, the Hindu ruler of Calicut, and Sultan of Egypt could offer little resistance. As always the determination of a small united band of soldiers triumphed easily over the rich confusions that accompany a culture of accommodation and compromise.

A modern parallel is established as Ghosh closes the novel. Almost five centuries later, the Gulf War again disrupts history and this time characters. The construction of the text is itself complex. There are basically two strands of narrative. In the first, Ghosh looks at the life of a twelfth century Indian slave Bomma who works for an Arabic Jewish trader Abraham Ben Yiju and tries to reconstruct his history. While the second portrays simultaneously his own experiences an Indian researcher in an Egyptian village.

The old Egypt, that there were no interference and people were independent. They had tradition and hierarchy. Their language was Arabic through which they could communicate with others. There was a Synagogue in Geniza where the letters were stored. The image of modern Egypt that Amitav Ghosh’s has portrayed in his travelers tale In an Antique Land is truly insightful.

When Amitav Ghosh revisits the villages after seven years he is astonished by the changes that had overtaken them. There was no electricity at Lataifa in 1980. Someone had brought the diesel water pump from a nearby town. The whole village especially for Amitav Ghosh who had been invited to give his expert opinion examined the machine. Amitav Ghosh, in 1988 finds refrigerator in every others house, and new brick building in place of adobe houses, calculators, TV sets, casset players and even
food processor. The people have prospered on gulf money. Most of the young man of the villages has left Egypt by that time to find job in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. The gleaning from the distant war had worked a silent economic revolution in rural Egypt and changed the life of fellaheen.

People have been sending their children to schools and colleges and often they talk about their development. Now a day the Egyptians have become very modern but the main thing that made a transition from old to modern is the western culture of Egyptians. Once people from various universities come and take away the letters from Synagogue. A research about the history of an old Egypt came out. The present people of Egypt have exposed about their past through this history.

The contemporary and the historical story one offers a look at a time when global trade brought different cultures and religions together in India and the Middle East. Interestingly the letter which sparked Amitav Ghosh’s opening interest curved out to have been part of the most significant single collection of medieval documents ever discovered. Amitav Ghosh researches what is striking about the era that harmony existed among Muslims, Jews and Hindus.

Through the historical story, Ghosh demonstrates that the cultural and religious integration prompted by globalization does not have to result in the hatred and distrust may see too often today. By the close of Ghosh’s time in Egypt the Iran-Iraq war has ended forcing Egyptians to give up their jobs to decommissioned Iraqi soldiers and return home. Accustomed to the lifestyles high wages abroad have brought the Egyptian men find few prospects at home.
The reader becomes aware of the hopelessness that can result when globalization’s promises are not met. An understanding of the culture and day-to-day lives of the poor in other countries is crucial to an assessment of whether they are benefiting from globalization. By taking us into the lives of these Egyptian villagers, Ghosh provides insights into the human consequences of globalization and modernization in the Middle East. While Ghosh shows that richness brought about by globalization can develop people’s lives, equally, he make it clear that if globalization’s profits are temporary or only available to a few, it can also lead to hopelessness and despair. The Antique Land is not entirely lost.

The writer second visit to Egypt, It registers socio-cultural change which has occurred in Egypt in recent years under the spell of the Western influence. People in village are no longer ignorant about the city glamour. Popular culture of the day has lured many young and old alike. It is no “surprise that Cairo absorbs outsiders”. But “as a rule people here respect one another” and they are hospitable and “serene to foreigners”. Thus in spite of the fact that likes many other developing countries, Egypt too is attracted towards the Western commercial world. Its natives have not yet developed Xeroxed mentality of the West.

Travel gave him a sense of freedom and leisure. Ghosh is thrilled to meet people and visit places. He could also get genuine picture of traditional Egypt by living among the villagers. He could get to know about their soil and also the young generations up rootedness because of their search for new pastures green. In an Antique Land does not display the author’s intellectual capability or epic sweep. What one discovers is a very
minute and shrewd observation of human nature. Therefore, he deals with a unit small enough to manage—a microcosm, whether be it at Lataifa or Nashawy or Mangalore.

*In an Antique Land* has unadulterated, straight-forward impression of the people the writer came in contact with and the circumstances of the lives of the people during the course of his research. He paints the lively portraits of Abraham Ben Yiju and Bomma on one hand and on the other of Abu Ali, Ustaz Sabry, Sheikh Mussa, Nabeel and Zaghloul. All these characters burgeoned his wanderlust. Ghosh sustains reader’s interest by displaying rich and varied kinds of men and manners.

The writer is absorbed by the variety of human types. It seems to him that in Egypt and India the most impressive and the most awe-inspiring monument of antiquity is neither the Citadels, nor the Pyramids, nor the Nile but the man himself. To see human begins closely is Ghosh’s chief aim in visiting Egypt. With a convex lens in his hand he tries to penetrate into the people of contemporary world and also the people of antiquity. Their lives have dramatic intensity. Each section of the book and each chapter add to the reader’s clarity to understand the plot. *In an Antique Land* thus is a travel book for it records people and their manners. Ghosh has an artist’s eye, his perceptions are sensitive and observations are acute. Ghosh sets out to quench his quest for more interesting facts. His is “a Travellers Tale”. Apart from his perfectly pitched prose for vivid images, Ghosh has the travel writer’s infallible eye for the quirk that lays bare the soul of a people.

**History, Culture and Society in In an Antique Land**

Amitav Ghosh described *In an Antique Land* as pure history with no trace of fiction in it. It is about anthropological field work, the of a 12th century Indian slave of a
Jewish merchant who travels from Cairo to Aden and further moves on to Mangalore in India for rich trade pickings and an account of Ghosh’s interaction with his informants and friends in Egyptian villages during his two visits in the 1980s. The author undertakes a scrutiny of the continuities and ruptures in Egypt and reckons with the civilization aftermath of colonialism. His definition of history has been a part of all his novels. History is Amitav Ghosh’s first love.

In London Magazine –“History is brooding presence in Ghosh’s books almost a living entity able to shape the lives of his characters”

The author lives in New York and frequently visits his home town Kolkata in India. He is a novelist and an anthropologist and he writes with a postcolonial consciousness. His novels attempt to plumb with the depths of human experience in this fictionalized historical narrative through the exploration of lives and concerns of different nationalities. In an Antique Land is neither an autobiography nor a travelogue. It is a novel which deals with history and authors travel to Egypt in search to know about the story of Bomma an Indian slave. Mr.Ghosh, who is an anthropologist, transforms his search into a novel. As has been said earlier Ghosh has a deep love for history.

Among the contemporary Indian English novelists may know only of Manohar Malgonkar, who as an authority on Maratha history stands in comparison to Amitav Ghosh. Malgonkar’s novel The Devil’s Wind narrates the daring feats of Nana Saheb of Bithoor of 1857 fame. His other books on Kanhoji Angrey and Mahatma Gandhi show his love and in-depth study of Indian history. The author is a latest addition to this category of fiction writers.
Besides being a novel describing the 12\textsuperscript{th} century history of India’s southern coast, Mangalore, the novel gives a glimpse of pre colonial period. But in brief Ghosh also tells how Portuguese and Dutch naval powers put an end to Muslim and Jew mercantile powers. Thus they laid the foundation of colonial rule in India in 12\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th} century. However, trade and business between India and the Mediterranean countries in the West and between India and eastern islands of Sumatra, Borneo Java, etc., flourished extremely well during 12\textsuperscript{th} century as described in the novel. It reverts so many claims of oriental theorists of the west, who have painted a grimmer side of orientalism. Moreover the use of the word slave by western anthropologists for Bomma is inappropriate. The Arabic word karinda (an authorized employee) must have been used. The liberty and designated powers enjoyed by Bomma do not put him in the category of a slave.

The ethnographer’s cultural negotiations with the village community in Egypt during his field work are syncopated with a historical reconstruction of the Indian slave. Gosh flamboyantly crosses fragments and blends different narratives styles and perspectives to splice genres with extra inflection on the narrative. Unlike Europe travelers, who sent messages home of the superiority of home, Gosh establishes close relationships with his informants and interlocutions in Egyptian villages where he inhabits his personal contact and warmth evidently endear him to the villagers.

European colonizers were consumers of Egypt’s about and sympathy for the Egyptians he lives among, and he responds to the local culture with affection and thoughtfulness. The cross cultural exchange between Ghosh and villagers in Egypt isn’t freighted with ethnocentric perspectives or cultural superiority.
The Indian ocean and its trade routers and languages become a zone of imaginative release, which enables the ethnographers historian to reconstitute the flexibility of the medieval as a critical perspective on the exclusive identities of modernity (Javed Majeed 49).

A sense of the post and its impact on the identities of the present. Macro events and major convulsions of history are discarded Ghosh breaks out of Western discursive constructions in order to recover and rearticulate cultural transactions during the Middle Ages in considerable parts of Asia.

The writer ideological positions is manifest in his ironic stance of modern Egypt and idea as exclusivist postcolonial societies and his narrative strategies in the way he mediates and arranges selected moment of the past, uses the fragmentary evidence related to Ben Yiju life and Bomma’s career, and recommends the little histories to shore up his conclusions, add up to a counter narrative as well as aid in fulfilling his intentions. Besides the author commits himself to combat orthodox nationalism by a discourse which betters on subversive strain evident in the excavated networks of intercultural affiliations.

“history the real world as it evolves in time is made sense in the same way that the poet or novelist tries to make sense of it, i.e. endowing what originally appears to be problematical and mysterious with the aspect of a recognizable because it is a familial form. It does not matter whether the world is conceived to be real or only imagined. The manner of making sense of it remains the same (Hayden White 98).
The authors history of the silenced voices and prays a crucial role as Edward said notes in his comments on contemporary postcolonial literatures, “In the re-managing and re-figuring of local histories, geographies communities”.

The author uses historical novel to retrieve the syncretism culture of the Indian Ocean trade to counter imperial accounts of the past, officially represented as a tale of colonial success. In a careful scripting of the medieval trade ties between the Middle East and India based on empirical evidence gathered from archival sources, the author can claim agency in giving conceptual shape to the history, culture and society of the past. By way of a jumping off point, subaltern figure, Bomma, to mediate the text which sets out to track the faint traces in history Ghosh’s discourse recovers a version of the part for the people of the Middle East and India as part of the typical third world characterized by backwardness and barbarity.

The people in Cairo, Aden and Mangalore are not pigeonholed according to their class or religion. The history centers round. Abraham Ben Yiju, who travels’s from Cairo to Aden and then to Mangalore and his Indian slave Bomma. The colonial acquisition of Egypt that unsettled and dislodged its rich cultural legacy in the high age of imperialism were also responsible for decimate of the Indian Ocean trade. Unlike the North African travellers, the hordes of imperial colonizers from Europe intruded on the Indian Ocean trade as well as the syncretism culture that supported it.

Egypt’s location made it vulnerable to European intrusion. By the end of the eighteenth century, it came to be mined and explored in the way the colonial powers were reaching out far afield for conquest and settlement. The economic role and the social position of slaves in the society reflected in the Geniza records were entirely
different from the lift of slaves on American plantation or in Europe. The latter had radial ingredients and entailed perpetual, inherited and involuntary servitude.

In the Middle East and Northern India, slaves meant apprentices, agents, disciples on aspirants, or even partners and shareholders. In British North America, slavery was a form of Unfree Labour in that Africa’s were defined as property to be bought and sold. It was the opposite of Liberty and served as a benchmark against which American patriots measured their own freedom. Unlike the seductive concept of slavery sustained by Eurocentric assumptions, the institution of servitude in the Middle East or India was a principal means of recruitment into privileged level of government and could offer slaves ennobling links to share their master’s elevating benevolence. This possibility of transcendence was ruled out in the Western brand of slavery which positioned set off and defined the slave as a bound, fixed, unfree muzzled and acquiescent figure without the slope and detail and substances of his life.

The author intention is to present a statement of cultural self worth in response to the biases of white colonial history. He upturns and dismantles negative representations and rejoices in the antiquity of Egypt the narrative stages discussions about the Egyptian identity and proclaims the value of what Europe has dismissed as primitive. The author effectively disrupts the various patterns by which the orient is represented. He ferrets out the evidence of a rich and varied pre colonial Egypt to impugn and invert colonial stereotypes. Europe’s skewed view of Egypt is straightened out.

The Middle East of the Crusades era, Quoting mainstream history books, and providing scholarly footnotes, Ghosh depicts the area made up of today’s Israel, Syria,
Jordan, and Egypt as a highly cosmopolitan region, in which several European nations jostle for power. He describes the Crusaders defeat at the hands of the Damascenes and then hints at the vast changes in global power that have occurred since then by referring to the next time such a large and diverse group of foreigners convene in Egypt, that is in 1942 when Britain and her colonial armies arrived to fight Rommel’s forces.

In *In an Antique Land*, Amitav Ghosh is constantly at pains to interrogate current perceptions of the post modern world as a world “newly-shrunken” in which new technologies of communication and transportation allow money, ideas, goods, and individuals to transgress boundaries at speeds previously unknown. In the sentence quoted above, Ghosh indicates that the supposed advances of globalization may actually have lessened the cosmopolitanism of individuals and countries.

The author subverts usual assumptions about the progress of history by juxtaposing medieval and modern-day Egyptian societies. He suggests that in habitants of the twelfth century Middle East may have been more open to difference and well travelled than those of the present age, despite new technologies that potentially allow twentieth-century individuals greater access to other cultures. Amitav Ghosh is sophisticated trading society, in which people travel remarkable distances, and in which Christian, Jew, Muslim, and Hindu interact, do business and form relationships.

Conventional histories, Ghosh argues have obfuscated this shared heritage, compartmentalizing historical evidence in such a way those centuries of dialogue his discussion of Judaeo-Arabic, Ghosh indicates that the dialogue between Jews and Muslims was not simply metaphorical, but also literally enshrined in this hybrid, and now obsolete trading language. By contrasting the 12th and 20th century strands of the
book, the author suggests not always entirely convincingly that Jews and Muslims interacted more tolerantly in the Middle Ages than might be expected in the light of the current chilly political relations between Israel and the Arab nations.

As a commodity being traded in the Geniza international market, it becomes clear how much has changed since the 12th century of which Ghosh writes. Most historian describe the world system of the twelfth century as an inchoate ‘free-trade community’ where trade laws allowed the relatively free flow of goods to and from countries, with no one country or community having a monopoly over the others. Janet Abu-Lughod has written that each country interacted with others in the medieval global economic system in ways that could be co-operative, conflictual or symbiotic. Historicists are interested in the connection between literary texts and the culture which produces. History is always a matter of telling a story about the past, which means there is no single history, but histories constructed at different times according to different power-structures.

The figurations of institutional history and can serve as alternative sources of historical knowledge for audiences ideologically resistant to the dominant narratives. This largely non-hierarchical society provides a marked contrast with the world economy from the sixteenth century to the present day, in which both goods and ideas are traded in a system that heavily favors the storehouses of the west. The proto-capitalism of Ben Yiju's day was a matter of cooperation, friendships and tolerance and as Ghosh shows this system compares very favorably with the ruthless monopoly of the capital under colonialism.
Amitav Ghosh eschews the narrative conventions of history chronological order, an impersonal, omniscient narrator and a plain, formal style drawn from 19th century methods of employment. The historical record making sure that the reader is always aware that this is one truth rather than the whole truth about the Middle East of the twelfth century. His model of history is highly personal and does not assume transparency. In an Antique Land is narrated in the first person by a narrator of rather uncertain identity. The Egyptian villager’s call this 'I' narrator 'Amitab' and he is clearly too some extent meant to be associated with Amitav Ghosh.

The usual stated aims of a historian to provide an unbiased impersonal account of events and people, Ghosh’s methods of research are unashamedly imaginative. As a writer of fiction he seeks to reconstruct personalities and relationships from often un-elucidating archival traces which are well exemplified when he examines fragmentary letters concerning business transactions. Most historians would surely read these for their content alone scanning the detail for any light they could shed on wider economic, social, and political conditions.

Ghosh structures history, culture and society and creates postcolonial space by thematizing the search for an alternative history. the book is an attempt to delineate the silence of those who have been erased by the sentence of imperial history and does contribute to the forming of a canon that belongs in the discourse of postcoloniality, and as such perusal us to renegotiate our protocols of reading sure enough, Ghosh's effort succeeds in dislodging the imperial freight by celebrating the possible of revisioning history, culture and society and providing a corrective to the epistemic violence of European colonizers.
A Post Colonial Attitude in *In an Antique Land*

Post-colonial literature reflects the effects of colonialism. Through the word post may see that it means the end of the formal colonial rule. The word colonization, British and by uttering the word the post colonization readily look at the world created after the British colonization. Sometimes post-colonial literature questions the importance and relevance of Britishness and Englishness. Perhaps the prominence of post-colonial literature reflects the changing aspects of the British nature itself, which is now called in many cases, transnational literature.

British conquered different continents by using different colonial tools. British colonization is a grand process because it took a long time to establish. The British Empire was at one time referred to as the empire on which the sun never sets. Among the British colonies India was of tremendous importance. British colonizers started to execute the process of colonization in India initially through trade and commerce.

The conflict among the local states of India the British colonizers got the opportunities to gain the control of India as a colony. This victory which resulted in the success of Bengal recognized the British East India Company as both a Military and commercial power. This event is widely regarded as the beginning of British rule in India. The wealth acquired from the Bengal treasury allowed the Company to strengthen its Military might significantly. This army conquered most of India's territorial and political domains by the mid 19th century and thus the Company's territories were substantially augmented.

There are writers who emerged after the colonial situation. They are basically called the post-colonial writers. Notable among them are Salman Rusdie, Anita Desai,
Arundhuti Roy and Amitav Ghosh. Their writings do not directly discuss postcolonial issues. For example, Amitav Ghosh writes in the manner of travel writing. His novels attempt to present the colonial, precolonial and postcolonial worlds through the eyes of an objective narrator. A lot of history and shows how like majority of the colonized nations, the people of Egypt to have lost much of their cultural heritage. The writer too feels guilty because he has learnt to use Western theories and equipment to uncover a history that is part of his own heritage.

_In an Antique Land_ quite different in content and style thereby highlighting the author's range and versatility. In this book, Ghosh straddles time, as it were, and brings out vividly the societies of two centuries separated from one another by eight hundred years. There is a flavor of timelessness about the book as the pendulum keeps shifting from the twelfth-century merchant Ben Yiju to the twentieth-century research scholar of anthropology the author himself. And in the process the book narrates a cluster of different stories loosely woven together.

The various layer of the amorphous structure of the book, where history and fiction, myths and legends, and breaking of old barriers and the erection of new ones form a whole. This paper attempts, through a close analysis of In an Antique Land, to look at the book from the angle of historicity as seen through the eyes of the postcolonial narrator.

As Sharmila Guha Majumdar points out, "The barriers of nation, country and time dissolve in the consciousness of the author, and he reaches a tragic realization of how unscrupulous political forces continue to suffocate human aspiration"
Amitav Ghosh’s book tries to do is to address the Iran-Iraq war and the operation Desert Storm in terms of a global including pre-colonial and post-colonial, history. The book also does what fiction is supremely good at it provides a special means of access to this history, reducing us by its narrative design into identifying with the individual experience of living through history. The design has a peculiar significance as it involves adopting the unique viewpoint of a researcher in anthropology living in post-colonial Egypt and setting up a contrast between the pre-colonial Egypt of twelfth century and the post-colonial Egypt of the 1980s. He thus commits himself to a personal engagement with history by retrieving a specific forgotten or ignored episode in history, that of Abraham Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant originally from Tunisia, who comes to India via Egypt and Aden around 1130 AD and his slave Bomma, "the toddy-loving fisherman from Tulunand."

The point of view of a post-colonialist and gives his own reading into the characters of the two periods, i.e., those of the twelfth century and those others of his own time. In the twelfth century the countries of the world were separated from each other by barriers of immense at retches of water and insurmountable mountains and yet brought together by a global village, has been ironically broken up by 'narrow domestic walls erected by the Imperialists.

Amitav Ghosh's post-colonial attitude becomes clear in his description of the vandalism of the Geniza by the Western powers. The author comes out with a scathing attack on the imperialist world where "the interests of the powerful defined necessity, while the demands of the poor appeared as greed" (80-95).
The vandalism of the Geniza not only highlights the contemptuous the imperialists to the age-old treasures, the age-old values of the East but also defines the author's attitude to the two worlds he creates in the book, one historical and the other fiction. The skillfully crafted story of a communal riot that took place in Dhaka the narrator gives us an intimate insight into the explosive barrier of symbols, that is embedded in the post-colonial situation of cities going up in flames because of a cow found dead in a temple or a pig in a mosque of people killed for wearing a lungi or a dhoti depending on where they find themselves of women disemboweled for wearing veils or vermilion of men dismembered for the state of their foreskins.

The writer explains how these divisions, walls between man and man, was the result of a new cult that was introduced by the power-hungry imperialists in the wake of colonization. Once colonization began, hate and suspicion replaced what was right or good or willed by god. The writer's post-colonial perspective is also evident in the way he portrays the pre-colonial times when there were no barriers between Abraham Ben Yiju the Jewish merchant from Egypt who settled in India for twenty years and his Indian slave Bomma,

Ben Yiju living in India or to refer to Bomma as an Indian is not to anticipate the borders and the political vocabulary of the twentieth century (284).

The pre-colonial and post-colonial situation as far as the concept of slavery is concerned slavery today and as it was understood eight centuries ago, the post-colonial concept of servitude prevalent in Egypt under British rule before the days of the revolution.
The infinitely pathetic state of affairs in the modern world where man's relationship to man is interpreted only in terms of the ruler and the subject the master and the slave, the colonizer and the colonized, the student of social anthropology is pained and confused. The book has two sets of characters, the one belonging to history that Ghosh pursues indefatigably as a student of social anthropology and the other belonging to the present whom the narrator encounters and around whom he builds his fictional world. The author's achievement like that of any gifted historical novelist lies in his ability to extract from actual events a set of characters whose fictional identity is camouflaged by the plausible interaction with the environment and by their ability to appeal to the reader. Unifying the two sets is the thread of historicity a post-colonialist's interpretation of the events encompassing eight centuries starting with the twelfth and ending with the Operation Desert Storm.

The pre-colonial world are Abraham Ben Yiju, a Tunisian Jewish merchant who came to India via Egypt and Aden, and his slave Bomma who is from Tulunad of ancient India. Through these characters Ghosh portrays a world where man lived in harmony with man, where the Gulf existing between people of different races and different cultures became meaningless as they met over the drawbridge of humanity. The pages devoted to that world spill over with light and color ordinary people bustle around laughing, talking and doing the most ordinary things. The main characters easily related to this environment.

Ben Yiju who was born in far off Tunisia could settle down so easily in Mangalore in India and marry a girl from the matrilineal community of Nairs. The author makes it clear that Ben Yiju had many marital choices open to him closer to his
own faith, as the author tells there was a more overriding and important consideration in marrying Ashu and that was love. It was as simple and as natural as that where racial and religious barriers dissolved into nothingness. Then three years later Ben Yiju a coral for the baby from Egypt. If India was home for Ben Yiju, he felt himself no outsider when he returned to Egypt after twenty long years. Ben Yiju and his daughter by his Nair wife were welcomed back with open arms. When he sent an offer of marriage to his nephew in Sicily for his daughter, Surur for one clearly received his uncle's proposal of marriage with the peak warmth, his instant response was to set off for Egypt to claim his bride.

The twentieth century anthropology research student tracks down the elusive Bomma, the slave to his true home and background. Aden as an emissary of Ben Yiju, who sent him there partly on business trip and partly on a shopping jaunt, than once that the slave was a little too find of his glass. What is interesting in his relationship with his Jewish master? Through the Bomma the author takes pains to explain the concept of slavery as understood in the middle Ages. This concept was very different from the slavery as it came to be after the European colonial expansion of the sixteenth century. At one level slaves were akin to apprentices and agents who were entitled to a share of the firm's profits. At another level slavery was also often used as a means of fictive ties of kinship between people who were otherwise unrelated. At this highest level, this bond between master and slave acquired a religious and spiritual dimension.

The Vachanakara saint poets of Bomma's community often used slavery as an image to represent the devotee's quest for God. The relationship that existed between Bomma and Ben Yiju was a spiritual one is not clear. But it is certain that Bomma was
very close to his master and was more of a companion and partner to him than a slave. It is not surprising; therefore that he migrated to Egypt when Ben Yiju finally returned home and it was the matrilineal descended Tulu who kept the patriarchal Jew Company during his last years.

"The knell had been struck for the world that had brought Bomma, Ben Yiju and Ashu together and another age had begun in which the crossing of the paths would see so unlikely that is very possibility would all but disappear from human memory." The main plot of Abraham Ben Yiju and his slave the journey is towards the human aspects of civilization the journey in the sub-plot seems to be in the converse direction towards guns and bombs and tanks of Western Imperialist Powers which spell wreck for all the world, especially for so many Egyptians stranded in Iraq during the Operation Desert Storm. It was these colonizers who erected the man-made barriers and introduced the deep schism between Hindus and Muslims based on such inessential customs as the burning of the dead, the absence of circumcision in boys and clitoridectomy in girls.

The modern age they ushered in where brother betrays brother for thirty pieces of silver cherished codes of ethics are compromised and commitments to larger causes are drowned under waves of cupidity. The author writes about cunning and egotism and betrayal. But on a profounder level he also writes about the eternal yearning in man to go back to an idyllic world, a world that existed for example eight centuries ago. The contemporary world is people whom the research scholar meets during his pursuit of Bomma. These characters have been brought to life by a few deft strokes of the brush.
and almost each character reveals the havoc wrought by the post-colonial malady of distrust and selfishness.

The gargantuan Abu Ali, the very personification of cupidity, there is Imam Ibrahim, the symbol of bigotry and narrow-mindedness. The Imam is at his venomous worst when he questions the narrator about the Hindu custom of worshipping cows or burning the dead. The Iraquis return from the Iran-Iraq war and with the Operation Desert Storm looming large on the horizon Nabeel's fate is sealed. Nabeel vanishes into the anonymity of history written the Western Powers. This book brings very skillfully the enormous similarity of beliefs and of myths and legends of the cultural approach of the two antique lands till foreign imperialism erected barriers destroying that unity. The student of social anthropology is struck by the parallel images used by the Vachanakara saint-poets of South India and the Sufi mystics of Egypt.

The Vachanakaras idea of merging with God would have been regarded as blasphemous by the Sufis, yet the idea of bondage to God was one of the central metaphors of religious life for both the faiths. Both the Vachanakaras and the Sufis regarded the devotee as the slave of God the master and often this relationship was expressed in highly erotic metaphors.

The twentieth century anthropology student is taken round a Bhuta temple in Mangalore he finds an echo of the Egyptian legend in the driver's recounting of the Indian legend. The Egyptian legend is that of Sidi Abu Kanaka's grave and the Indian one centre's round a Bhuta shrine. The driver relates how tried to break through the Bhuta shrine in order to build a road connecting Mangalore city to its newly-built port. On hearing the tale, the student is reminded of the Egyptian one about Sidi Abu
Kanaka's grave. The grave lay in the way of a canal being built by the government. When the workers tried to remove the grave it was as hard as rock and not all the modern machinery could dig it out. And so it happened that the canal was made to take a slight diversion there and on that plot of land the people of the village built a maqam for the Sidi.

The resemblance between the Indian legend and the Egyptian one, he is too polite to openly disagree with the author but there is a cynical smile on his face. This cynicism turns to hostility from an officer when the narrator expresses a desire to visit the tomb of Sidi Abu-Harisa. The officer fails to understand what business an Indian can have at the tomb of a Jewish holy man in Egypt.

The narrator's comment sums up the whole theme of the book.

......that there was nothing I could point to within his world that might give credence to my story the remains of those small indistinguishable, intertwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim had been partitioned long ago, It was then that I began to realize how success the partitioning of the past had achieved (339).

The author's post-colonial attitude to historicity it irradiated with a feel for the metaphor and rare flashes of humor at the most unexpected places. He is a master of understatement and his prose attains sometimes heights of lyricism. But what is most remarkable about the book is the way Ghosh handles the twin-narration, advancing and receding, intertwining and dissolving through time. And throughout the book there is a suggestion that it were better for mankind to back track and pick up what had been dumped by the wayside on its march to progress. It is high time that take a world view
and realize that there are enormous similarities amongst different societies which have shared in the past similar gods and pantheons, similar myths and legends, similar cultural activities.

**Cross - Cultural Encounter in In an Antique Land**

In most novels cross-cultural encounter takes the form of East-West encounter. Cross-cultural encounter is one of the most important themes of Indian English fiction, as the genre itself is a product of India's encounter with the west. In Amitav Ghosh's novels, the encounter is not between British, American or French culture and Indian culture, he writes about the cultures of countries like Burma and Malaya (*The Glass Palace*). Indians are interacting with people in the Gulf countries and in North Africa (*The Circle of Reason*), or the culture of the Raj in India (*The Calcutta Chromosome*). In his latest novel, (*The Hungry Tide*), the cultural encounter is between Fokir, the illiterate fisherman who reads the ocean currents, and Pia, a cataloguist with a degree from an American University. Pia has been brought up in the United States and knows hardly any Bangla.

The protagonist of *In an Antique Land* is Amitab, a student of anthropology living in an Egyptian village. The keynote of this encounter is humour and also has a serious representation of the imperial encounter when Ghosh shows how the peaceful co-existence of different cultures which existed in the Middle East during medieval times was completely broken up by the hegemony of the colonial powers. The characteristics of in this novel have many fictional and non-fictional genres. It is a novel of social documentation, it has aspects of a historical novel, it resembles detective fiction in the way it follows the trail of a mysterious slave mentioned in a manuscript, it
is an autobiography, a travelogue, and also has elements of scholarly expository prose in its comments on cultural and economic issues.

Amitav Ghosh himself a comparison with his prose published in The Imam and the Indian Prose pieces reveals how carefully it has been structured. It begins with a six-page prologue, locating the author in terms of time and geography. Then the next three parts of the novel are named after the places he visited Lataifa, Nashawy, and Mangalore. Going back describes the changes he finds because of the oil economy when he returns to Egypt eight years later and the Epilogue gathers up all the threads of the narrative. The notes at the end of the novel give details about its factual basis. He is piecing together the lives of the slave and Ben Yiju from stray fragments of evidence. As a twenty-two years old researcher at Oxford, the author notices a reference to a slave in a letter written in 1148 A.D, by Khalaf ibn Ishaq, an Arab merchant living in Aden addressed to a friend of his Abraham Ben Yiju in Mangalore. The author is intrigued by the reference to the slave because of his sympathy for the subaltern the barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world.

The author attempts to re-create the life of this slave take him to Egypt and Mangalore. Slavery was widespread in the littoral states of the Indian Ocean in the medieval period but it was quite different from the slavery of the transatlantic trade of the New World. Among Jewish Merchants of medieval Cairo for instance as with many tribes in Africa slaves were sometimes gradually incorporated into their masters households and came to be counted as members of their families. He believes that the merchants treated the slave as an equal. he follows the paper trail of documents which have travelled all over the world. From the Geniza the medieval storehouse in the
synagogue in Cairo the papers have been appropriated by Western scholars and deposited in libraries all over the world, the British Museum in London, the university library in Cambridge, the National Library in Jerusalem, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and in the U.S.A.

Amitav Ghosh works out that the slave's name must have been Bomma, a new which was once common in Tulunad, though all the boys here had names like Ramesh and Vivek now. He finds the last reference to the slave in a manuscript housed in the rare book room of the Annenberg Research Institute in Philadelphia. The document in Ben Yiju's handwriting mentions a sum of money owed to Bomma, The author takes this as proof that Bomma was with Ben Yiju when he went back to settle in Egypt in the last years of his life. The detective work involves a lot of historical reconstructions. *In an Antique Land* is a historical novel with a difference. It is not about kings, queens, courts and battles, but about ordinary people. Ben Yiju is a new from Africa who travels to India, where he marries an Indian woman and acquires a slave who becomes his trading agent.

Shelley's sonnet 'Ozymandias' which talks about the futility of earthly achievements and the perish ability of name and fame. The novel operates in two time frames, the 20th century and the 12th century. Shelley's poem observes the antique land from the West, in the spirit of Orientalism, treating Ozymandias as the other.

The nineteenth-century Romantic poet talks of traveller from an antique land. Amitav Ghosh makes a slight change for his title and the whole perspective changes; he presents travellers 'In an Antique Land'. This constitutes a critique of the attitude of Western scholarship to the East. Shirley Chew analyses the novel with its consciously
derived title as a studied and dexterous experiment in the textual recovery of a portion of this appropriated ground and the self-reflexive attention it brings to the reading and transmission of texts, that is, its problematizing of its claims to knowledge of the past even while engaged in the retrieval of that past. There are three travellers, Ben Yiju, his slave mentioned in the letters, and Amitab, a young doctoral student. All three civilizations of 12th century Middle East, Egypt in the 1980s, and Mangalore, both past and present are lovingly re-created from the inside.

The cross-cultural encounters of the twelfth century reveal a culture which is not rigidly compartmentalized, the Jews from Africa and Egypt, the Muslims in Arabia and the Indian traders functioned in the spirit of co-operation. The author observes that the peaceful traditions of the oceanic trade may have been in a quiet and inarticulate way, the product of a rare cultural choice. The medieval culture of the Middle East owes a lot to the pacifist customs and beliefs of the Gujarati Jains and the universal brotherhood underlying Sufism. But with the arrival of the Portuguese, these links are broken forever. In 1509 AD the fate of that ancient trading culture was sealed and a transcontinental fleet put together by the Muslim potentate of Gujarat, the Hindu ruler of Calicut, and the Sultan of Egypt was attacked and defeated by a Portuguese force off the shores of Diu in Gujarat.

The author narrates his unpleasant experience in 1988 when he tries to visit the shrine of a holy man on the outskirts of Damanhour. The Sidi had been born into a Jewish family in the Maghreb; it was said but had transported himself to Egypt through a miracle. His tomb is visited by a Jews from Israel, when the Egyptian police officers learns that Ghosh is not an Israeli but an Indian, his smile vanished and was quickly
replaced by a look of utter astonishment. Neither Jewish nor Muslim, not Christian, there had to be something odd afoot. He just cannot understand Ghosh's interest in a religion not his own.

The cross-cultural encounters of the present keynote are the Humour. The Egyptian villagers as well as the narrator have their own preconceived notions about the other civilization. The author for instance has the fixed idea that Islamic society is very strict about the segregation of the sexes. He has a problem recognizing the three women in Shaik Musa's house,

The author had the impression that he had passed them in the lanes of the hamlet but he was never quite sure. The fault for this lay entirely with him, for neither they nor anyone else in Lataifa wore veils but at that time, early in his stay, he was so cowed by everything he had read about Arab traditions of shame and modesty that he is barely glanced at them for fear of giving offence. Later it was he who was shame-stricken, thinking of the astonishment and laughter he must have provoked walking past them, eyes lowered never uttering so much as a word of greeting (41).

The joke is on the narrator at in many places, it was the time of the rich harvest, late autumn, and he had spotted him walking through the fields, notebook in hand. Because of the notebook, the simple villagers think that he is an effendi from Damanhour who'd come to check whether anyone's evading military service. The novel presents many characters with a Dickensian touch. There is abu Ali, who is profoundly unlovable, Khamees the rat he gnawed at thigs with his tongue like a rat did with its teeth, Eid waiting many years to marry the rich girl he loves and the genial Shaikh Musa
whose young son suddenly dies. There is Ustaz Mustafa who studied law at the University of Alexandria. He has the habit of checking his watch very few minutes because he does not want to be late in getting to the mosque. His commands show an ordinary Egyptian villager's stereotypical notion of India,

all about India, said Ustaz Mustafa, smiling serenely, there is a lot of chilli in the food and when a man dies his wife is dragged away and burnt alive. Not always he protested his grandmother for example, Jabir was drinking this in, wide eyed. And of course, Ustaz Mustafa continued you had Indira Gandhi, and her son Sanjay Gandhi, who used to sterilize the Muslims. No, no, he sterilized everyone, he said. His eyes widened and he added hostility, No not me of course, but..... (46).

The author attempts to clarify the issues, to explain that Sanjay Gandhi was not targeting Muslims specifically, leads to comic misunderstanding with the villagers applying everything to the narrator personally. He finds to difficult to explain Hinduism,

if it is not Christianity nor Judaism nor Islam what can it be? who are its prophets? it's not like that, he said There aren't any prophets (47).

The important aspect of this cross-cultural encounter is the essential humanity of the villagers, the same human emotions and faith are present everywhere. Ustaz Mustafa, the keeper of the mosque, is among those who try to persuade Amitav Ghodh that he must convert to Islam. What finally helps him escape from the repeated requests is the Muslim clerics respect for filial devotion. The comic misunderstanding arises
sometimes, because of the language problem. The author does not know the Arabic words to explain why Hindus do not believe in circumcision:

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 (52).

Hinduism which he finds impossible to explain to the simple villagers of Egypt is the custom of cremating the dead. Here again the problem is partly linguistic,

His heart sank this was the question he encountered almost daily and since he had not succeeded in finding a word such as 'cremate' in Arabic, he knew he would have to give his assent to the term that Khamees had used the verb to burn which was the word for what happen to firewood and straw and the eternally dammed (168).

The Imam and the Indian try to establish their superiority in terms of the armaments they have acquired from the West not in terms of their civilization and values. Jabir and other young boys decide that the narrator is a simpleton who does not understand anything but Indian technological superiority is responsible for improving his standing in Jabirs eyes. One day Mabrouk, an otherwise shy boy, comes rushing, they want his opinion of the diesel water-pump. Amitav Ghosh knew nothing at all about water-pumps, but he is considered an expert because he is an Indian. When he goes to their house, he is escorted to the most secret secluded part of the house the Zariba. Their acquisition was standing in the middle of the year, like a newborn calf,
with an old shoe hanging around it to fend off the Evil Eye. There were several such pumps in the surrounding villages, they were known generically as al-Makana, al-Hindi, and the Indian machine for they were all manufactured in India. "He gave it a vigorous shake "It is a very good makana Hindi, he said patting the pump's diesel tank. Excellent! Azeem! It is an excellent machine"

Amitav Ghosh uses for the water pump, like a newborn calf, reveals the common rural heritage of India and Egypt. He is also aware of their common belief in the necessity of warding off the Evil Eye. His fiction has always concentrated on the permeable borders between different cultures and religions. His Sahitya Akademi award winning novel has the title *The Shadow Lines* and he shows that the lines of demarcation between different cultures and countries are not absolute. Even with in India he shows that cultures and religious beliefs do not exist in water tight compartments.

*In an Antique Land* shows him in Mangalore where he has gone on the trail of Ben Yiju's slave. At first he thinks that his name must be derived from 'Brahma' a god of the Sanskritic pantheon, but later realizes that it must be Bomma, the common form of Berme or Bermeru, the pricipal figure in the pantheon of Tuluva Bhuta-deities. Over time with the growth of Brahminical influence, the Tulu deity Berme had slowly become assimilated to the Sanskritic deity Brahma. The author shows that there are innumerable culture encounters within India and in most cases a fine synthesis and accommodation has been worked out.
Along with its innumerable Bhuta shrines, Tulunad had its fair share and more of temples dedicated to the gods of the Sanskritic pantheon and most of the Tuluva people participated enthusiastically in the worship of both sets of deities. There was no contradiction in this of course for to them Bhutas and Sanskritic deities represented aspects of divine and supernatural power that shaded gently and imperceptibly into each other (252).

Amitav Ghosh visits a Bhuta shrine, the driver of the taxi he is travelling in stops at a shrine on the outskirts of Mangalore to say a quick prayer and make an offering. And the Pujari there tells him about the powers of this deity, Years ago, when Mangalore’s new port was completed the government’s engineers had started building a road to join it with the city, several fifteen miles to the south. But soon to general consternation it was discovered that if the work were to go ahead as planned the road would cut straight through the shrine. The people of the area had protested mightily, but the government had ignored them and sent out notices of eviction to all the farmers who owned land in the area. Sure enough one day the engineers arrived with their machines to begin the work of demolition. But then there was a miracle their bulldozers were immobilized soon after they had begun to move, they were frozen to the ground before they could touch the shrine's walls. Completely confounded the engineers called in high-ranking government officers and technicians with yard-long degrees. But there was nothing anyone could do and eventually admitting defeat they agreed to divert the road so that skirted around the shrine.
The author has earlier heard a similar story in Egypt. Maghloul the weaver at Nashawy tells the author the story of Sidi Abu-Kanaka. The story as in Mangalore is one of the governments trying to develop the area, to build a canal to serve the farmers of the area. But when the canal reached Nashawy the villagers discovered that a calamity was in the offing, for if it went ahead as the engineers had planned it would go directly through their cemetery. Everybody was horrified at the thought, Then one morning the workmen to their utter astonishment came upon a grave that would not yield to their spades, they hammered at it for days and days all of them together, but the grave had turned to rock and no matter how hard they tried it couldn't make the slightest dent in it....that the canal was made to take a slight diversion there, and on that plot of land the people of the village built a maqam for the Sidi....

Even as the Imam and the Indian researcher is compete with each other in boasting about modern ornaments. The author is aware that despite the vast gap that lay between us, they understood each other perfectly. They were both travelling; they were travelling in the West. The narrator Abraham Ben Yiju and his slave Bomma are not the only travellers the Western imperial powers too originally came as travellers and traders.

Cross-cultural encounter is presented through the syncretistic medieval civilization of the Middle East, where Muslims Jews and Hindus traded on equal terms. When this culture encounters the west, represented by the Portuguese, it ends in violence and defeat. In the twentieth century, Amitav Ghosh presents the narrator-protagonist interacting with a host of interesting characters, in Mangalore and in Egypt.
This interaction serves as socio-political commentary; it is also a source of delightful humour.

Communal Relations in *In an Antique Land*

The affairs between the Hindu community and the Muslim community have been full up for treatment by Amitav Ghosh in his novel *In an Antique Land* too, as there figure in the novel a number of situations in which the members of the two communities meet and convey their opinions and feelings towards each other sometimes verbally and at others non-verbally. The incidents connected to the Hindu-Muslim affiliation integrated, in this novel and find that they can be place into three broad categories those in which the associations of the two communities are inimical and the two are trying to harm if not remove each other those which bring to light the ideological differences between them and the hurdles which bring their coming together. And those in which the members of the two communities have friendly relations between them.

To the first riots in 1947 in the cities of Dhaka and Calcutta. To the second category belong the religious and metaphysical discussions between Ustaz Mustafa and Amitab and also similar discussions between the Imam and Amitab. And to the third category belong the friendly relations of Amitab and his hosts in the village of Lataifa and the like. The author narrates some incidents related to communal riots. For instance in the following passage he describes how a large number of Hindu families had to leave their homes in Dhaka when in the year 1947 they feared they would be attacked by the Muslims mobs,
more people than ever before appeared in the garden, suddenly and without warning. They began to pour in early in the morning in small knots carrying bundles and other odds and ends and as the day wore on the heavy steel gates of the house were opened time and again to let more people in. By evening the garden was packed with people some squatting in silent groups and others leaning against the walls as though in wait (206-07).

As the narrator reports refugees, feeling from mobs, and they had taken shelter in garden because that was the only Hindu house nearby that happened to have high walls. This account brings to light the fact that according to Amitav Ghosh there are situations in which the members of the Muslim community become so hostile to the Hindus that the latter had to flee from their homes in order to protect themselves. When he narrates that when the Muslim mob found these Hindu families in the house on fire and eliminates all the inmates of the house as is evident from the following account. A large crowd is thronging around the house a mob of hundreds of men their faces shining red in the light of the burning torches in their hands, rags tied on sticks whose flames seem to swirling against our walls in waves of fire.

According to Amitav Ghosh when a mob is in the state of communal frenzy it can go to the extent of trying to eliminate a whole crowd of the Hindus. He even mentions a family all but one member of which has been wiped out by a Muslim Mob when he narrates, one of the maritime districts of East Pakistan and he had come to work, because he had lost most of his family in the riots that followed Partition. If they did this to one family they could have if not must have done this to others too. The novelist when there is hostility between the two communities the Hindus should take
necessary precautions to protect themselves. Though this should not be taken to imply that Amitav Ghosh is blaming only the Muslim community for becoming so aggressive towards its adversary, he asserts that the Hindus too can go to the same extent, as he says that what happened to the Hindus in Dhaka happened to the Muslims in Calcutta as he narrates that during the riots there occurred incidents like cities going to up in flames because of a cow found dead in a temple or a pig in a mosque or of a people killed for wearing a lungi or a dhoti depending on where they find themselves of women disemboweled for wearing veils or vermilion of men dismembered for the state of their foreskins.

Since here the novelist is saying that in one city a man is killed for wearing a dhoti in another city a man is killed for wearing a lungi, it is evident that Amitav Ghosh is charging both the Hindus and the Muslims equally with becoming inimical towards each other when riots break out. The intellectual battles between the members of two communities. There figure in the novel a few discussions in which Hinduism is found fault with by some member of the Muslim community and a member of the Hindu community tries to vindicate Hinduism. In one case there is a discussion between an Imam and Amitav Ghosh over some practices of the Hindus, the Imam regards the Hindus as offenders. Even Ustaz Mustafa ridicules the Hindus for their practice of worshipping cows and boys like Jabir regard the practice as sinful as becomes evident from the following extract from the text:

...a sharp collective intake of breath as Jabir and the other boys recoiled calling upon God in Whispers to protect them from the Devil (Ibid 47).
Jabir and the other boys, the reaction of described here indicates that in the eyes of the Muslims worshipping cows is a devilish practice. They must be holding this opinion because according to them the Supreme Being is one and that there is no second doing anything in the field of creating and running the universe as their *kalma' la ilah illiillah Mohammad-e rasool Allah* (Alla is one and Mohammad is his last messenger) also evidence.

The Hindus worshipping the cows is an appearance of their thankfulness to an animal from which they get very beneficial milk and also bullocks which used to be very valuable for agriculture before machinery like the tractor had come into survival. The Hindus worship not only cows but also several other animals including the cobra on a particular festival. The Hindu expresses their thankfulness even to trees and plants like the bunya tree and the basil plant. They express their thankfulness even to the sun and the moon. In no sense can thankfulness to a benefactor be regarded as sinful.

Mustafa is not able to consider Hinduism as a religion value accepting not only because the Hindus have the practice of sati but also because it was started by somebody like Mohammad, the founder of Islam. That signifies that according to Amitav Ghosh many Muslims are not able even to comprehend Hinduism because they do not find the counterparts of the constituents of their own religion in it. The Hindu says that many people in India are impure. That means that in a way he has accepted the charge that has been leveled against the Hindus. Amitav Ghosh saying, that he was enthralled by language signifies that he is denying the charge. On the issue of the Hindus burning the bodies of their dead too there is little agreement between the Hindus and the Muslims according to Amitav Ghosh.
“The shopkeeper recoiled as though The Imam had been slapped and his hands flew to his mouth. ‘Ya Allah!’ muttered’. The Imam’s hissing the charge and the shopkeeper’s hands flying to his mouth indicate that in their eyes burning the dead is a very serious offence thought it is common knowledge that a dead human body begins to decompose very hurriedly and emits bad odor unless some preservatives are used. A dead body has to be disposed of in such a way it does not cause problems to the survivors. So burning a dead body is simply a way of disposing it.

Some Muslim characters with whom, Amitab has very pleasant relations and who love this Hindu very dearly. One of them is Shaikh Musa. About him Amitab says: I had always felt secure in friendship from the moment of our first meeting, there was gentleness and a good humor about him that inspired trust, Mabrouk, Shaikh Musa’s nephew is another person of the kind. Mabrouk and Amitab are on so good conditions with every other that while Mabrouk’s father buys a water-pump; Mabrouk takes Amitab to his house so that the father may know Amitab’s view about it.

Mabrouk is to see the machine comes to light when read the following account “Come with me ya doctor he cried, you have to come with me right now to our house. My father and my family want you. Mabrouk was in a state of such feverish excitement that he could not bring himself to wait until I closed my notebook he virtually dragged me out of the room right then never letting go of my elbow”. This kind of relationship is a relationship of amity and harmony and it is this relationship that brings the people of different communities together and makes them live in peace and harmony like the members of one and the same family. The people of one community help those of the other community even in the days of riots when his emotions are flared up and find it
very difficult to think calmly. He does it when he says that throughout the days of Partition riots there were Muslims who helped the Muslims in Calcutta. He says this in the following words:

….. this must be said, it must always be said for it is the incantation that redeems our society in both Dhaka and Calcutta there were exactly mirrored stories of Hindus and Muslims coming to each others rescue so that many more people were saved than killed (Ibid - 209-10).

According to Amitav Ghosh it is quite possible for a Hindu and a Muslim to have friendly relations in spite of the wide differences between their metaphysical and moral views. If Amitab and Shaikh Musa can have friendly relations between them in spite of their being members of different communities, it is possible for any Muslim and any Hindu to have friendly relations provided they want them to be so and if Muslims in Dhaka can come to the rescue of the Hindus other Muslims too can come to the rescue of the persons in trouble in case they wish to do so.

However, Amitav Ghosh is not blind to reality and he does not forget the fact that when issues like the Partition are there most members of the two communities become hostile towards the members of the other community and begin to make efforts to eliminate the members of the rival community.

**Egypt and India in *In an Antique Land***

*In an Antique Land* is such a fictional enterprises which probes deep into the conflicts between the two diverse cultures of Egypt and India at the heart of which lies the dichotomy of Islam and Hinduism. The narrative of the novel develops out of an
Indian scholar’s experience of living with Arabs. In this encounter the author brings to the surface the hidden clashes between the two cultures at a time when Egypt was subject to the drastic changes brought about by the European modernity. The Egypt which the narrator, who can be properly regarded as the author’s replica, frequents is the postcolonial nation-state caught in the labyrinth of Western globalization, on the one hand and local traditions commingled with Islamic ethos on the other.

Amitav Ghosh points out at the tragic turn of events in history of Asia and Middle East and particularly India. The book underlines the unarmed nature of Indian trade and commerce before the advent of Vasco-da-Gama in India. The author wants to focus on a forgotten period of history, which shows how free and liberal India’s collaboration with the Arab and Chinese world was. He highlights the easy flow of human warmth and trust that existed between a Tunisian Jewish merchant and his Indian helper Bomma. The book is obviously a testimony to Ghosh’s intense urge as a tireless, genuine researcher. In fact this book covers his research as a social anthropologist over decades. It establishes him not just as a writer of fiction but also as a keen traveler, a diligent researcher a social anthropologist and a social historian.

*In an Antique Land* is a contemporary novel, delineating some ordinary characters. The daily encounters of these characters are shown. Their religious rites, social customs along with their eccentricities and whims are effectively portrayed. A tale grows into a story; ordinariness becomes history and anthropology mixes with fiction. Amitav Ghosh’s in this novel is like a breath of fresh air. Like his other works, his sense of time is not very strict. Time floats and mixes along with blending of fact and fiction; there is coalescing of different branches of knowledge.
anthropology, philosophy, sociology and religion. It is an interaction of the author with at least four languages and culture spread across continents and centuries. One thing is certain about Amitav Ghosh; he is not a conventional writer. He is patterns never change, and themes keep repeating.

Amitav Ghosh said: No, this time I’m 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’ve tried to capture a story, a narrative without attempting to write a historical novel.

_In an Antique Land_ is journey based. Two Indians visits Egypt and Abraham Ben Yiju visits India. He comes via Egypt and Aden. He lives in India for seventeen long years. His constant companion is a fisherman, Bomma, a south – Indian. Bomma goes to Egypt on business trips on numerous occasions as Yiju’s representative. The second Indian to visit Egypt is Ghosh himself. These two journeys by two Indians to Egypt are seperatedly by centuries. It takes more than a decade for Ghosh to find out all about this relationship between Yiju and Bomma, their respective background and personalities. This ground also makes for an interface Egyptian and Indian civilization. The author as a through social anthropologist catches the storehouse of old records in Babylon. It is the synagogue of Benzra. This is perhaps the biggest single collection of medieval documents ever discovered. They were, however, later taken out of Egypt to Cambridge. Princeton, Oxford and Leningrad, Ghosh assiduously located Yiju’s documents and is first struck by the unusual hybridity of language. The language is Judseo-Arabic, a colloquial dialect of medieval Arabic written in Hebrew script. The author learning of Arabic proves valuable here. He deciphers all documents and
unravels as also rebuilds the story of Ben Yiju and his slave Bomma. We also have inviting description of places like Cairo, Lataifa, Nashawy, Malabar Coast and Mangalore. It is only because of his keen knowledge of facts and figures that these descriptions come as true and weighty.

Ben Yiju’s total involvement with India by accepting Ashu in marriage, he shows his flowing sense of humanism. As the three characters in the slave’s name are B-M-A, Prof. Goitein suggests the name to be Bama, as derived from Brahma, the creator of the cosmos. But things do not get convincing for Ghosh unless Prof. Vivek Raj of Mangalore University explains. He tells that the correct name of the slave is Bomma, who was born in a matrilineal community of Tulunad, and worships spirit deities, ‘Batas’. The culture of accepting extra-human and extra-sensory phenomena is not new to Indians. This background of Bomma seems quite natural. The point to be noted, however, is that though Bomma is a slave with a meagre salary of two dinars per month, he is entrusted with goods worth thousand times more. He is sent as a representative of his master to places like Egypt and Aden. He is a slave and yet not quite a slave. The bond between Yiju is more like a patron and Bomma like a client. Although Bomma drinks at times, yet his role as Yiju’s business agent grows over the years. Yiju has even referred to Bomma as Sheikh in some of his later years marking clearly Bomma’s professional size. She belongs to a culture whose popular traditions and folk beliefs ‘upturn and invert’ categorization of Sanskritized Brahiminical Hinduism. This homogenizing of our religion where community is expected to be less than one umbrella is indeed a new and alien phenomena. It is not in tune with our original religion and this singularity of identity did not exist earlier.
Ben Yiju also followed practices that are now not part of the standard image of the orthodox religions of the Middle East. The popular image of Middle East is quite subversive. But Yiju shares with Bomma the exorcism cults, the magical rites and the custom of visiting graves of different saints. They have a solid meeting ground between them, but for these liberal attitude.

The matrilinæal descended Tulu and the patriarchal Jew would otherwise seem to stand on different sides of an unbridgeable Chasm (263).

It is interestingly to note business was conducted in those days between India and the Middle East. It was “wholly indifferent to many of the boundaries that are today thought to mark social, religious and geographical divisions”. For example one of Yiju’s business partners, Madmun, had joint ventures with a Muslim, a Gujrati Bania and a member of a landowning caste of Tulunad. Despite religious, cultural and linguistic differences, they had complete mutual trust and understanding. The fact that no legal redress was available in those days enhanced their cooperation. On the matter of language Yiju and his associates use a language of Northern derivation. They do not know Tulu. The author goes on to speculate that Yiju and other traders used code words of business. The idea of a specialized trade language reminds us of ‘Satti’ (wholesale cloth market) of Varanasi where business language is highly specialized. Only years of training yields mastery in this language and its use. But such meaningful and fruitful relationships existed between people of such different backgrounds which is stunning indeed. They were making money, and were sharing cultures and religions. They were easily marrying into each other’s community. It sounds a utopia even today. But as all
good things come to an end, this open, unarmed character of Indian trade was to change forever on 17 May 1498 when Vasco-da-Gama landed in India:

Within few years of that day knell had been struck for The world that had brought Bomma, Ben Yiju, and Ashu Together and another age had begun in which the crossing of their paths would seem so unlikely that its very possibility would all but disappear from human memory (286).

There is confrontation between the two civilizations, all supposedly educatedness comes off and the mask of civilization is broken when Ghosh fiercely defends his country against the brutal attack of Imam. However, the impact of this incident on Ghosh is shattering. It was the death of a dream that he saw in history:

I was crushed, as I walked away: it seemed to me that the Imam And I had participated in our own final defeats, in the dissolution Of the centuries of dialogues that has linked us … Ben Yiju or His slave, or as one of the thousands of travelers who had crossed the Indian Ocean in the Middle Ages might have done; of things that were right of good, or willed by God (236-37).

*In an Antique Land* also makes a comment on the growing trend of consumerism and its impact on the developing world. When Ghosh returns to Egypt after seven years he finds major changes in the two villages. The young men of these villages have gone to Gulf countries and have brought back huge sums of money. When Ghosh visits Abu-Ali in Lataifa with Seikh Musa, he witnesses a procession of, “A.T.V. set a food processor, a handful of calculators, a transistor radio, a couple of cassette
players a pen that was also a flash light, a watch that would play tunes, a key ring that answered to a hand clap and several other such objects”. When he goes to the house of Abu Ali, he finds that it has vanished. Instead of the old moped there is now a new pick-up Toyota truck. He is “assaulted by a sudden sense of dislocation”, As though he had gone to different epochs. The magic of immigrant labour has changed the world of Lataifa and Nashawy beyond recognition in less than a decade. What have changed are not merely the physical things but the inner socio-cultural relationships have also been “upturned and rearranged”. It does not need much imagination to see that Ghosh referring to the paradigmatic changes occurring in all developing countries like his own. Herein lies the contemporary relevance of the book.

The idea that all divisions are unreal and artificial appears again and again in Ghosh’s fiction. At the end of his second visit to Egypt, before leaving for Cairo he wishes to visit the tomb of a saint called Sidi-Abu-Hasira but he is taken by the police and is interrogated by the chief. The police officer is simply unable to understand why an Indian who is not Jewish wants to visit the tomb of a Jewish holy man. This is again a significant remark on the current culture of intolerance. In this case religion is causing walls. Amitav Ghosh is unable to stop himself from telling the police officer the story of Ben-Yiju and him that these two gentlemen of past shared with Bomma. He tells him that these two gentlemen of the past shared

Indistinguishable interwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim (339).
The police officer is not ready to understand. He again goes back to dissuading Ghosh from visiting the saint’s tomb. He says that all these superstitious beliefs will disappear with development and progress. Ghosh leaves the scene saying that this is indeed a heavy price for development and progress. *In an Antique Land* ends with his last visit to Egypt in 1990, just three weeks after Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. There is a sense of disappointment at the protracted Iran-Iraq war. In all these scenes, human concerns go unabated. Nabeel hopes that things will return to normal and soon he will be able to earn enough money for the ongoing renovation of his house.

Making the narrator a social anthropologist, Ghosh both historicizes and politicizes his narrative by giving it a more profound historical dimension. Shifting the scene of the novel from the contemporary life to the middle ages through the documents of Geniza, Ghosh has rendered *In an Antique Land* multilateral both stylistically and thematically. The novel is a spatial as well as a temporal travelogue. Part of the narrative of the novel revolves around the narrator’s scholarly achievements as an anthropologist. This theme marks a discrepancy between the text and its subtext. While the narrator’s life in Egypt and among Arabs has a subjective base, recounting the personal experience of an Indian, the other half of the novel is written in a documentary style, adopting an objective attitude.

The modern text is related in the first person point of view which is highly eliminated, if not totally obliterated, in the predominantly third-person narrative of the medieval subtext. This disparity of point of view is one of the technical merits of *In an Antique Land*, which greatly influences the narrator’s adopted perspective in each part. The documentary style of the subtext is felt in Ghosh’s unbiased observation of the
Arabs world which encompasses his interactions and reactions with Arabs. The scientist-like narration accords his story a more genuine and authentic significance. On the other hand, the narrator’s subjectivity in the subtext is manifested in the way he introduces his medieval subjects as an Oriental figure rather than as an Orientalist. Ghosh’s identity as Indian, who likewise Egyptians, has had the colonial experience of the British Empire, draws a clear –cut line between his approach to the medieval subject and that of a European Orientalist.

**The Image of Woman in *In an Antique Land***

The ruling social system almost all over the world ordains that woman’s place is the home, her role as a wife and mother is quite often synonymous with her total human existence. The word ‘family’ derives from Latin ‘Famulus’ which means a household slave and familia signifies the totality of slaves belonging to one individual who is the male head the limitation imposed on woman for her family function is not however confined to the West, despite the Latin philological lineage.

In India, in China and in Greece and Rome, woman has always been relegated to background for her family roles and the task of civilization has become more and more man’s business. One therefore expects the presentation of woman in literature, created and dominated by man to be mere role-fulfillments. The Indian subcontinent has refused to progress during successive stages of history and continued an archaic survival and this failure illustrated in the frequented political defeats, economic suppression marked infertility in the creative efforts in every field of human knowledge has led to a total ossification of the Hindu psyche. The very old modes and ideals instead of undergoing revision and transformation in consonance with the changing time have tended to
dominate the ethos in decadent forms. So the ever-obedient ever suffering Sita who ended her life in self-immolation has remained the dominant feminine archetype.

While the totalitarian expertise in destroying the identity, the very soul of human being is now a recognized phenomenon, it should not shock us to see that women steam-rolled and flattened into the family roles tend to be dehumanized insofar as they are invariably stripped of all the individualizing traits of a sentient being. Shouri Daniels describes:

the female incarnate thus, She has no shape or form. She is everything or nothing. She is fluid. Pour her into any mould and she takes it. Ideals and principles lie outside her nature (4).

As she is the void, she becomes a being only insofar as she can be regarded as an object in relation to man who is of course the subject. Elaine Showalter in her theory of feminist criticism has talked about the analysis of woman according to the three socio-cultural and psychological critical categories of Feminine, Feminist and Female-aesthetic. The Feminine is the concept of womanhood, the traditional role of the woman, in relation to the patriarchal society where she is understood always in connection to the male. She has no identity of her own but is venerated as a mother in relation to the father, as a sister in relation to her brother, as a wife in relative to her husband, then as a daughter in relative to her father. Elaine Showalter said:
In the feminist phases or the winning of the vote, women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity, and use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. In the female phase women reject both imitation and protest two forms of dependency and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art (11).

Female is the concept of theory that the woman is an individual woman as herself the movement towards the understanding of woman as a female, woman as power, woman as erotic symbol of desire, that within herself she has power the recognition of power gives her maturity. Feminist is the concept of the theory that they are fighting for their rights, trying to break from the ideological form. Feminist was stance or tone of women libbers striving for the recognition of their rights and the fight for their identity as individuals in the society.

In *In an Antique Land* the presence of woman is not felt in most parts of the novel and if present, woman is always mentioned in connection to the male, be it her father, brother, son or husband. The names of every women character are not mentioned. One of the women characters whose name is mentioned is Ashu. Ben Yiju came to Mangalore 1132 A.D. He married a slave girl Ashu. She is Nair by caste, which according to Goitein was probably beautiful. Ashu is not mentioned anywhere else in the entire corpus of Ben Yiju documents, although her children figure in it frequently. Ben Yiju did not once refer to her in his letters or jotting.

Busaina is mentioned as tall sweet-looking. She is a sister of Khamsee’s, and she is referred to have left her husband and moved back to Nashawy with her children. Although she had given her husband two fine healthy children, the two of them had
never really got on. They had quarreled all the time and in the end things had come to
such a pass that her husband had announced that he was going to marry again. She had
her husband used to quarrel all day long because she had to have her way in everything.

Ben Yiju did not accept this as he might have wanted a submissive woman as his
wife, who would never decide anything by herself and would always depend on her
husband for everything and accept his decisions. He visits India and he comes via Egypt
and Aden. Ben Yiju lives in India for seventeen long years. His constant companion is a
fisherman, Bomma. Bomma is south - Indian. This south – Indian goes to Egypt on
business trips on numerous occasions as Yiju’s representative. The second Indian to
visit Egypt is Ghosh himself. So these two journeys by two Indians to Egypt are
separated by centuries. It takes more than a decade for Ghosh to find out all about this
relationship between Yiju and Bomma, their respective backgrounds, and personalities.
This ground also makes for an interface between Egyptian and Indian civilizations.

Bomma was born in a matrilineal community of Tulunad who worship spirit
deities, ‘Bhutas’. As all know the culture of accepting extra human and extra sensory
phenomena is not new to Indians. The background of Bomma is seems quite natural.
The point to be noted, however is that thought Bomma is a mere slave with a meager
salary of two dinars per month, he is entrusted with goods worth thousand times more.
He is sent as a representative of his master to places like Egypt and Aden. He is a slave
and yet not quite a slave.

The bond between Yiju and Bomma speaks for the kind of relationship they had.
There is trust and commitment in their relationship. Yiju is more like a patron and
Bomma like client. There is not much hierarchy. Although Bomma drinks at times yet
his role as Yiju’s business agent grows over the years. Yiju has even referred to Bomma as Sheikh in some of his later years marking clearly Bomma’s professional rise. Khamees brother of Busaina, his wife didn’t have children and having failed to father any children he had taken a second wife, but with no result. His wife had walked off in a rage, shouting to the world that it was his fault that he was childless, not hers. He does not agree that it is since of his mistake that he is childless as coded by his first wife and goes on to take a second wife, but with no result. Amm Taha says that he uses Hoopoe’s blood for a spell for women who can’t bear children it would only be because of his wife’s fault.

Daughter of Ben Yiju name is not mentioned whereas his son’s name Sururis mentioned. This indicates that women were not considered important even to mention their names. Ben Yiju’s daughter is mentioned in his letters as “I have left a daughter his sister.” The wives of Imam second wife. Sakkina, Shaikh Musa’s wife is portrayed as a shy woman she was so shy to answer the author that Ahmed had to speak for her. She was very young and her age was a fraction of her husband’s age.

The women characters their physical appearance and their cloths speak for them, as is the case with the three women in Shaikh Musa’s house, one in the first bloom of her adolescence with a gentle, innocent face and a rosy complexion, one was a pale, pretty, self-possessed young woman, dressed in a long printed skirt, the other was dark and thickest and she was wearing a black fustian and the author goes on to say that her clothes and her bearing spoke of a college or at least a high school education. The author knocks at the door of Ustaz Sabry’s house and a woman dressed in the severe black robes of an elderly widow appears. She is described as a thin lady with thin, fine-
boned cheeks. The identity of these women is physical. Women are also portrayed as objects of entertainment. The girl dancer mentioned in Nashawy was young clothed in a simple printed cotton dress with a long scarf tied around her waist whose dance was a source of enjoyment to the people gathered. Most of the women characters perform the duties of a servant. The two women in Shaikh Musa’s house come into the room carrying a pair of trays loaded with food.

Sakkina appears in the doorway and gives Hasan a tray with three glasses of tea on it, Shaikh Musa’s wife ushers the guests into the guest-room, showing them the way with a kerosene lamp and goes back to bring some tea and food, later she gives the lamp a final scrub and opens the door to show another room, the women carry food for their men out to the fields, Imam’s first wife brings in a tray of tea and women walk towards the town balancing baskets of vegetables on their heads. These women are nameless and perform functions.

Abu Ali would always berate his wife or roar abuse at her. In another context a vendor says that he would rather divorce his wife than sell the fruits for a lesser price in the market. Here women have been portrayed as a commodity. Then other women characters mentioned in the novel are Ahmed’s mother, Nabeel’s mother, Ismail’s mother, Ali’s mother, Amm Taha’s first wife and his second wife, Eid’s wife, Amitav Ghosh’s mother, Hasan’s wife the headman’s daughter etc. Amitav Ghosh is being provocative and he is drawing attention to this antiquated attitude of the patriarchal society towards women.