Chapter V: A Critical study of *In An Antique Land*
5.1. Introduction:

*In An Antique Land* is written by the anthropologist, Amitav Ghosh and the publishers marketed it as ‘a subversive history in the guise of a traveler’s tale… a magical, intimate biography of a country, Egypt, from the Crusades to Desert Storm.’ [http://www.roadjunky.com/] There are two Indians visit Egypt, one is Arabian Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant originally from Tunisha, who came to India about 1130 A.D. and married with a Nair woman and acquired an Indian slave Bhoma who went to Egypt with his master. The other Indian in Egypt is Amitav Ghosh himself who visited Egypt in 1980 as a student for his doctoral degree from Oxford and who went to Egypt to trace the root and cause of the slave MS-H6. It is a kind of travelogue novel in Indian English novel. However, the principle aim of this chapter is to focus on critical study of *In An Antique Land* and draw out notions as Colonial Desire and Hybridity.
5.2. A Critical study of In An Antique Land:

In the *prologue*, novel opens with introduction of The Slave of MS-H6 in modern history and Abraham Ben Yiju whose name appeared in several medieval documents as a student of anthropology, novelist search for the life of Ben Yiju and his slave Bhoma who is Indian from Tulunad west coast of India, whose origin traces to the 12th century and who were engaged in trade between India and Egypt and Aden. In his subversion of history of Ben Yiju and his slave Bhoma. Ghosh has supported his narration with historical documents. In this matter, Ghosh writes: ‘The letter which now bears the catalogue number MS-H6, of the National and University Library in Jerusalem, was written by a merchant called Khalaf Ibn Ishaq and it was intended for a friend of his who bore the name Abraham Ben Yiju.’ [Ghosh: 1992: 3] That is how the novel begins with *prologue* where Ghosh marks at about the same time the next year, 1980, I was in Egypt installed in village called *Lataifa*, a couple of hour’s journey to the south east of Alexandria. Claire Chambers in his critical assay *In An Antique Land: A Fragmentary History* of the Indian Ocean says:

> **Such attention to the cultural, economic and social connections between the inhabitants of the far-flung lands and islands of the Indian Ocean, it should be noted, chimes with an important point that Ghosh makes repeatedly in his work. He frequently makes plain that travel, migration and cultural interaction are not recent by-products of globalization but endeavors that societies have always undertaken for economic, religious, ideological, strategic or personal reasons.** [Chambers: 2009: 87]
The story of Ben Yiju is rebuilt with the help of letters between him and his three business partners: Madmun ibnal- Hasen-ibn-Badar, Yusuf ibn Abraham and Khalaf ibn Ishaq, who seems to be Yiju’s closest friend. Regarding to the address of Ben Yiju, the novelist cited: ‘The address, written on the back of the letter, shows that Ben Yiju was then living in Mangalore- a port on the south-western coast of India.’ [Ibid] He was lived in India for seventeen years. His even accompanying person was a fisherman, Bomma. There was a mysterious puzzle about Bomma therefore Amitav Ghosh discovered the past of Bomma. The novelist writes: ‘I discovered, for instance, that a man called Mâsaleya Bamma, who had worked as a servant for a group of warriors, had been killed, not far from Tulunad, just a few years before Ben Yiju arrived in India.’ [Ibid: 204] Bomma was a South-Indian, who goes to Egypt on business trips on numerous occasions as Yiju’s representative. He was a man belongs to merchant family, who married a pious wife. It is said that Bomma was a common name during that time typically used in the middle society. In relation to this the novelist writes: ‘I did not know whether the name was derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Brahma’ or from some other source, and I had no idea at all whether it might reveal anything about the Slave’s origins by linking him to any particular caste, religion or social group.’ [Ibid] Ben Yiju came to Mangalore in 1132 A.D. He married a slave girl Ashu. She is a Nair by caste. Indeed the search for the slave MSH.6 becomes interesting. Moreover it also shows Yiju’s total involvement with India. By accepting Ashu in marriage, he shows his graceful sense of humanism.

There are three characters on the slave’s name are B-M-A as derived from Brahma, the creator of the cosmos. The correct name of the slave is Bomma. He was born in a matrilineal community of Tulunad, who worship spirit deities, Bhutas. This background of Bomma is seems quite natural. It is said that though 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 connection 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 his later years marking clearly Bomma’s professional rise. Bomma belongs to a culture whose popular traditions and folk beliefs upturns and inverts categorization of Sanskritaized Brahiminical Hinduism. This homogenizing of our religion where the whole community is expected to be less than one umbrella is indeed a new and alien phenomenon. It is not in tune with our original religion. This singularity of identity did not exist earlier. Streams of Hinduism were scattered and varied. Variance among spiritual and religious practices was encouraged.

Similarly 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 religion 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 attitudes ‘the matrilinally descended Tulu and the patriarchal Jew would otherwise seem to stand on different sides of an unbridgeable chasm. [Ibid: 216]

It is interesting to note how business was conducted in those days between India and Middle East. It was ‘wholly indifferent to many of the boundaries that are today thought to mark social, religious and geographical divisions.’ [Ibid: 228] For example, one of Yiju’s business partners Madmun had joint ventures with a Muslim, a Gujarati Bania and a member of a land owning caste of Tulunad. Despite religious, cultural and linguistic differences, they had complete mutual trust and
understanding. Perhaps the fact that no legal redress was available in those days enhanced their co-operation. …The “dialogue” between people from various racial and religious groups travelling in the Indian Ocean was not simply metaphorical, but also literally enshrined in the polyglot and often mixed tongues of the coasts’ inhabitants. [Chambers: 2009: 87]

On the front of language Yiju and his associates use a language of Northern derivation. They do not know Tulu. Ghosh goes on to speculate that Yiju and other traders used code words of business. The idea of a specialized trade language reminds us of Sati (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 is stunning indeed. They were making money. They 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 17th May 1498 when Vasco-da-Gama landed in India, ‘Within a few years of that day 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 their paths would seem so unlikely that its very possibility would all but disappear from human memory.’ [Ibid: 235] When the Portuguese used military force to capture trade over Indian Ocean and monopolize it, a new era in history as well as thinking began.

Ghosh is hardly able to control his anger over colonization, ‘Soon, the remains of the civilization that had brought Ben Yiju to Mangalore were devoured by that unquenchable, demonic thirst that had raged ever since, for almost five hundred years, over the Indian ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf.’ [Ibid: 237] The size of the novel constitutes the three visits of Ghosh to Egypt. Ghosh seems
enthralled by Egypt and its history. He views the scenario with an exceptional intelligence. His perception is unbiased. He sees people and their lives exactly as they are. However he does not get the same treatment from foreigners. Their treatment of Ghosh is based on the Western view of India. He is even provoked to the extreme. People expect him to fall on his knees whenever a cow passes by. This sort of pinning down attitudes upsets him. But among those very foreigners there are individuals like Nabeel who understand his agitation and lovingly reproach him, ‘They were only asking questions just like you do; they did not mean any harm. Why do you let this task of cows and burning and circumcision worry you so much? These are just customs; it’s natural that people should be curious. These are not things to be upset about.’ [Ibid: 166] But even amidst such sane voices there is confrontation between the two civilizations.

All supposedly educated-ness 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 defeat, in the dissolution of the centuries of dialogues that has linked us.’ [Ibid: 174] we had acknowledged it was no longer possible to speak as 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 or good, or willed by God.’ [Ibid: 194] Ghosh even feels guilty that he has betrayed the period of history that he is studying. He is sorry that he is not able to keep up the spirit of Ben Yiju and Bomma. There is a painful realization that ours are the times of suspicion and betrayal. The days of Yiju and Bomma have gone away forever.

The novel also makes a remark 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 huge sums of money. When Ghosh visits Abu-Ali in *Lataifa* with Sheikh 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 dilapidated house, a brightly painted three storied building stands. Instead of the old moped there is now a new pick-up Toyota truck. Ghosh is, 'assaulted by a sudden sense of dislocation,' as though he had gone to different epochs. The magic of immigrant labor has changed the world of *Lataifa* and *Nashawy* beyond reorganization in less than a decade. What has changed is not merely the physicality of things but the inner socio-cultural relationships have also been, upturned and rearranged. It does not need much imagination to see that Ghosh is not only talking about the villages of Egypt only but is referring to the paradigmatic changes occurring in all developing countries like his own. Herein rests the contemporary relevance of the novel. 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, Ghosh 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. Ghosh is unable to stop himself from telling the police officer the story of Ben-Yiju and Bomma. He tells him that these two gentlemen of past shared indistinguishable intertwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim. But 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.

There is another story which enhances the main concern of the novel is the story of Imam Ibrahim. As Shaikh Musa told the narrator Imam Ibrahim is one of the members of founding families of Nashawy. He runs the haircutting shop, besides taking care of the Mosque. Imam has read many of the classical texts. He delivers scholarly sermons at mosque. But those who have got colonial education ‘laugh at his sermons’ and say that “he doesn’t seem to know about the things that are happening around us, in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Israel.’ [Ibid: 141] Ustaz Sabry questions, without going to college or university and big cites: ‘how could these people learn about the principles of religion?’[Ibid: 142] Ibrahim is very knowledgeable about plants and herbs also. He heals the diseases with traditional herbal medicine. But, because of colonization of minds the people like Zaghloul say: ‘Those leaves and powders don’t work anymore. Nowadays everyone goes to the clinic and gets injection and that’s the end of it.’ [Ibid] Once the narrator called on Ibrahim and told him that he had come to talk about his healing methods, his ancestors, history of his family and interested in learning about folk remedies and herbal medicines. Ibrahim asked, ‘Why do you want to hear about my herbs? Why don’t you go back to your country and find about your own. Forget about all that; I’m trying to forget about myself?’ [Ibid: 192] Through this story the narrator suggests how colonial influence created boundaries between ancient and modern. There are many more stories which directly contribute to the main concern of the novel.

Amitav Ghosh employs legends and myths with magic realism. Long ago Sidi Abbas was lived in Nakhlatain and he had been famous for godliness and piety. It
was said that he was gifted with *Baraka*: the power of conferring blessings. When he was died, people tried to lift the Sidi’s bier after performing the rites, for the amazement of people they couldn’t move it at all. They were able to move it only when Sidi’s son lent a hand to it. The Sidi’s body led the wonderstruck people into a mosque and Sidi communicated with people to build him a tomb and celebrate his mow lid there every year. In the following years Sidi demonstrated his power to them time and again, through miracles and acts of grace.

Once, few thieves were escaping with a group of stolen water-buffalo. When they came past the Sidi’s tomb, they were frozen to the ground, buffaloes also. It was Sidi’s power that anything left touching his tomb was safe. Therefore the formers were leaving their valuable things leaning against the walls of the Tomb, knowing that they would not be touched. Once, someone left a plough with leather thongs, propped up against the tomb. After a while a mouse came along and started biting the plough’s thongs. But no sooner had its teeth touched the plough than it was frozen to the ground. Even animals were not exempted from the rules of sanctity that surrounded the Sidi’s tomb. In the context this episode emphasizes that during the past the guilty was punished without any consideration of class, religion, gender, and region. But of recently the rich guilty escapes from punishment. A story is interwoven in relation to this. The legend questions the boundaries between rich and poor.

Amitav Ghosh narrates the story of social and cultural changes of Egypt and introducing two characters: Nabeel and Ismail. They are students of agricultural training college, Damanhour. Both of them leave their homeland and move to Iraq in search of better economic prospects. They are introduced as two young students, whom the narrator meets when he is in *Nashawy*, Egypt. Both these young men have a burning passion to become officers in the village co-operative,
a post which was held in high-esteem in their small town of uneducated Fellaheen community. Out of these two boys, Nabeel is more passionate about achieving success in life.

Nabeel is a modern character. He represents the youth of the third World developing countries who are hypnotized by the dream of success, and are eager to go to any extent to achieve this success. Nabeel’s childhood has been spent in acute poverty, and it considered his father responsible for this poverty, because of his low-paying job of a watchman. He desired to have a white-collar, well-paying job in order to improve his lot, and also to improve their standing among other rich relatives: ‘Nabeel, on the other hand, hated his family’s poverty and loyal though he was to his father, he considered a watchman’s job demeaning, unworthy of his lineage. He had always been treated as a poor relative by his more prosperous Badawy cousins and he had responded by withdrawing into the defensive stillness of introspection’. [Ibid: 150] Ismail works as a construction labourer and Nabeel works as an assistant in a photographer’s store. Though their jobs are not highly respectable, they are able to earn a lot more than what they would have earned his family in Egypt as officers in the co-operative. Nabeel is able to relieve his family from its downtrodden state, and is also able to fulfill his family’s dreams of acquiring material comforts: ‘Later Nabeel had sent money for a television set and a washing – machine and then, one day, on one of his tapes he had talked about building a new house. Those tumble down old rooms they’d always lived in wouldn’t last much longer, he’d said, he would be glad to have a new house ready, when he came back to Egypt’. [Ibid: 319] Nabeel like many other young men of Nashawy had gone to work ‘outside’, for a short time, just to earn enough. But who will decide when it is enough.
When Amitav inquires with Nabeel’s family about his life in Iraq, they try to discourage his inquisitiveness: ‘What are things like in Iraq? I asked Fawzia. Does Nabeel like it there? She nodded cheerfully. He was very happy, she said; in his tapes he always said he was doing well and that everything was fine’. [Ibid: 322]

The narrator is confused at this casual reply, but is more troubled at Ali, Nabeel’s brother’s response, because even he gives a very detached answer to the question posed by the narrator about Nabeel’s wellbeing, Ali shrugged, as far as he knew. Nabeel’s sister-in-law’s immediate response to this confirms out fear about the value of Nabeel’s existence. She says ‘And besides’ said Fawzia, ‘what would Nabeel do back here? Look at Isma’il just sitting at home, no job, nothing to do.’ [Ibid: 351] It does not consider Nabeel’s discomfort, his loneliness and his pain of separation, while counting the money that he sends from Iraq.

Nabeel’s safe and sound return is neither here nor her family’s first priority. While on the other hand, Isma’il, who has had a firsthand experience of the terrors they faced in Iraq, and is also aware of the mental and physical toll that it takes on these immigrants, and so he once again emphatically adds: ‘But still, he wanted to come back, He’s been there three years. It is more than most and it’s aged him you have seen, what I mean if you saw him. He looks much older. Life is not easy out there’. [Ibid: 352] Nabeel is especially burdened by this sense of alienation because he is shown to be more sensitive and considerable than the other men of this age. He treasures familial bonding, and that is why he was able to understand the loneliness that the narrator experiences during his stay in Egypt. And it is this incident which immediately strikes the narrator, as soon as he is told about Nabeel’s being alone to face the war in Iraq, as most of his friends and relatives have returned to Egypt: ‘My mind went back to that evening when I first met Nabeel and Isma’il: how Nabeel had said: ‘It must make you think all the people you left at home when you put that kettle on the stove with just enough water for
yourself. It was hard to think Nabeel alone, in a city headed for destruction.’ [Ibid: 353] Nabeel’s pathetic story ends on a very sad, pessimistic note by the narrator suggesting his complete annihilation in the world of History. In brief, the roots of man’s alienation are found in the life of Nabeel.

The novel ends with his last visit to Egypt in 1990, just three weeks after the 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.

The novel is divided into four parts—*Lataifa, Nashawy, Mangalore, and Going Back*. It began with Prologue and ends with Epilogue. The section *Lataifa* narrates the episode of his stay at Ali’s house where novelist has been brought by Doctor Aly Issa, Prof. in the University of Alexandria and one of the most eminent anthropologist in the Middle East. The novelist writes about Abu Ali that he is such an unlovable person that none in the neighborhood as well as in his family like him. Through the Abu Ali’s house novelist comes in contact with Saikh Musa who is kind and helps novelist in many ways. His two sons Ahmed and Hasan exhibit the changed way of life due to education. Ghosh in his section, focus on Arab laws of religion and celebration of random festivals. He writes about cultural strangle-hold of Ramdan on people as well as on whole of village - and thereby exposes social and cultural history of Egypt. Simultaneously with his, the episodes of Historical research regarding Geniza—(Historical stores houses) documents and historical details of Ben Yiju and his slave MS-H6 are described giving minute details. These episodic stories of fiction as well as research investigation made by Ghosh have linkage to the plot of the novel up to the end.
The section titled as *Nashawy* describes Ghosh’s visit to *Lataifa* after 8 years and narrates the story of social and cultural changes of Egypt and introducing two characters – Nabeel and Ismail, both students of agricultural training college in Damanhour. Both are very fine young men full of aspiration with open mindedness to modern ideas. Both hail Ustaz Sabry their teacher on his art of arguments. Through the novel, Ghosh evokes Nabeel’s father was working as labourer on other people’s land and hence poor. The section also describes the novelist’s personal encounters with Imam about hot discussion over development of Egypt and India about customs about, ‘Prior claim to the technology of Modern science.’ [Ibid: 193] In this matter novelist writes: ‘I was crushed as I walked away it seemed to me that the Imam and I had participated in our own final defeat.’ [Ibid: 194] Here Ghosh tries to unite two plots one of Ben Yiju’s story and other of his visits to Egypt.

The section *Mangalore* comes alive in the vivid description of the place given by the novelist. He gives panoramic view of *Mangalore* in following words: ‘Seen from the sea, on a clear day, Mangalore can take a newcomer’s breath away. It sits upon the tip of a long finger of steeply rising land, a ridge of hills which extends and of a towering knuckle of peaks in the far distance. Two rivers meet around the elliptical curve of the fingertip to form a great palm-fringed lagoon, using tranquil under quicksilver sky.’ [Ibid: 197]

The section *Mangalore* deals with Ben Yiju’s stay in Mangalore of south west coast of India. It provides an of account of Ben Yiju and his slave Bhoma as well as flourishing trade through Egyptians and Arabic traders with Indian Merchants mostly Gujarat merchants Ghosh writes: ‘They evidently played a significant role in the economy of Malabar in Ben Yiju’s time and were probably instrumental in the management of international trade: Madmun, for one, was on cordial terms
with several members of the Gujarati trading community of Mangalore, Whom he kept informed trends in markets of the Middle East.’ [Ibid: 228] Life of Ben Yiju and middle age relationship between Egypt and India including trade relationship come to end, when the Portuguese invaded Indian ports including Div of Gujarat and Mangalore and Calicut of south west coast of India in 1509 AD. Ghosh concludes this as: ‗Soon, the remains of the civilization that had brought Ben Yiju to Mangalore were devoured by Unquenchable demonic thirst that has raged ever since, for almost five hundred years over the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf.’ [Ibid: 237] Thus, the novel severely expresses disapproval of the colonizer and his lust for power in the sub-continent of Asia.

Amitav Ghosh has an outstanding sense of history, geography and anthropology. History can be interpreted and defined not only as a biography of kings and queens but also as a record of lives, participations, contributions made and impacts felt by ordinary people in a particular period and time of history. The reason behind such a proposition is,

the undeniable challenge that history of unhistorical people in Ghosh’s seem to pose against the traditional documented historiography which has so far attempted to trace, recapture and record lives of only great figures of the past. [http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/]

It is really very difficult to define a historical novel through it has displayed imaginary story about the past and also careful reconstruction of people and events based on serious research of historical facts. However, Encyclopedia Britanica expresses the historical novel as:
While before First World War the historical novel was popular because of its colour and its background after the war it was the pragmatically that was sought for in it. It was popular because it strengthened in the reader illusion of reality and imported to him a conviction of documentary evidence and reliability.

[Encyclopedia: 1953: 577]

Historical novel is an attempt to present a vivid and clear environment of antiquated past, where people were alive leading their life according to conditions prevailing at their time. Those, who consider the history as dry, are satisfied by going through the pages of historical novel.

Historical novelist by blending the characters with life of past, recreated the spirit of time to relive the past. Such are the methods and nature of historical novels of earlier times. It is said that the past has always attracted civilized man to know the past as the matter of interest. The modern novels are not historical novels altogether but historical events or happenings are evoked in the novel making it historical novel partially. R. K. Dhawan points out historical novel as:

A historical novel is nothing but an evaluation of a segment of historical reality as projected by the novelist whose techniques of writing fiction enable him to describe his vision of world-vision.

[Dhawan: 1999: 14]

Historically, In An Antique Land throws light on life in India of 12th century. The novel portrays the repercussion of villagers of Lataifa in the Iran-Iraq war. It also portrays the world of trade and commerce in Indian Ocean the Arabian Sea, and Persian Gulf. As a historical novelist, Amitav Ghosh brings creative imagination
to bear upon the dry facts of historians and antiquarian and also out of mass of scattered historical materials greened from a variety of sources, evolves a picture having a fullness and unity of a work of art.

As a student of social anthropology, the novelist was leafing through manuscripts. He read about the very same Tunisian Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yiju who came to India around A. D. 11130. Ben Yiju, who lived in India from seventeen years, married a Nair woman, acquired an Indian ‘slave’, Bomma, a native of Tulunad. Bomma was with his master when he went back to Egypt in the last years of his life. The novelist writes: ‘I was a student, twenty-two years old, and I had recently won a scholarship awarded by a foundation established by a family of expatriate Indians. It was only a few months since I had left India and so I was perhaps a little more befuddled by my situation than students usually arc. At that moment the only thing I knew about my future was that I was expected to do research leading towards a doctorate in social anthropology. I had never heard of the Cairo Geniza before that day, but within a few months I was in Tunisia, learning Arabic. At about the same time the next year, 1980, I was in Egypt, installed in a village called La aîfa, a couple of hour’s journey to the south-east of Alexandria. I knew nothing then about the Slave of MS H.6 except that he had given me a right to be there, a sense of entitlement.’ [Ghosh: 1992: 19] It shows an affection of a young researcher who emotionally attached to the subject of his research.

The historical narrative of In An Antique Land reveals Abraham Ben Yiju and his Indian slave named Bomma. It is not easy to present the facts of history in a narrative vein. But, like a master craftsman Amitav Ghosh has intermingled history and narrative with a rare craftsmanship in the story of Ben Yiju. The job was simply beautiful like arranging the world materials in historical sequence and
building up the complete account of twelfth century out of the fragmentary documents. Characters and events are viewed from the perspective of the historical research and that makes the narratives appear a truthful account.

In *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh describes his historical research. It contains lively narrative of his travels between Egypt and India. The significance of these two countries here is that both can be considered postcolonial, and although they might be considered Third World today, they are both antique lands. So they have been home to very advanced civilizations in their long histories. In this journey, the novelist retraces ancient trade routes between India and the Middle East, and calls to mind travels that occurred outside the European history of travel.

As an Indian, both Egyptians and Indians respond to him as one who might share a similar cultural background, and whose countries have built up historical allegiances. Ghosh is introduced by his Egyptian host as ‘a student from India ... a guest who had come to Egypt to do research. It was their duty to welcome me into their midst and make me feel at home because of the long traditions of friendship between India and Egypt. Our countries were very similar, for India like Egypt was largely an agricultural nation and the majority of its people lived in villages, like the Egyptian fellaheen, and ploughed their land with cattle. Our countries were poor, for they had been ransacked by imperialists, and now they were both trying in very similar ways to cope with poverty and all the other problems that had been bequeathed to them by their troubled histories.’ [Ghosh: 1992: 135] A further example of Ghosh not occupying the privileged position of the Western traveler is in his defensive responses to the Imam's (Muslim priest or chief) charges of backwardness in Ghosh’s Hindu culture. The Imam attacks Ghosh for being one of those people who burn their dead and worship cows. Amitav Ghosh
and the Imam end up arguing about whether India or Egypt is more advanced using the measure of what destructive power each side's military could muster.

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 had gathered on the courtyard of the owner, waiting specially for Amitav Ghosh who had been invited to give his expert opinion, examined the machine. In 1988, he finds refrigerator in every others house, new brick building in place of adobe houses, calculators, TV sets, cassette 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.

Today the Egyptians have become modern but the main thing that made a transition from old to modern is the western culture. Once people from different universities came and took away the letters from Synagogue. Then after a research the history of the old Egypt came out. The present people of Egypt have discovered about their past through this history. Interestingly, the letter which sparked Ghosh's initial interest turned out to have been part of the most important single collection of medieval documents ever discovered. And what is striking about the era Ghosh researches is that harmony existed among Muslims, Jews and Hindus. Through the historical story, Ghosh demonstrates that the cultural and
religious mixing prompted by globalization does not have to result in the hatred and mistrust we 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. Here, 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 prosperity brought about by globalization can improve peoples' lives, conversely, he makes it clear that if globalization's benefits are temporary or only available to a few, it can also lead to hopelessness and despair.

As a researcher Ghosh has visited Egypt, village Lataifa and encountered the social and religious reflection of the people. He has constructed the accounts of his experiences and put forth in a form of novel however In An Antique Land is not merely a novel but also a presentation of history flourishing trade between India and Egypt in 12th century. He also came across Tunisian Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yiju, who comes to India via Egypt and marries Indian girl, Ashu and remains in India away from his home and family in Egypt. Ghosh writes: ‘Despite its brevity and suddenness of its termination, there is one fact the passage serve to establish beyond any doubt. It proves that Ben Yiju’s departure for India was not entirely voluntary – that something had happened in Aden that made it difficult for him to remain there or to return.’ [Ibid: 129]
Amitav Ghosh has evaluated of two historical events, one Ancient and the other recent history. Regarding to this K. C. Bolliappa comments:

"Indeed our world is full of Ismails and Nabeels. One can learn lesson from history if only one is willing. As Oscar Wilde has put it, ‘Man learns from experience that he never learns from experience’. And so history continues to be continuers, flowing process where the same things occur again and again. Individuals like Ismail survive because their desire for possessing consumer good is not inexorable but men like Nabeel have no hope as they want to stay on in a city ‘headed for destruction. [Bolliappa: 1996: 65]

It does not seem in concern with history or fiction. It is for third world workers to awaken their life from such presentation. The novel focuses on the troubles arising out of migration. There are two sections: one as regards research conducted by Amitav Ghosh as a doctoral research, student and other fictional characters based on his visit to Egypt, Nashawy and Lataifa.

While elaborating the business communication and language of Ben Yiju’s time, novelist conveys the pleasant-sounding association of human beings of different caste religion and geographical backgrounds. Regarding to this Ghosh writes: ‘In matter of business, Ben Yiju’s networks appear to have been wholly indifferent to many of those boundaries that are today thought to mark social, religious and geographical divisions.’ [Ghosh: 1992: 27 ] He further wrote about the language of Ben Yiju’s time as: ‘The Arab geographer Masudi refers, in fact, to a language called “Lariyya” which he describes as being spoken along much of the length of
the Malabar Coast.’ [Ibid] It shows that how Ghosh stress the historical evidence of the language of Ben Yiju’s time.

The colonial discourses have constructed binaries of East and West. The West is represented as cultured, advanced, capable, enterprising, intelligent, and humane and so on, whereas the East is represented as uncivilized, primitive, incapable, dull, unkind and so on. In *In an Antique Land* cross-examine the boundaries created between the East and the West. Bomma, a member of the fisher community, climbed the ladder of business hierarchy from an agent to, ‘Sheikh’. He successfully carried on the business activities in the Middle East countries on behalf of Ben Yiju. The records reveal that the fisher community of Malabar region had very good contact with foreigners. The question is how it could be possible for such men to achieve success in their field if they were uncivilized, incapable, primitive, and dull as the colonizers constructed and represented them. For colonizers ‘the interests of the powerful defined necessity, while the demands of the poor appeared as greed.’ [Ibid: 94] The precious documents of Geniza illustrate how cultured and scholarly those people were. Because of their invaluable value the Geniza documents are preserved in the libraries of Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton and other world famous universities. Therefore, it is very clear that the other was created and naturalized rather than natural. In fact it is the colonizers who have behaved as they represent the colonized.

The phrase ‘traveling in the West’ presents an argument between Ghosh and an Imam. They are ‘traveling in the West’ by using modern technology of violence as a benchmark of civilization and are equating the height of civilization to the West. ‘Traveling in the West’ is a way of perceiving the world with or the experience of living under the influence of the imperialist system of representation. This system involves ethnic essentialism and binary opposition. It is worthwhile to describe the
experiences germane to ‘traveling in the West’ and subvert Western ideology with the concept of Hybridity both textually and officially.

The concept Hybridity as a theoretical approach sets out to problematize the naturalized myths of distinct and separate racial or cultural entities. It spawns from Bhabha’s criticism on cultural diversity. Bhabha proposes Hybridity as a theoretical approach to look at cultural contacts. He argues that the concept of cultural diversity implies a system of transparent norm defined by the dominant culture to give niches to the other cultures within its own framework. The strategies deployed by Ghosh to question the credulity of the dominant Western discourses in cross-cultural encounters, history and knowledge. While Ghosh agrees with the power of the approach of Hybridity in subverting imperialist values, it should be noted that his works also call to attention the problems of this approach. However, the philosophical mystery of whether the concept of Hybridity starts out with ideas of cultural essentialism is not resolved by Ghosh in his works.

*In An Antique Land* exposes the power of hybridization in literary forms. It is not only illustrates the influences of colonization on the world’s ideologies regarding the West and the East, but it is a hybrid form of travelogue, history and cultural ethnographic research which also marks Ghosh’s attempt to write back to the empire and the discursive imperial discourse that still operate in the postcolonial world. He writes back to western realities on the power relations between the West and it’s others by questioning the Western representation of cross-cultural history and Western paradigm in ethnographic research which place the West and the ethnographer in more superior positions than the non-west and the subjects of studies. Hybridity questions traditional Western historiography and suggests more re-reading of the past through various forms of histories such as the novel, folklore
and myths – stories that have been considered peripheral by the dominant paradigm. Ghosh’s challenge to Western historiography is a call for the urgency to tackle morality, particularly the morality of history. By re-imagining and reconstructing the suppressed stories of these margins, Ghosh gives voice to the disempowered and silenced.

*In An Antique Land* even more explicitly utilizes Hybridity to deconstruct conventional paradigms in history and anthropology. Instead of a single overarching narrative with linear structure, the novel consists of multiple time-space and mini-narratives. Connecting the medieval past with the modern, the parallel time-space levels deny clear boundaries used in conventional historical periods, suggesting that history is continuous and without closure. Historical as well as narrative continuity is contested here. This opens up the past to contemporary interpretation and imagination.

In addition, *In An Antique Land* comprises mini-narratives of various kinds, from Ghosh’s own experience to framed narratives, e.g. the author’s own memory of the riots, folk legend of a local saint’s tomb recounted by Zaghloul—a weaver who loves to tell stories, the story of the settlement of a manslaughter incident in the village, Bomma and Ben Yiju’s life. All these are informed by Ghosh’s textual research, the taletellers’ and Ghosh’s imaginations, gossips and folklores. Hence, Hybridity noticeable itself in a multitude of ways in the *In An Antique Land*: through races, cultural identities, language and literary genre.

The novel is narrated in the first person point of view to tell about the contemporary narrative of the novel. The narrator goes to *Lataifa, Nashawy* and *Mangalore* and records his findings. Like the traditional first person, the narrator doesn’t depict everything from his point of view. The life and culture narrate
themselves rather than being narrated. He lives among and holds conversation with the people of these villages. Through these conversations the novel unfolds itself. In concerned to medieval narrative, the novel has been reconstructed by letters and documents. Ben Yiju’s origin, background, tastes, family, networks of relationship, stay, and business are all revealed through the letters written by his mentor, friends and him. So also, trade, cultural and other relationships between India and Egypt are elicited from the Geniza documents. Thus, by bringing in conversations, documents and letters within the first person narrative Ghosh interrogates the boundaries between narrative strategies. So, it is not a mere juxtaposition of medieval narrative and contemporary narrative, rather coalescing of them ideologically for better understanding.

5.3. Summing Up:

Thus, the narrative of the novel shifts from personal to historical. All the four parts provides details of the glimpse of India’s sea faring merchants, their adventure and encounter with several countries through the stories of Ben Yiju and his slave Booma in 12th century. It throws light on the life in India of 12th century as well as the repercussion of villagers of Lataifa in the Iran-Iraq war. It portrays the world of trade and commerce in Indian Ocean the Arabian Sea, and Persian Gulf. The apprentice technique is used by Ghosh to interpret the history and its effect on individual. The novel portrays the world of trade and commerce in Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. While beginning at In An Antique Land, Bharati A. Parikh express the novel as:

*To quote Milan Kundera, a modern novel should accomplish the supreme intellectual synthesis which In An Antique Land does attain. It satisfies our longing for the far off lands as well as*
A Colonial Desire And Hybridity In The Selected Fiction Of Amitav Ghosh: A Post-Colonial Study

India’s prime achievement in the by gone era in the field of navigation. [Parikh: 2001: 150]

Amitav Ghosh’s novels show the modern trend of historical novel. Modern novels cannot be exclusively classified under the category of historical novels as they deal with the history as a base for framing new interpretation of various ideologies and philosophies with reference to individual rather than the whole of mankind. Amitav Ghosh, as a historical novelist, who brings creative imagination to bear upon the dry facts of historians and antiquarian and also out of mass of scattered historical materials greened from a variety of sources, evolves a picture having a fullness and unity of a work of art.
A Colonial Desire And Hybridity In The Selected Fiction Of Amitav Ghosh: A Post-Colonial Study

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