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Chapter II

The Socio-Political and Historical facets of Indianness and their Reflections in Ghosh's Novels

As one of the ancient civilizations of India, its society has its own peculiarities like others. The word 'society' refers to people in general, living together in communities. These communities are formed based on region, customs, race, caste, religion, language, etc. Each community has its own way of thinking, living, tradition, practices and general aims. So it becomes a great task for a novelist to know the social background of each community to narrate his story realistically and effectively. Besides, the novelist must be able to trace out the changes taken place in the life and vision of those communities. Generally, writers raise their voice against the evil customs and outdated practices prevailing in a community, convincing the readers narrating realistic pictures from actual life.

The caste system has been practised in the Indian society for centuries. It originated in the division of functions and responsibilities of agrarian societies among the Aryans. They divided all members of the society into four castes - the Brahmin (priest), the Kshatriya (soldiers and feudal lords), the Vaishya (farmers and shopkeepers) and the Sudra (menial job - doers). Later the Sudras became the outclass in the society and they were forced to do the menial jobs like removing human excrements. Besides, its members were forbidden entry into the temples and they were punished severely for any sort of physical contacts with upper caste Hindus. That was how they were known as untouchables. Thus, untouchability became a salient feature of the Aryan society. In order to maintain such a system, the responsible persons of the society encouraged segregation and curtailed free mingling among the people.

The phenomenon of caste system has always been more controversial than any other aspects of Indian social and cultural life. Since the days of the British rule both historians and anthropologists referred to India as a 'caste society'. Many point out that this is an overstatement about the importance of caste in Indian society. At the same time, we know that if a person is born as a low caste, he has to remain an untouchable till his death. Such a person is not allowed to learn Sanskrit or any kind of scripts or even Vedas, to equip himself with the power of knowledge to improve his lot. His 'dharma' is to work always for the upper-caste. For several centuries, caste constituted the core of social life in India. Yuval Noah Harari, the anthropologist and philosopher makes the following remark about caste system in India in his most famous book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*:

The Hindu caste system and its attendant laws of purity became deeply embedded in Indian culture. Long after the Indo-Aryan invasion was forgotten, Indians continued to believe in the caste system and to abhor the pollution caused by caste mixing. Castes were not immune to change. In fact, as time went by, large castes were divided into sub-castes. Eventually the original four castes turned into 3,000 different groupings called jati (literally 'birth'). But this proliferation of castes did not change the basic principle of the system, according to which every person is born into a particular rank, and any infringement of its rules pollutes the person and society as a whole. A person's jati determines her profession, the food she can eat, her place of residence and her eligible marriage partners. Usually a person can marry only within his or her caste, and the resulting children inherit that status (155, 156).

It is true that great reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Bhimrao Ambedkar, etc. have tried their best to abolish the horrible caste system and its associated social evils like untouchability, child marriage,

fundamentalism, fanaticism, etc. Though they interfered effectively to discourage the above-mentioned social evils they could not uproot them completely from Indian society. Even after seventy years of independence these evil customs and practices are continued. The constitution of free India has forbidden the practice of untouchability in any shape or form. Besides, it has granted to Harijans, special privileges and safeguards in order to ensure equality of treatment and status to them. There is provision for reservation to the posts in government services. Special facilities have been granted to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes regarding their representation in the public services. Various voluntary organisations have come forward to ensure equal status for them. Educational facilities such as free tuition, stipends, scholarships and the provision of free books, stationery and other equipments have been assured. Concessions such as exemption in age limits, relaxation in standard of eligibility and qualifications, selection on minimum-efficiency basis and inclusion for promotion have also been extended to them. Despite all these administrative steps and social efforts, this cancer in our society has not been completely eradicated. The Indian English writers have selected these themes in their works and presented them very touchingly to make reformation in the attitude of the society.

Many Indian English novelists have raised their voice against this inhuman injustice prevailing among Indian society. They have mixed imagination with sharp realities harmoniously. Their novels depict the deplorable condition of the untouchables, the atrocities inflicted on them by the caste Hindus and their humble position in the society. The prominent among them and their works are the following:

Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (1935)

R.K. Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955)

Ruth Praver Jhabwala, *The Nature of Passion* (1956)

Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997)

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* is an indictment against the cruelty and prejudices of the higher caste people towards the lower castes. This work is regarded as one of the first strong protests against the horrible caste system in Indian society. It questions the mode of disposal of the garbage by a particular section of society called 'untouchables'. The novelist records honestly the wretched living conditions and unhygienic surroundings of the low caste people.

R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for Mahatma* highlights the miserable plight of the untouchables and records the atrocities inflicted on them by caste Hindus. The Harijan Colony where Gandhi stayed with the city sweepers was the worst area of the town. There the huts were just hovels put together with rags. The scavengers living there did all the menial works for the upper class including the removal of nightsoil. But the municipal council didn't extend any of its services to the poor people living in those gutters. The novelist comments, "Deep into the night, their voice could be heard, for alms, in all the semi-dark streets of Malgudi" (37).

Ruth Praver Jhabwala depicts another negative aspect of caste system in her second novel *The Nature of Passion*. The protagonist in this novel is Lalaji who is a typical high caste Hindu businessman. He makes use of his high caste connections to flourish his business kingdom. Even in the marriage of his youngest daughter he gives more importance not to her will and pleasure, but to his caste, religious and business interests. The novelist hints that caste system in India is used ruthlessly by many not to keep the purity of their races but as a means to make more money.

The harmful aspects of caste system prevailed in India, especially in Travancore of Kerala, is clearly brought out in the novel, *The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy. Most

of the Indian English novelists present caste system as an integral part of the Hindu way of thinking and living. But Arundhati Roy connects it with Christianity and shows how it functions in the so-called Christian communities. She introduces Velutha, a young untouchable boy belonging to Paravans community among the low - caste Hindus, as the representative of outcastes in the society. The problem of untouchability and the condition of the Paravans reflect Indian social realism in the novel. Mammachi remembers how the Paravans were treated in her childhood:

Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their foot prints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. In Mammachi's time, Paravans like other untouchables, were not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (74)

The untouchables were not permitted to enter into the houses of upper caste through the front door. That is why Velutha comes to Pappachi's house through the back door. The Paravans are not allowed to touch the household articles used by the high caste people. Both Velutha and his father are humble servants very much servile to Pappachi's family. Velutha has an illegal affair with Ammu, a divorcee of two children. When Baby Kochamma happens to know their relationship, her reaction is something unimaginable. She says, "How could she stand by the smells: haven't you noticed, they have a particular smell? These Paravans." (78) This sentence is enough to throw light about the attitude of other people towards the untouchables in Kerala. The situations presented in the novel about the pitiable condition of these people are more or less the same in other states of our country even in our modern times.

Caste system and untouchability in Ghosh's novels

Ghosh depicts the real picture of the caste system prevalent in India during the 19th century in the first few chapters of the novel, *Sea of Poppies*. Untouchability, a social evil closely associated with caste system prevailed strongly among the residents of the village. According to this practice, if a higher caste individual happens even to view an untouchable quite accidentally, it would pollute him. So Hukam Singh, the husband of Deeti, an upper-class Hindu takes special attention not to view Kalua, his carriage driver an untouchable, while travelling in his bullock cart going to the opium factory in Ghazipur, three miles away:

Kalua, the driver of the ox-cart, was a giant of a man, but he made no move to help his passenger and was careful to keep his face hidden from him: he was of the leather-workers' caste and Hukam Singh, as a high - caste Rajput, believed that the sight of his face would bode ill for the day ahead. Now, on climbing into the back of the cart, the former sepoy sat facing to the rear, with bundle balanced on his lap, to prevent its coming into direct contact with any of the driver's belongings. Thus, they would sit, driver and passenger as the cart creaked along the road to Ghazipur conversing amicably enough, but never exchanging glances (4).

The cruelty done to the untouchables by the upper class surpasses all our imagination. There were three young scions, thakur - sahibs in Ghazipur, who were much addicted to gambling. They heard about Kalua's physical prowess and promised him an ox-cart for participating in the wrestling matches on behalf of them. He became victorious in all those matches. Eventually he suffered his first defeat in the presence of the Maharaja of Benares. The three landlords humiliated him at first mating him with a well-known prostitute, Hirabai.

Later they forced him to mate with a large black mare. They enjoyed themselves much the cruel scene:

Suddenly, with a swish of its tail, the mare defecated unloosing a surge of dung over Kalua's belly and thighs. This excited yet more laughter from the three men. One of them dug his whip into Kalua's buttocks: Arre Kalua! Why don't you do the same?(57).

Even the colonial people were passive to the injustice done in the name of caste. Bhyro Singh, the foreman of the *Ibis* seeks permission for sixty lashes to be inflicted on Kalua the untouchable for his elopement with Deeti, an upper caste widow, and his wish is granted by the British Captain of the *Ibis*. The captain was sure that Kalua would certainly die before the flogging came to an end.

Ghosh has done his best as a writer to criticize the traditional caste system in India. There is no exaggeration in saying that he performs the role of a social reformer, especially in the case of caste system. He has applied this commitment to abolish our caste system in his writing wherever it is possible. It is directly evident in the novel *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

The narrative of the story develops at three different levels. In the first one comes Antar, an Egyptian computer clerk who works day and night all alone on his super intelligent computer named Ava. He tries to relocate the adventures of an India born American scientist L. Murugan. He tries to find out the reason behind the incomprehensible fact that Murugan disappeared in Calcutta in 1995. The second level of the story – line is true and historical which revolves around the British Scientist Ronald Ross, who discovered the manner in which Malaria is conveyed by the mosquito in 1902. The third level describes the super human powers of Mangala and Laakhan. At this level Ross's achievement is reduced to a

mere, subordinate activity which, is controlled by more potent power of Mangala and Laakhan.

Ghosh mentions that an Austrian clinician Julius Von Wagner Jauregg was actually ahead of Ronald Ross on malaria research. But even before the Austrian in the 1890s, Mangala, a sweeper woman had achieved remarkable success in this field. Mangala and Laakhan belong to the very lowest rung of Hindu caste system. Mangala of the sweeper caste is worshipped in blood and flesh as well as years after as an image. Ghosh believes strongly that the great supporters of truth, science and higher knowledge can be a 'dhooley bearer' like Laakhan and a sweeper woman Mangala. He demolishes the false concept that class superiority and right to knowledge go together. Here is wishful undoing of Indian caste system and an assertion of the right to knowledge irrespective of class, caste, creed, culture and colour. Twice in the course of the novel, Laakhan is shown as a torch bearer; metaphorically a bearer of knowledge. Ghosh further universalizes the theory by making people of all religious background accepting the entire drama. Hindus (Murugan, Sonali, Urmila), Muslims (Saiyad Murad Hussain alias Phulboni, Antar) and Christians (Mrs. Aratounian and Countess Pongracz) – all accept the transmigration of souls.

As a philanthropist and writer, Ghosh has raised his voice against this inhuman social practice in his novel *The Hungry Tide*. While narrating the history of the island of Lusibari, he highlights his displeasure on the caste system in India. Sir Daniel Hamilton, a Scottish colonialist, had bought ten thousand acres of the Sundarbans from the forestry department in order to establish a community with new agricultural projects. He invited deprived people to come and settle in his estate on one condition that there would be no caste system and no tribal self rules. Ghosh writes,

‘Everyone who was willing to work was welcome, S’ Daniel said, but on one condition. They could not bring all their petty little divisions and differences. Here there would be no Brahmins or Untouchables, no Bengalis and no Oriyas. Everyone would have to live and work together’. (HT, 51).

Despite the crocodiles, tigers, snakes and dangerous tides in the Sundarbans, many desperately poor people accepted his call and came to live in this semi –communist region where the inhabitants shared all their possessions. Sir Daniel Hamilton built a house in the new settlement called ‘Lusibari’, a pidgin version of ‘‘Lucy’s House’’. Lucy was Hamilton’s wife who had sadly died on her way from England to join him in a shipwreck. Though she never came to the house that had been built for her, people used to call it Lusi’rbari. Later they preferred its shortened form ‘Lusibari’ and that was how the island got the name.

There is good resemblance to Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* and Velutha, an ‘‘untouchable’’ in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. It is found that like Fokir, Velutha possesses a special connection to the river that runs through the village of Ayemenem where the story happens. Fokir dies in a natural disaster and Velutha meets his death due to cruel torture in a local police station. Roy presents Velutha to Ammu through these words: ‘‘As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she saw that the world [his feet] stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. He moved so easily through it (Roy 333-34). Ghosh presents Fokir as having the ‘‘river in his veins’’ and the unique capacity to see ‘‘right into the river’s heart.’’ Both Fokir and Velutha know well their local surroundings and every objects around them and they represent indigenous wisdom. Shakti Jaising has made an interesting observation about these two characters in his essay:

Following his (Velutha) death and in the context of Ayemenem's increasing destruction by the tourism industry, Velutha emerges as a symbol of lost wholeness. Like *The God of Small Things*, *The Hungry Tide* responds to the devastation of rural ecology and culture by depicting Fokir as bearing an organic and stable connection to the natural world.(81)

Deeti is the first character presented in the opening of both *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. She is an illiterate and widowed poppy farmer from Bihar who is endowed with a gift of vision. She has been familiar only with a landlocked existence in her native province. She experiences a complete strange situation of the *Ibis*. Francoise Lionnet has made an interesting observation about how Ghosh has presented the histories of slavery and indenture through fictional characters:

'As nerve center of the coolie trade and final destination of several central characters(of Indian, Chinese, African, American, and European descent) in the *Ibis* trilogy, Mauritius is a narrative thread that runs through *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. In both volumes, Deeti sets the tone: we learn that after being widowed, she was saved from certain death by sati and signed up to join the *girmitiyas* (indentured) travelling to the plantations of Mauritius. Her drawings serve as an alternate form of narration and insight in Ghosh's trilogy, as he successfully brings together the histories of slavery and indenture.'(306)

Ghosh's medium of expression is English. For many years he has been based in New York. Thus he remains physically and emotionally connected to America and, outside India. It is a fact that his popular and academic audience is primarily the Anglo-American world. Even then Ghosh decisively and continuously interpolates Asia into U.S.literature and

consciousness. India is absolutely central to his output, his interpretation of it is heavily localized. Presenting Indian characters, especially Bengali and West Bengal setting, he demonstrates his real commitment to his motherland. Ruth Maxey, the critic has mentioned Ghosh's this aspect in his article, "Beyond National Literatures: Empire and Amitav Ghosh" in the following words:

‘Ghosh’s belief in a collective Indianness is reflected in *The Hungry Tide*, where the tide country seems to offers freedom from caste, the promise of social mobility and Indian belonging for NRIS, and in *Sea of Poppies*, where the indentured collective on board the *Ibis* allows a common Indianness to prevail over old caste designations.’

The state of being a widow in India is quite miserable. Formerly she was forced to perform ‘sati’ and it refers to the former practice in Hinduism of a wife burning herself with the body of her dead husband. Hinduism does not permit remarriage for widows and it is applicable only in the case of women. In the case of a man, if his wife dies, he can marry as he pleases. Hinduism interprets that widowhood is the result of predestiny and karma. It says that a woman becomes a widow only because of her karma. Therefore, Hindu widows have to remain widows all their lives. She has to be tonsured and forbidden from marrying again. She has no right to have children and to enjoy a normal life. However, men are exempted from these things. Moreover, the widows of other religions don't follow such a cruel and inhuman practice. Being an anthropologist Ghosh is determined to eliminate these callous practices from Indian social life convincing the readers its injustice done only to women. He highlights such situations in life most realistically and turn the people to act against the age-old customs from our society.

Ghosh's reformatory approach to performing *sati* in *Sea of Poppies*

The plight of an Indian widow was shocking. The patriarchal system regarded that women's existence should lose 'its rationale once the husband was dead.' (Sakunthala Narasimhan, *Empowering Women: An Alternative Strategy from Rural India*. 51).

The untimely death of Hukam Singh is a terrible blow to Deeti, but her relatives take it as a golden chance to enhance the prestige of the family by forcing her to perform 'sati' (widow burning ceremony). Sati refers to the former practice in Hinduism of a widow burning herself, either willingly or by force, with the body of her dead husband. When Deeti's husband Hukam Singh's health condition grew worse a few weeks before, her brother-in-law Chandan Singh came near to her and promised the position of a 'mistress' in the case of her husband's death. He assured her if she kept him happy, he would look after her well. But she reacted sharply to him: "I will burn on my husband's pyre rather than give myself to you" (158). It means that she has taken a strong decision to perform *Sati* after her husband's death. Here Ghosh reveals the reasons why many a widow was ready to perform *Sati* in the past. As far as a Hindu widow is concerned, death is more welcome than being dependent on her relatives and kin.

Ghosh describes the ritual of performing *sati* in detail. It is a strange experience to a modern reader. Here the novelist is not a mere silent spectator to a horrible scene. Instead he comes forward with a clear-cut solution. On one evening while Kalu was coming back to his village, he happened to meet two unknown travellers and knew from them about the death of Hukam Singh, the former sepoy. He came to the scene and assumed that there was already an arrangement for performing 'sati' by Deeti. For the time being he forgot that he was a mere bullock cart driver and an untouchable belonging to the chamar caste, whereas Deeti was the wife of an uppercaste man. He has seen her before when he takes her husband back home

from the Ghazipur Opium factory while he is sick. However, Kalua decides to save Deeti's life from performing 'sati'.

'Kalua observed the whole scene concealing himself from others. The pyre was arranged on a great mound of wood, on the banks of the Ganga. Hukam Singh's body was carried out of his dwelling, in procession, and laid upon the mound. A second procession was headed by Deeti, covered in white sari.

Half dragged and half carried, she was brought to the pyre and made to sit cross-legged on it, beside her husband's corpse. Now there was an outbreak of chanting as heaps of kindling were piled around her, and doused with ghee and oil to ready them for the fire' (177).

Kalua waited until the pyre was lit and everyone was intent upon the progress of the flames. He crept down to the edge of the crowd and rose to his feet. He cleared a path through the crowd like a hurricane. People fled to different places like cattle. Then he did the impossible:

'Racing to the mound, Kalua placed the platform against the fire, scrambled to the top, and snatched Deeti from the flames. With her inert body slung over his shoulder, he jumped back to the ground and ran towards the river, dragging the now - smouldering bamboo rectangle behind him, on its rope. On reaching the water, he thrust the platform into the river and placed Deeti upon it. Then, pushing free of the shore, he threw himself flat on the improvised raft and began to kick his heels in the water, steering out towards midstream. All of this was the work of a minute or two and by the time Chandan Singh and his cohorts gave chase, the river had carried Kalua and Deeti away from the flaming pyre, into the dark of the night.' (177)

Later we see that Kalua helps Deeti to board a ship named *Ibis* that carries slaves or indentured labourers from Calcutta to Mauritius. They begin a new life after boarding the ship . Deeti becomes Aditi and Kalua becomes Maddow Colver. Thus, Ghosh proves that ‘sati’ is neither a sacrifice nor a solution to any situation in life.

The practice of sati, the immolation of widows on their husband’s funeral pyre has been a controversial topic in postcolonial and feminist discourses. While advocates of Western modernity perceive sati as a murderous ritual, the proponents of orthodox Hinduism regard sati as a courageous cult of “wifely devotion”. In these two arguments women largely appear as “mute objects”. Barnali Sarkar examines this topic closely based on the novel Ghosh’s ‘Sea of Poppies’ in an article and finds that Ghosh has brilliantly sidlined the conundrum of polarizing representation of sati along the East-West axis and reflects instead the subjective experience of women as sati. He narrates the background of the practice of sati in India and analyzes the character Deeti in the novel in detail, and makes the following observations:

Deeti’s attempt to become a sati is not motivated by her desire to prove her purity or to bring honor to her family, as, according to Hindu religious regulations, should be the case for the practice of sati. Nor does she take the commandment of religion as her own will in her decision to mount the funeral pyre of her husband as has often been claimed by the West. Instead of nurturing the idea of sporting with her husband in heaven after her immolation, as traditional Hindu scriptures preach, Deethi decides to sacrifice her body in the funeral pyre to escape the skewed reality that threatens her in the form of frequent sexual harassments and fear of forceful accumulation of her land and property by her brother - in - law after her husband’s death (287).

Ghosh presents a model widow through the character of Tha'mma in *The Shadow Lines*. She was born in a joint family in Dhaka who was capable to bear all sufferings in her life. When she became a widow, she joined as a teacher in a school to maintain her family. She is a typical middle-class teacher who is proud in all her doings. She does not expect any sort of favour from her sister Mayadebi and husband who are immensely rich. Shubha Tiwari analyses this character from different perspectives and summarises as follows in her book, *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study* :

Tha'mma's character is a tribute to so many unrecognized women in this country who is holding the world of their children and near and dear ones together by their toil and labour. She brought up her son alone. But she never showed her vulnerability. Her extraordinarily keen observation and the unbending steel of her personality set her in a class of her own. (34)

Aparna Mujumdar asserts how Ghosh has presented modernity in the conclusion of her essay "Modernity's Others, Or Other Modernities: South Asian Negotiations with Modernity and Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*":

Ghosh's work indicates that both the political, social and economic consequences of the dissemination of the colonial state's ideologies of modernity and progress, and the responses to them, were varied, and ranged from strategic absorption to cautious negotiation, giving rise to heterogeneous and fluid configurations of modernity in the colonies, which have coexisted with practices and beliefs conventionally understood as traditional and archaic.(182)

Soon after the tragical death of her husband, Uma returned to Lankasuka, her parents' house in Calcutta. Hers was a small family: she had only one brother who was much younger

than herself. Her homecoming was not a happy one. Her father was an archaeologist and a scholar who never insisted on all the customary observances of a Hindu widow. At the same time, he was not impervious to the criticism of his neighbours. As an affectionate father he did what he could to mitigate the rigours of his daughter's situation. But as a widow living at home, she was not free from the rigid constraints and deprivation of the society: 'her hair was shaved off; she could eat no meat nor fish and she was allowed to wear nothing but white. She was twenty-eight and had a lifetime ahead of her. As the months dragged by it became clear that other solution would have to be thought of' (197).

Being the collector's wife, she had the privilege of having a very substantial pension. Besides, her husband had made many astute investments in Uma's name before his death. She had no children to look after and therefore she need not remain at home longer. In those days Uma received a letter from Dolly, inviting her to visit Rangoon. In order to escape from the plight of the widowhood in Calcutta, Uma decided to go abroad. She travelled her head covered, with a shawl to hide her shaven head. Dolly and Rajkumar welcomed her at the Barr Street Jetty, and the moment she stepped off, Dolly tore away her shawl. Later Uma went to London and America, and actively involved in the freedom struggle ongoing abroad. Thus, she saved herself from the traditional fate of an average Hindu widow.

Ghosh narrates in detail another widowhood in the case of Manju after the unexpected death of Neel in the accident in the timberyard in Rangoon. While Manju was a young girl, she had observed the shaving of a widow's head at her neighbour's house in Calcutta. A barber had come to do it and the women of the family had helped him. Nobody said anything about the things that an Indian widow had to follow in her life. Manju seated herself at her dresser, looked into the mirror and tried the scissors taken from the sewing box on her hair. Being a young woman, her hair was strong, thick and black, the blunt blades of the scissors were useless. She dropped them back into her sewing box. The baby began to cry, so Manju

shut the door on her. She went down the stairs to the kitchen and found a long, straight - bladed knife with a wooden handle. She tried it on her hair, but it also didn't help her to cut her hair. Soon she remembered the scythes that had once been used to cut the compound's grass. Ghosh describes her doings in her strange mental condition like this:

She opened the front door and ran across the compound to the outhouse. The scythes were exactly where she had thought, piled in a heap with the other gardening implements. She stood in the knee-deep grass of the compound and held up her hair, drawing it away from her head. She raised the scythe and hacked at it, blindly, because her hand was behind her head. She saw a lock of hair falling on to the grass and this gave her encouragement. She sawed at another handful and then another. She could see the pile of hair growing in the grass around her feet. The one thing she could not understand was the pain: why should it hurt so much to cut one's hair? (497)

Mr. Raymond came there at that moment, held her hands strongly and the scythe fell from her grasp. She saw that her fingers were smeared with blood. He told her gently that she had cut her scalp in her mad attempt to cut the hair. He led her into the house and made her sit in a chair. He took some cotton wool and swabbed her scalp. When the baby began to cry, he led her to the stairs. She went up a few steps and then she couldn't go any more. She couldn't bear to think of going into that room and picking up the child. She felt that her breasts had become dry. She could not do anything then. She buried her face in her hands. Raymond approached her and reminded her quietly that she was the mother of the baby. He persuaded her to stop the baby's hunger. He followed her to the room and kept watch until she picked the baby up and held to her breast. Finally when Manju was crossing river with her baby in the presence of Dolly and Rajkumar as refugees to India during the World War II,

she entrusts her baby with her mother-in-law and commits suicide by slipping from the raft into the water. Thus, her widowhood becomes complete.

Ghosh's observation of Indian widowhood is revealed in the end of the conversation between Kishan Singh and Bela. When Kishan Singh came to Lankasuka in Calcutta with Arjun to attend the wedding of Arjun's sister Manju and Neel, Bela the young girl feels a strange curiosity to the soldier in the British army and enquires his details. He explains to her that his village is a long way from Calcutta and it is near Kurukshetra where the great battle of Mahabharata was fought. Therefore, the men of their district are famous for good soldiers. Bela asks him whether he has wanted to be a soldier. He replies to her negatively and adds that he had no other choice. He describes that all men in his family his father, his grandfather and his uncles all had served in the 1/1 Jats regiment. In fact, he had wanted to go to college, but when he was fourteen his father died. His relatives urged him to join the army. That was how he had become a soldier. At once Bela shows interest about the women in their village and she asks:

'And the women in your village,' she said, 'what are they like?'

'Not like you.'

She was hurt by this. 'Why? What do you mean?'

'In a way,' he said, 'they are soldiers too. From the time they are little they begin to learn what it means to be widowed early; to bring up children without their men; to spend their lives with husbands who are maimed and crippled.' Just then she heard her mother calling her name and went running out of the room (311-312).

Ghosh has presented mainly four widows in the selected novels: Tha'mma in *The Shadow Lines*, Uma Dey and Maju in *The Glass Palace* and Deeti in *Sea of Poppies*. It seems

very clear that as a writer he is dead against this inhuman practice prevailing in Hinduism. He convinces the readers the right of widows to continue their living after death of their husbands. In the case of Tha'mma after the death of her husband, she assumes the job of a teacher, brings up her only child and manages her family without depending anyone else. She becomes a responsible paragon to all widows in future generations. Uma Dey is fortunate for having financial self-reliance as the wife of the Collector. At first, she escapes from the traditional background of Calcutta to Rangoon in Burma. From there she goes to Europe and comes to America, and there involves actively in the freedom movement of India mobilising the few patriot Indians. Thus, she finds new meaning to her life. Though the death of her husband and the dangerous circumstances of war make Manju utterly disappointed, she decides to continue her living for the sake of her child. Finally, in the case of Deeti, Ghosh becomes a reformer against the age-old practice. There a young man named Kalua comes forward and saves her adventurously from the pyre. Later as indentured labourers to Mauritius they get passage in *Ibis*. Thus, Ghosh conveys the message that we have to find out new outlets to solve these inhuman practices from our social life.

Before discussing love and marriage in Indian social conditions, we have to realise the general attitude of the people about man-woman relationship . Indian tradition observes man as powerful and ambitious but woman as meek and benign object. She is subordinate to male members of the family, carrying each and every dictate of the man with downcast eyes, and confined strictly within the four walls of the house. Man has been the master with all the strings in his hand, making her dance to his tunes. She has been subordinated to her father in her girlhood, to her husband in her adulthood and to her son in her old age. In other words, woman always has been a slave in family and society.

After independence there has been great change in the traditional concept about the role of a woman. A progressive vision giving equal importance to man and woman in society

has been developing step by step. The right for education, the right to universal franchise, the change in marital relations, the growth of a new class of working women, etc. have helped a lot to improve the status of women in society. These two attitudes about the role of a woman, traditional as well as progressive, can be seen in the Indian English novels.

Mulk Raj Anand brings forth strikingly the different phases in the development of the central character Gauri in his novel *The Old Woman and The Cow*. In the first phase, she is depicted as submissive, meek and humble like cow, according to the traditional Indian vision. She is mercilessly thrown out of her house by her husband even having ignored her pregnancy. Her mother entrusts her with a Seth at Hoshiarpur. Gradually she becomes more self-reliant and tries her best to fulfil her traditional role as a Hindu wife. Later she escapes from the Seth and goes to work in colonel Mahendra's hospital. There she learns modern values and gets ready to face the grim challenges in her life. In the last chapter, she emerges as a bold defiant woman and leaves her husband like Sita not as a helpless woman, but as a woman conscious of her rights.

It is said that love and marriage in India are closely related with race, caste, region, religion, family's financial status, etc. Child marriage is very common till recently and nobody bothers about the will and pleasure of those who are getting married. The parents of the boy and the girl decide everything. Eventually the system is known as 'arranged marriage'. Our traditional society has never encouraged love-marriages. To some extent, it is forbidden by many because there prevailed caste system and inter-caste marriage was unthinkable. Similarly, members belonging to different religions also cannot get married easily. Even if they get married, their life in the society will be a miserable one.

As a historian and anthropologist, Ghosh has studied well the varied and different aspects of love and marriage in the Indian social background. Here love and marriage are not

purely personal or individual choice, because they are closely connected with race, caste, region, religion, social status of the parents, financial status, etc. He wishes to put an end to these highly complicated social anomalies. He gives meticulous attention in crafting affairs of love and marriage of his characters. Of course, as a writer his main concern is with war and its consequences upon common people in a country. Despite political and cultural diversity Ghosh's men and women follow the dictates of their hearts rather than other considerations. This thematic preoccupation of Ghosh in presenting romantic characters makes his novels more reformatory and interesting.

Though the affair between Tridib and May Price ended in a tragedy, it gives a new dimension to love among the youngsters. Tridib, the 27-year-old Indian youth loves May Price, the 19-year-old English girl who makes her living by playing oboe in an orchestra in London. He had met her as a child in England when he had gone to stay there with his family in 1940. Since then he had been sending greetings regularly to Mrs. Price, but when he was twenty-seven, and May was nineteen he sent a separate greeting to May. After the first three letters, he sent her a pornographic letter to her.

May is a humane and sensible woman. Tridib falls in love with May. His ardent love to her leads to his premature tragical death. When she tried to save the old man from the rioters, Tridib rushed to the spot and he was murdered ruthlessly by them. Ghosh follows his own concept of love and the creation of a new world irrespective of caste, region and religion. Tridib who was born and brought up in a Hindu family in Calcutta doesn't try to think more about loving and marrying a girl, born and brought up in London. For a young man in India has to consider many things before loving and marrying a foreign girl. Ghosh regards such things as superficial and ignores them in the romance of new generation.

Ghosh speaks to the world through his selected characters. Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* is such a character. Ian Almond of Bosphorus University in Istanbul, Turkey, has made a striking observation about this character in one of his article:

Tridib appears not to know, quite literally, what on earth he is going. He has no clear role or function in life - except, of course as a memory - trainer for the young narrator; his curious, other - wordly presence, homeless and bereft of any real destination, wanders in and out of the pages of the story, peripheral to the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* yet thematically central to its ideas. For Tridib is Ghosh's archetypal imagination - more than anyone else he is creator of worlds par excellence, the one who has developed the gift of reality - fabrication to its highest, most sophisticated degree. The melancholy which his "tired, withdrawn air" seems to exude is no symptom of his imaginative powers but a condition for them. Tridib is adept at constructing place and identities precisely because he feels he has none of his own to impede the process; his homelessness is a stimulant to imagination, not a consequence of it.(97-98)

Ila means 'water' in Bengali. Like water Ila has the sparkle and fluidity of water, but like water she is forced to take shape of the container that imprisons her. Ila is a typical new generation girl. She doesn't mind others' needs, interests and difficulties. She has no capacity to understand and judge others. She lives in her own world. She has no sense of commitment to anyone else in this world. The narrator tries his best to draw her attention to him, but what he gets is a normal salute from her. She does not pay any attention to the one who loves her madly. But she loves Nick, an English boy from London who is not capable of any sincere love. Nick is white, strong and big in appearance.

Right from the beginning Nick has plans to start a business where Ila's parents are expected to invest. Ila's father purchases a flat for them in London. He even meets the expenditure for their honeymoon. After the formal registration of marriage in London, Ila, Nick and their families fly to Calcutta for 'one of the most lavish weddings'. All this fairytale stuff soon ends when she knows that Nick has slept with another woman on the previous night. All her father's aura, rank and money, her own beauty, education and everything turn against her. Her husband begins to show his true metal. Poison has already entered their marriage as it normally does into so many marriages. Ila's married life with Nick is bitter, hard and a painful one. However, there is no one else to blame for it except she herself. Their failed married life clearly brings out the East-West encounter. Ila tries her best to be a faithful wife following the Indian tradition but Nick has no such quality as a typical representative of western culture.

The Narrator's Attachment to Ila in *The Shadow Lines*

Love is a major source of pain in the novel *The Shadow Lines*. From the beginning Ila has cast her spell over the narrator. The narrator, a young Indian, enjoys a mysterious love in his relation with Ila and tries hard to make sure of her love in turn. Irony of fate works more gravely in matters of love. Ila is mad after the English youth Nick Price. In London many times he walks miles and miles to get to Ila's space, to see her, her laughter, her eyes, to feel her near him but nothing, just nothing comes from her side.

Love denotes suspension of logic. Love and logic are natural enemies. It also implies that love and every type of rationality i.e., justice, equality, etc. are antagonistic. By being irrational, love implies an uncertain, excited and confused state of mind. When one individual becomes the focal point of one's existence, everything and everyone else becomes secondary.

There is lack of control over emotional life. This is what happens in the attachment of the narrator to Ila.

Ghosh presents his idea of love and romance in the context of different countries, cultural backgrounds and life styles. He believes that the elements of race, caste, region, religion, culture, etc. are not at all obstacles to the smooth flow of genuine love. He has followed the same example in his own life. Born and brought up in a Hindu Bengali family in Calcutta, he married a Christian woman born and brought up in America. This is not a part of fiction, but something happened in his real life. So he has been able to depict such romances easily and realistically in his writing. Ghosh expresses his protest against the arranged marriage system through the character Manju in *The Glass Palace*. He writes:

She was on her own now, and she would have to think about what she was going to do with herself. So far as her mother was concerned, Manju knew, her future had already been decided: she would leave the house as someone's wife and not a day sooner. The mothers of two prospective grooms had already come calling to 'see' Manju. One of them had given her hair a discreet tug to make sure she wasn't wearing a wig: the other had made her bare her teeth as though she were a horse, pushing apart her lips with her fingers, and making faint clucking sounds. Her mother had been apologetic afterwards, but she'd made it clear that it wasn't in her power to ensure that these incidents would not be repeated: this was a part of the process. Manju knew that many more such ordeals probably lay ahead (282).

Love and marriage, and the subsequent family life of Rajkumar and Dolly in *The Glass Palace* can be pointed out as a good testimonial to Ghosh's concept of love and married life. Rajkumar, an orphan teenager from India happens to notice a royal maid in the

The Glass Palace in Mandalaya. When the Indian soldiers fighting under British evacuated King Thebaw and his family from their official residence The Glass Palace, a mob rushed to the palace for looting. The boy Rajkumar also joined the mob and happened to meet Dolly, one of the queen's maid. The novelist describes their first meeting with minimum words when the king and his family were taken to exile in Ratnagiri: "Dolly looked very small when Rajkumar spotted her. She was walking beside at all soldiers, with a small cloth bundle balanced on her head. Her face was grimy and her htameine was caked with dust" (45).

Later Rajkumar joined as a partner in Saya John's business and soon he became a successful timber merchant. He came to Ratnagiri and visited Uma Dey, the collector's wife. With her help he proposed Dolly to marry him and she reluctantly married him. Two sons - Neel and Dinu - were born to them. Rajkumar and Dolly led a happy family life with their sons for a long time. In the depiction of this married life Ghosh crosses the borders - Rajkumar from India and Dolly from Burma - lead a happy family life. Their nationhood does not become an obstacle to live together.

The Burmese Royal family were forced to lead on average middle-class family life in their exile in Ratnagiri. There they began to face new problems and the affair of the First Princess with Mohan Sawant, their coachman was one of them. The conversation between Dolly and Uma about the affair reveals the social aspects of love and marriage in Burma and India. Ghosh writes:

Dolly bit her lip, looking intently into Uma's eyes. 'If I tell you,' she said, 'will you promise not to tell the Collector?'

'Yes. Of course.'

'You promise?'

‘Solemnly. I promise.’

‘It’s about the First Princess.’

‘Yes? Go on.’

‘She’s pregnant.’

Uma gasped, her hand flying to her mouth in disbelief. ‘And the father?’

‘Mohan Sawant.’

‘Your coachman?’

‘Yes. That’s why your Kanhoji is so angry. He is Mohanbai’s uncle. Their family want the Queen to agree to a marriage so that the child will not be born a bastard’.

‘But, Dolly, how could the Queen allow her daughter to marry a coachman?’

‘We don’t think of him as a coachman.’ Dolly said sharply. ‘He’s Mohanbhai to us.’

‘But what about his family, his background?’

Dolly flicked her wrist in a gesture of disgust. ‘Oh, you Indians,’ she said.

‘You’re all the same, all obsessed with your castes and your arranged marriages. In Burma when a woman likes a man, she is free to do what she wants.’

‘But Dolly,’ Uma protested, ‘I’ve heard that the Queen is very particular about these things. She thinks there’s not a man in Burma who’s good enough for her daughters.’ [117,118]

As a keen observer of human relationships Ghosh tries to depict married life of different persons their aspirations and disappointments in life. Uma is a memorable character in this novel and she represents an average Indian woman in the beginning and later she rises to the level of an Indian deity. She enters the novel as the wife of the new collector in Ratnagiri. It is the task of the collector to look after the affairs of King The baw and his family. That is why, he decides to pay an official visit with his wife to the Outram House in Ratnagiri where they have been living in exile. Though the visit was a formal one, Uma's resourcefulness attracted Queen Supayalat. The novelist comments like this: "Self - possession was a quality she'd always admired. There was something attractive about this woman, Uma Dey; the liveliness of her manner was a welcome contrast to her husband's arrogance" (108).

Though Uma has her own attractive personality, it does not help her to become a successful wife to Collector Dey. He completed his education abroad and could not adjust with Indian views and doings. His attitude caused a disharmony in their life. Ghosh does not blame them for their situation in life. He has noted what happened with majority of Indian marriages. That is why he writes this:

...the wifely virtues she could offer him he had no use for: Cambridge had taught him to want more, to make sure that nothing was held in abeyance, to bargain for a woman's soul with the coin of kindness and patience. The thought of this terrified her. This was subjection beyond decency, beyond her imagining. She could not bring herself to think of it. Anything would be better than to submit (153).

Ghosh draws our attention to the real reason for the failure of many marriages in India. The husband and wife live together for decades without trying to know each other.

They don't care and share their innermost thoughts and feelings of each and everything. There is no chance for the great union of two minds and bodies. Here marriage is degraded to a matter of habit and ordinary ritual of life. The Collector had expected high standards of manners from his wife befitting to his status. Unfortunately, she could not rise to that expectations. From the narration it is clear that Uma does not love her husband. Incidentally, the writer hints how he first met her. He selected Uma after seeing her at a puja when she was sixteen. He wanted a modern girl who could adjust to the situations of her husband's status as a district collector. His family didn't agree with his choice of a life partner. He persisted in his decision and married Uma. Time proved that Uma was not a successful life-partner to the Collector. The Collector knew that Uma was not happy in life with him. It seems that Ghosh presents his idea of marriage through the character of Dey. He tells Uma: "To live with a woman as an equal, in spirit and intellect: this seemed to me the most wonderful thing life could offer. To discover together the world of literature, art: what could be richer, more fulfilling? But what I dreamt is not yet possible, not here, in India, not for us" (173).

Uma had known from Dolly about the affair between the First Princess and the coachman Mohan Sawant, but she didn't convey it to her husband in time. It became a setback in the official life of the collector and it led to his suicide. Soon Uma returns from Ratnagiri to her ancestral home in Calcutta. Later she travels to different parts of the world, becomes a freedom fighter and rises to the level of a busy activist.

The evil aspects of the arranged marriage system prevailing in the Indian society are clearly brought out through the marriage of Deeti with Hukam Singh. In the arranged marriage system horoscope plays a key role in fixing a marriage. Deeti's fate is being ruled by Saturn-Shani-a planet that exercised great power on those born under its influence. It often brought discord, unhappiness and disharmony to the couples. She knew this in advance and never had any high expectations about her future. She told herself that if she were ever to be

married, it would probably be to a much older man. Otherwise it would be an elderly widower who needed a new wife to nurse his children. Deeti told herself that considering her horoscope, the proposal of Hukam Singh was a better one. Her own brother, Kesari Singh, had proposed the match and had requested her to overlook the future husband's slight lameness as a minor one. Besides, she had to consider his family's connections because one of them had risen to the rank of subedar in the East India Company's army.

On the wedding night itself Deeti was deceived by her mother-in-law and her brother-in-law Chandan Singh. Her husband Hukam Singh was an addict to opium and had no potency to give birth to a child. He had the habit of smoking opium which he had learnt after he had been wounded and taken to the hospital barracks. He took a mouthful of the smoke, placed his mouth on hers and breathed it into her body himself. She felt that her lungs filled with smoke and slipped away from this world into another beautiful world. When she opened her eyes next morning there was a dull ache in her lower abdomen and a painful soreness between her legs. She noticed that her clothes were displaced and her thighs were crusted with blood. She found her husband was lying beside her undisturbed. Later she was convinced that her brother-in-law had raped her on the wedding night as she had been under the impact of the opium smoke made by her husband. Her mother-in-law was very particular to have a baby from her impotent son Hukam Singh and thus maintain the prestige of the family. She fulfilled her wish employing her other son cleverly.

Critics point out diverse aspects of Ghosh's writing recognizing him as a great contemporary Indian English writer and depicting a variety of married life is one of them. The couples he has presented in his novels are strikingly different from one to another. In the novel *The Glass Palace* Ghosh presents mainly six couples: Rajkumar and Dolly, King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat, Collector Beni Prasad Dey and his wife Uma, Matthew and his American wife Elsa, Neel and Uma Dey's niece Manju, and Dinu and Alison. In the above

mentioned couples the life of King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat is worth mentioning. King Thebaw is ineffectual and scholarly type of person whereas Queen Supayalat is an expert in cruel court intrigues and palace politics. He had no ambition to be the king of Burma. As a child he had spent several years in the palace Buddhist monastery, showed genuine interest in scriptural study and passed the difficult *patma-byan* examination at the age of nineteen. However, fate favoured Thebaw and installed him on the throne. He fell in love with one of the princesses in the palace and that was Queen Supayalat. When she became the Queen she proved her real metal. The novelist writes:

In order to protect him from her family she stripped her mother of her powers and banished her to a corner of the palace, along with her sisters and co-wives. Then she set about ridding Thebaw of this rivals. She ordered the killing of every member of the Royal Family who might ever be considered a threat to her husband. Seventy-nine princes were slaughtered on her orders, some of them new-born infants, and some too old to walk. To prevent the spillage of royal blood she had had them wrapped in carpets and bludgeoned to death. The corpses were thrown into the nearest river (38-39).

Ghosh has admitted that King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat are not fictional characters but they are historical figures in the history of Burma. As a writer he tries to give a didactic message to the readers through the character of the queen. She did along a chain of cruel activities in order to safeguard her husband's kingship. But time revenges her by sending herself and her family to live in exile for twenty years. She is subjected to utter humiliation in her captivity and thus she compensates to all her sins she did as the queen.

Male domination is an integral part of a patriarchal society and therefore it becomes an important element of Indianness. In such a system, women depend on men. Deeti herself

becomes a cruel victim to this social system. Her husband Hukam Singh is an addicted to opium and has no potency to lead a married life. Her shrewd mother-in-law knows this deficiency of her son and tackles it cleverly. Deeti is drugged opium and raped on her wedding night by her brother-in-law, Chandan Singh. Deeti is sure that her mother-in-law also is an accomplice in this cruel deed. She thinks, “...that confirmed Deeti’s belief that the child in her belly had been fathered not by her husband but by Chandan Singh, her leering, clack jawed brother-in – law” (34).

When Hukam Singh lies in his death bed, his brother Chandan Singh approaches Deeti and offers to be his keep. Besides, the social system is against woman. The property of a man who does not have a male heir would automatically go to his brother. Being the mother of a girl child, Deeti has no chance to possess her husband’s land after his death. Deeti is sure that her relatives would make her life unbearable after her husband’s death. So she decides to end her life by performing sati in her husband’s funeral pyre.

In a patriarchal society a woman has no identity at all. Her identity is closely associated with her father, husband or children. Deeti’s neighbours and relatives do not call or address her using the name given by her parents. Instead they call her ‘Kabutri-ki-ma’ which recognizes her as the mother of Kabutri. In a patriarchal society a girl child was considered as a burden while the male child was an asset to the family. The girl’s parents had to offer money and gifts to the groom to get their daughters married off. Deeti’s father had to thatch the roof of her groom’s house as a part of her dowry.

Malati, the wife of Neel Rattan Halder, is another passive sufferer of a patriarchal society that followed Hindu tradition. She performs her duties as a wife and mother without any complaints. She never complains or questions her husband’s relationship with his mistress Elokeshi. Neel’s mother was also neglected by her husband and she lived in an

isolated gloomy wing of the palace while he enjoyed with his mistresses. Later Neel is put in jail and all his estate is confiscated. Before he is deported to Mauritius as a part of the punishment, Malati comes to jail and meets him. She doesn't show any sign of ill feeling even in the complete ruin of their life. She has been forced to live in a small house. Even then she tells Neel only this to take care of himself. She suffers everything due to the mistake committed by her husband, but never complains. Ghosh becomes a master story teller in depicting Malati as a typical Indian wife who performs her duties without expecting anything.

The woman in the Indian society does not have equal status with man. Even at home she is just an unpaid domestic servant treated as an inferior creature, a pleasure-giving commodity or a child bearing machine. She has to subordinate herself following all dictates of the male members of the family. *Manu Smrithi* explains that she has to be subjected herself to her father in her childhood, to her husband in her adulthood, and to her son in her old age. This traditional picture of Indian woman is depicted in earlier Indian English novels. That is why we see her more as prostitutes, courtesans, maid servants, etc. in the pre independence fiction. The recent great changes happened in the social and political spheres like the right to universal franchise, the change in marital relations, the growth of a newer class of working women, etc. changed the status of the women in the society.

Though it is a controversial topic, we know that we give special privilege to women in some of our communities. The narrator's family atmosphere in the novel *The Shadow Lines* itself is a good example for it. There Tha'mma decides everything. Nobody questions her. Even the narrator's father who is matured enough feels that Tha'mma should never feel insulted. Thereby he leaves many things as insignificant despite their usefulness. Tha'mma's sister Mayadebi also enjoys great privilege in her family. Her husband the Saheb gives due respect to her words in almost all matters. Though she is unemployed, she doesn't feel any sort of uneasiness in her domestic domain. She follows her husband wherever he goes as a

foreign diplomat. The narrator's mother also receives high respect in her family affairs. Of course she is a woman of average intelligence and unemployed. Still she controls most of the important things in the family. Her husband, the narrator's father gives her maximum freedom in this regard. He never complains about her. He wants to enjoy his freetime with his wife at home. In this she is not a slave at home, but a queen in her kingdom.

Ghosh does not ignore Indian women's love for jewellery. He depicts this aspect without any exaggeration. The narrator admits that his grandmother had a secret fondness for jewellery. There had been nothing secret about this weakness of hers, when she was a girl. It had been a passion to her. He heard his relatives teasing her about her love of jewellery. He heard the relatives had been asking her what had become of all those necklaces and bangles given by his grandfather. Their teasing didn't bother his grandmother at all. Tha'mma's love of jewellery had been a family joke when she was girl. She would often be seen at the little gold-merchant's shop at the corner of Jindabahar Lane, peering in through the bars, staring at the goldsmiths working inside. She took so much delight in exclaiming over her married cousin's jewellery cases that they had kept the keys ready on the ends of their saris whenever she went visiting. At weddings, knowing old housewives would ask for her opinion on the jewellery the bride had been given, as though she were a gold-merchant's grandmother, rather than a small girl. Tha'mma had stopped wearing jewellery publicly after her husband's death. Later when the narrator's father married, she handed over all the ornaments to the narrator's mother. Tha'mma loved to see the narrator's mother wearing the bangles and necklaces she had given her. But the narrator's mother didn't particularly care for jewellery and wore them rarely even to weddings. This infuriated his grandmother. Often she asked the narrator's mother angrily whether she was going to a wedding with her neck bare. She feared that it would give everybody the impression that she was starving there.

Tha'mma used to say she had been struggled hard not to sell her gold ornaments in order to hand over to her daughter-in-law. She is very particular that her daughter-in-law would not have anything to complain about ornaments. Though the narrator's mother is not interested in gold ornaments, she wears them on rare occasions only to satisfy her mother-in-law. On such occasions the narrator has observed, his grandmother would summon his mother and run her fingers over the necklace, smiling to herself and remembering about the place where she had bought it and trying to remember the name of the shop. It is clear that the mere sight of the necklace would make her happy beyond words. There was one piece of jewellery that she had never parted with. It was a long thin gold chain with a tiny ruby locket. It was so much a part of her that she had never taken it off. But all the same, she was very ashamed of wearing it and tried her best to hide it under her blouse, spreading it out over her shoulders. She feared that her relatives would gossip if they saw her wearing it. The grandmother had her own justification in wearing that ornament. Once she told the narrator that it was the first thing her husband ever gave her. He presented it to her in Rangoon soon after they were married. In depicting the grandmother's attachment to gold ornaments, Amitav Ghosh paints not only a Bengali woman but an average Indian woman. Today it is not a secret that the Indian women purchase a large quantity of gold ornaments produced in the world market. Here we see this grandmother in our family with real flesh and blood.

The Indian villages as well as cities are closely associated with Hindi film songs. It is a part of our life. Ghosh has conceived this aspect of the Indian life and depicted it in his novel very spontaneously. When the narrator is going through an acute sensation of love for Ila, he is haunted by an old Hindi film song – 'bequraar karke hameyun no jaiyen' (*The Shadow Lines*, 94). He is simply unable to free himself from this recurring tune in his mind. The reader at once identifies with the narrator because with most of the Indians, humming

popular film songs to suit their mental condition is a very natural and spontaneous way of purgating emotions.

We can never ignore the importance which we give to cricket in our life. Often we remember many historical events connecting them with popular cricket matches. When the narrator describes Calcutta riots in 1964 in *The Shadow Lines*, he simply quotes the news in the newspaper:

Indistinctly through the white haze that was swirling before my eyes, I noticed another headline, at the bottom of the page. It said: Kunderan's day at Madras, Unbeaten 170 in first Test. And right above it was a tiny little box item in bold print, with the headline: Sacred relic reinstalled which said 'the sacred hair of the Prophet Mohammed was reinstalled in the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar today amongst a tremendous upsurge of popular joy and festivity throughout Kashmir' (224) .

Observations on the Historical and Political Elements

If we look at the events in modern India chronologically, the following can be said to be the chain of events about which Indian writers were more concerned and around which they selected their plots, themes and characters:

1. Quit India Movement: 1942
2. Bengal Famine: 1943
3. End of the War: 1945
4. Communal Riots & Partition: 1947
5. Raider' Attack Kashmir: 1947
6. Martyrdom of Mahatma: 1948
7. Constitution of India: 1950

8. Vinoba Bhave's Land-gift movement: 1951
9. Language Agitations: 1956
10. Communist Regime in Kerala: 1957
11. Cape of Tibet and Sino-Indian
12. Death of Nehru: 1964
13. Pakistan Invasion: 1965
14. Death of Shastri and Tashkent Pact: 1966
15. Bangladesh Movement
16. War with Pakistan & the Liberation of Bangladesh: 1971
17. J.P's Movement: 1974-75

Freedom struggle and Gandhism in Indian Writing in English

The Indo-Anglian writers, particularly the novelists of the thirties are immensely influenced by the freedom struggle and the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, who fought for the cause of the under-privileged classes, the have - nots and the downtrodden, the marginalized and defenceless. The novelists have depicted the various incidents and happenings in the freedom struggle and the life of Mahatma Gandhi connecting them with the contemporary social, political, economic and religious spheres of India. Instead of introducing them as mere historical facts or events, they took meticulous care and attention to present them with poetic grandeur and artistic craftsmanship. The following writers have done remarkable contribution with the theme of either Gandhi or the contemporary freedom struggle: Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (1935). Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (1938); K.S. Venkataramani, *Kandan the Patriot* (1932); D.F. Karaka, *We Never Die* (1944); Amir Ali, *Conflict* (1947); Venu Chitali, *In Transit* (1950); K.A. Abbas, *Inquilab* (1955), R.K. Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma*(1956),

Nayantara Sahgal, *A Time to Be Happy* (1955); and K. Nagarajan, *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961).

Simplicity is one of the salient features of Gandhian literature. Gandhi always followed the principle of 'simple living and high thinking' and it influenced the writers of his age. So they discarded ornateness, artificiality, pedantry and laborious artistry in their language both in English and in the vernaculars. This impact reflected in their themes also. Most of the novelists of Gandhian age preferred the village to the city, the poor to the rich and the cultural heritage of the village to the urban luxury and sophistication. The main characters of the novels of this age represent the lower class of society who are victims of colonial exploitation, poverty and racial or religious discrimination.

Mulk Raj Anand has presented Gandhi as a character in last pages of his first novel, *Untouchable* (1935). He narrates a realistic picture of the one-day life of the protagonist, Bakha, an untouchable sweeper - boy who has to face untold humiliation from the upper class only because he belongs to an untouchable class. He faces bitter experiences wherever he goes that day and at last he mutters to himself: "Why we are always abused? The sentry inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That is why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That is why they don't touch us, the high castes" (58).

In the last pages of the novel, Mahatma Gandhi emerges as a saviour to uproot untouchability and caste discrimination. Bakha attends a big gathering addressed by Mahatma Gandhi in which Gandhi gives a new explanation as 'sons of God to the bhangis and chamars' to the appellation of 'Harijan'. Gandhi said: "The fact that we address God as 'the purifier of the polluted souls' makes it a sin to regard anyone born in Hinduism as polluted - it is satanic to do so. I have never been tired of repeating that it is a great sin. I don't say that

this thing crystallised in me at the age of twelve, but I do say that I did then regard untouchability as a sin” (*Untouchable* 164). The speech of Gandhi acts like a balm on the wounds of Bakha who was totally disappointed by the behaviour of ruthless upper caste Hindus. Gandhi’s words helped him to find out his identity in a caste-dominated social framework. He finds a ray of hope in his life and decides to go forward with great confidence.

Raja Rao’s first novel *Kanthapura* gives more significance to the ideals of Gandhi than in *Untouchable*. It deals with the powerful impact of Mahatma Gandhi on the peasants of a South Indian village. An elderly widow narrates the whole story spontaneously mixing irony and humour in a village atmosphere. Here, the political activities mostly related to Mahatma Gandhi are described in such a way including the Indian age-long myth, legend, history and religion. The narration looks like a Gandhi Purana in which Moorthy represents the spirit of Gandhi. He appears as a Satyagrahi and the leader of the non-violent movement in *Kanthapura*. The reputed writer K.R.S Iyengar makes the following remark about this book in his work *Indian Writing in English*:

The characters sharply divide into two camps: the Rulers (and their supporters) on the one hand, and Satyagrahis (and their sympathisers), on the other. There are various other divisions too: orthodoxy is pitted against reform, exploitation against sufferance, the planter against the coolies, the corrupt officials against the self-respecting villagers. But these lines grow hazy when the main issue between the Bureaucracy and Satyagrahis is joined, for now most people are on one or the other side of the barricades (391).

Thus, Raja Rao tries his best to explicate Mahatma Gandhi’s universal theory of truth and non-violence as the gospel to the poor and the disappointed Indians.

K.S. Venkataramani discusses the political aspects of Gandhism connected with the Civil Disobedience Movement of the nineteen thirties in his novel *Kandan the Patriot*. It tells the story of Kandan, an Oxford - educated Indian youth. The freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi awakened the patriotic feelings in him and he resigned from the Indian Civil Service in order to join the national movement. We see that Kandan has a prophetic dream before he breathes his last. He makes a long patriotic speech tinged with the spirit of Gandhism.

Amir Ali's famous novel, *Conflict* depicts the political upheavals as well as the sentiments of a Hindu family caught in the Quit - India agitation of 1942. Shankar, a village boy, goes to Bombay for higher education, he is caught in the agitation raised by Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders. He represents all those contemporary intellectuals who left their studies to join the national movement for freedom. In this novel, the novelist has also shown the rustic life of Indians which is trapped in the urban surroundings. Venu Chitale's *In Transit* presents a beautiful picture of Indian history between two World Wars dominated by the ideals of Gandhi. It deals with the various ups and downs going on in the history of modern India. The novel *Inquilab* by Ahmad Abbas presents not only Mahatma Gandhi but also introduces some other personalities of the Gandhian age. It covers the incidents from the Rowlett Bill and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre to the Salt Satyagraha and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931. It highlights the Gandhian ideals in its true perspective. Anwar, the protagonist of the novel goes from place to place enjoying experiences of different kinds - political, religious and social. He goes to Aligarh Muslim University where he falls in love with a Muslim girl, Salmah, the daughter of a professor of the university. There he meets a number of students belonging to different ideologies and religions - revolutionaries, congressmen, marxists and communalists. Later he along with other student leaders, is expelled from the University because of their participation in the Independence Pledge in the university campus

on 26 January 1930. Anwar has to pay a lot for his patriotic action because Salmah turns her face against him and marries a Deputy Superintendent of Police. When he releases from the bondage of his affair, he devotes himself fully to the cause of national movement. He travels all over India, accompanied by his friend, Robert, and sees directly the miserable life of the neglected peasants. He witnesses how Mahatma Gandhi and other political leaders turn the minds of the unprivileged mass against the tyranny of the British rule. The novel ends with the tragic note of the revelation of the secret that Anwar is really an illegitimate son of a Hindu merchant who was brought up by a Muslim. On the political plane, the novel ends on the Gandhi-Irwin pact.

R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* as the title suggests, upholds the impact of Gandhi on ordinary people. In this novel the action strays out of Malgudi. The two central characters, Bharati and Sriram are existentially engaged in politics. Sriram a typical weak-willed character, and Bharati, a Congress volunteer devote themselves to national movement. Though the hero is more interested in Bharati than in 'Bharatmata', it gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to the Mahatma. It is not at all easy to introduce a great personality like Mahatma Gandhi in a fiction. Prof. R.K. Srinivasa Iyengar has aptly made the following remark about this aspect of craftsmanship:

Other novelists, whether writing in English or in the regional languages, have likewise exploited the magic of Gandhi's name and presence, but seldom is the Gandhian role subsumed in the fiction as a whole. Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part: on the other hand, he is sure to turn the novel into a biography if he is given a major (or the central) part. The best thing for the contemporary novelist would be to keep Gandhi in the background but make his influence felt indirectly. (372)

We have to add that the stress is not merely on Gandhi's influence but on Gandhi himself because the novelist describes Gandhi's visit to Malgudi, his last prayer on 30 January 1948, the fatal day he was killed, etc. However, it is believed that the author's effort to fuse many themes doesn't seem successful.

Nayantara Sahgal, the daughter of Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit and niece of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in her very first novel, *A Time to be Happy* deals with Congress activities and the Quit India Movement of 1942 in an interesting way. The novelist is basically famous for her strong connections with the contemporary political leaders. The ideals of Gandhi as well as 'Nehruism' influenced her deeply. She was much interested in the political happenings and depicted them in her creative writing. Besides she always pleads for equal status to women in India with that of men in all the walks of life. Sahgal has written five novels and *A Time to be Happy* (1958) was the first one. It is a loose chronicle dealing with two north Indian families during the last stages of the freedom - struggle and the arrival of independence. Sanad, one of the main characters in the novel, is the son of a zamindar who joins a British firm and comes in contact with Western influences.

K. Nagarajan's *Chronicles of Kedaram* clearly points out the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, his intervention to unite the two Iyengar factions - the tengalai and the vadakalai. It presents a clash between the modernity and antiquity; a conflict between the West and East, a confrontation between the West and the East, a confrontation between the possessed and the unprivileged; a dispute between the Hindu and the Muslim, and the touchable and the untouchable. The novelist finds a contrast in the Iyengar feud. That is why in order to calm down the tension between the two Iyengar groups, the author has deliberately introduced Mahatma Gandhi who got success in making them united.

Pedro Machado has made the following comment about Ghosh's talent in writing historical fiction :

Amitav Ghosh occupies what in many ways is a unique position as a writer of historical fiction, for as many have noted, he has formal academic training as a social anthropologist and completed doctoral work that required him to develop challenging linguistic competencies, ethnographic specialization, and orthographic skills to read source materials from the extensive twelfth - century Cairo Geniza documents. From his earliest days as a writer, Ghosh has demonstrated an affinity for and appreciation of historical research. (1546)

Ghosh's greatness lies in his unique talent in blending history with fiction. He admits in the Author's Notes of *The Glass Palace*:

In attempting to write about places and times that I knew only at second-and third-hand, I found myself forced to create a parallel, wholly fictional world. The Glass Palace is thus unqualifiedly a novel and I can state without reservation that except for King Thewbaw, Queen Supayalat and their daughters, none of its principal characters bear any resemblance to real people, living or deceased (587) .

A few years later after the Second World War the Queen and her daughters were allowed to return to their homeland, Burma. The Queen's party made its way slowly across the subcontinent, travelling eastwards from Bombay by rail. They stayed at the Grand Hotel in Calcutta. On April 16, 1919, the Queen and her party boarded the R.M.S. Arankola. They arrived in Rangoon four days later and restarted their Burmese life in a bungalow on Churchill Road.

After many years Jaya visited Ratnagiri. The novelist mentions her visit purposefully in the last part of the novel in order to point out the changes taken place relatively in an unimportant place in India. He writes:

Ratnagiri's setting was every bit as spectacular as Jaya had imagined. But she quickly discovered that very little remained of the places that she had heard about as a child. The jetty at Mandvi was a crumbling ruin; the Bhagavati temple, once just a spire and a shrine, was now a soaring mass of whitewashed concrete; Outram House, where King Thebaw and his entourage had lived for some twenty-five years, had been torn down and rebuilt. Ratnagiri itself was no longer the small, provincial town of Thebaw's time. It was a thriving city, with industries clustered thickly around it on all sides (526).

Moreover, the historian in Ghosh wishes to highlight the strange and unusual lessons that teach the mankind about history. King Thebaw was a Burmese king who was forced to spend his life with family in exile in Ratnagiri by the British empire. The Indians had no connection with this Burmese king. Even then the reaction of the people to him is quite striking. The novelist becomes a researcher in history and tells:

But the strange thing was that through all of this, the town had somehow succeeded in keeping King Thebaw and his memory vibrantly alive. Thiba-Raja was omnipresent in Ratnagiri: his name was emblazoned on signs and billboards, on street-corners, restaurants, hotels. The King had been dead more than eighty years, but in the bazaars people spoke of him as though they'd known him at first hand. Jaya found this touching at first, and then deeply moving - that a man such as Thebaw, so profoundly untransportable, should be still so richly loved in the land of his exile (526).

Jaya went to the site of her great-uncle's - the Collector's residence where Uma had lived. It was very near to the hotel where she was staying. The compound was government property and it was surrounded by a massive, forbidding wall. Ratnagiri was looked as a perfect model for colonial district town. There were many district courts and offices in a red-brick Victorian compound. On the last day in Ratnagiri, Jaya hired a scooter-rickshaw and asked the driver to take her to the Bhate beach. When she reached there she noticed that the sand was copper - coloured and it slipped beneath the water at a gentle incline. There were a number of coconut palms along the edge of the beach. Near the water the sand changed into soil where there was a densely tangled accumulation of grass, shells and dried seaweed. There she found what was looking for - a small stone memorial to her great - uncle, the Collector. The writer selects apt words to narrate this memorable scene in the novel:

The engraved lettering was worn thin by the combined action of wind, water and sand. There was just enough light to read the inscription. It said: 'To the memory of Beni Prasad Dey Esq., District Collector, 1905-1906.' Jaya stood up to look at the windswept beach, sloping gently down to the waves. The red sand had turned grey with the setting of the sun. Uma had told her, long ago, that if she were to walk from the memorial stone to the water, in a straight line, she would cross the very spot where the Collector's body had been found, along with the wreckage of his capsized boat (529).

Thus, Ghosh gives a befitting epilogue to his chapter 'Ratnagiri' and his craftsmanship helps the readers to remember the place as a memorable one.

The novelist does not forget to mention the great sacrifice of our freedom fighters. He presents it here through the memories of Tridib and the narrator's grandmother. Tridib tells the narrator how the secret societies in Bengal indulged in making bombs at home to kill the

British officials, and how some of the culprits were nabbed and even deported or executed. They were very common in different parts of India, especially in Bengal, during the freedom struggle in India. When Mayadebi and other family members discuss the physical appearance and boldness of Robi in facing a notorious older college mate, the grandmother recollects one of her classmates who associated with the terrorist movement among nationalists in Dhaka. He is a shy and silent boy in the class and nobody noticed him. One day a group of policemen under an English officer came to the class room and arrested him. She narrates the whole incident with horror in her eyes. Tridib asks her anxiously what happened finally to the boy. We read her words with great patriotism in our minds:

They had heard afterwards that he had been a member of one of the secret terrorist societies since he was fourteen. He'd been exercising with them in their gymnasium, learning to use pistols and make bombs, smuggling messages and running errands. A few months before he was arrested, he had finally been initiated into the society. The first mission they had given him was to assassinate an English magistrate in Khulna district. All his preparations were ready; he was to leave for Khulna at the end of the week. But the police found out – their network of informers was legendary. The boy was tried and later deported to the infamous cellular Gaol in the Andaman Islands (38) .

The narrator says that his grandmother admired the boy martyr as a hero. If she had known his connection with the terrorist movements in advance, she also would have joined with him to murder the English magistrate. When the narrator expresses his doubt, she answers: "I would have been frightened, she said, but I would have prayed for strength, and God willing, yes, I would have killed him. It was for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free" (p39).

In this context Tridib also reveals to the narrator some terrorist movements among nationalists in Bengal in the first few decades of the last century: about secret terrorist societies like Anushilan and Jugantar and all their offshoots, their clandestine networks, and home-made bombs with which they tried to assassinate British officials and policemen, and a little about the arrests, deportations and executions with which the British had retaliated.

Here we see that Ghosh doesn't find anything wrong with the terrorist activities of the Indians during the British rule. To some extent, we feel that he appreciates them.

Ghosh's scholarly knowledge in freedom struggle of our country and craftsmanship for putting it in the proper places in a fiction are shown brilliantly in the presentation of the character Uma Dey. During Uma's stay in Rangoon with Rajkumar and Dolly, one day Rajkumar said to Uma that everything they had they owed to her. If there was anything she would ever need, she should ask them first. Immediately she asked them to book her a passage to Europe.

While Uma was travelling to Europe she met a family friend on the ship namely Mrs Kadambari Dutt. She belonged to the famous Hatkhola Dutts of Calcutta, a cousin of Toru Dutt, the poetess and a relative of the distinguished Mr. Romesh Dutt, the writer and scholar. Mrs Dutt was much older than Uma and had lived a while in England. She was very experienced and knowledgeable about things, and Uma felt that her new friend was the perfect godsend person to have on board. They were enjoying themselves together. The meeting of Uma with Mrs Dutt on board is a striking example for Ghosh's skill in mixing fiction with contemporary events and history.

Mrs Dutt helped Uma to find accommodation in London as the paying guest of an elderly missionary lady who had spent much of her life in India. Soon former friends and colleagues of the Collector, most of them English, came to meet her. Some of them had

known her late husband at Cambridge, and others had worked with him in India. They had all been very kind and taken her to show the important places in and around the city. Uma continued her connection with her shipboard friend, Mrs Dutt. She knew almost all Indians living in London. She introduced many interesting people to Uma and Madame Cama was one among them. She was a Parsee from Bombay but in clothes, manner and appearance she seemed more European than Indian.

Madame Cama impressed Uma much because she spoke to her more truthfully or forthrightly on matters concerning India. She had been kind enough to introduce Uma into her circle. All of them were interesting and idealistic men and women whose views and sentiments were similar to her own. Through these people Uma had begun to understand that a woman like herself could contribute a great deal to India's freedom struggle from overseas. Madame Cama suggested Uma to visit the United States. She had some Irish friends in New York and many of them were sympathetic to India's cause. She thought that Uma should meet such people and she could enjoy living in that city. Uma also didn't want to remain longer in London because everything in the city haunted and reminded her late husband. Soon she decided to leave London and to go to New York.

Uma settled in an apartment of her own at New York and took up the job as a proof-reader of a publisher. Besides, she actively involved in politics, participating in meetings, making speeches and writing articles for magazines. In 1929, when Uma was fifty and had been away from India for more than twenty years, she decided to leave America. She had various engagements in Tokyo, Shanghai and Singapore and therefore she preferred to sail across the Pacific rather than the Atlantic. Matthew, Elsa, Dolly and her two sons reached at the port of Georgetown in Malaya to welcome Uma.

At the pier they noticed that a large number of people had already gathered and most of them were Indians. Many of them had flowers and garlands in their hands. When the ship came into view and the crowd shouted loudly: “Uma Dey zindabad, zindabad - long live, long live Uma Dey” (232). Some others made their shouts and slogans in Hindustani: “Inquilab zindabad’ and ‘halla bol, halla bol!’” (232). They cheered and welcomed her cordially. After a long interval of 23 years Uma and Dolly met again. After the initial kind regards Dolly asked Uma who were those people that had gathered around there. Uma replied that they had belonged to a group she had been working with and had called them the Indian Independence League. Uma assured Dolly that she would relate everything in detail to her later. In the afternoon Matthew led Uma and others to his ‘Morningside House’ at Penang in Malaya.

Indian Independence League

Amitav Ghosh unveils relatively an unknown chapter in the freedom struggle of India that happened in America through the fictional character Uma. After dinner Dolly accompanied Uma to her bedroom. Dolly wanted to know more about the crowd gathered at the pier of Georgetown port. Uma began saying that it was such a long story and she didn’t know where to begin. She joined the Indian Independence League while she was in New York, inducted by friends, other Indians living in the city. Though the Indians in the city were few in number, they were closely connected. Most of them were passionately political and it was impossible for them to remain aloof.

Dadasaheb Ambedkar was a brilliant leader at Columbia. There was Taraknath Das, gentle in manner but stubborn in spirit. There was the Ramakrishna Mission at Midtown which was managed by a single, saffron-robed saint and scores of American sympathisers. There was an eccentric Raja who believed himself to be India’s Bolivar who stayed at a

tenement south of Houston Street. Soon Uma's apartment had become the centre of all activities of the Indians. She and her compatriots were like explorers or castaways picking apart the details of what they saw around them, trying to derive lessons for themselves and their country.

The Ghadar Party

Among Uma's Indian contemporaries in New York there were many who took their direction from a newsletter published from the University of California, in Berkeley, by Indian students. This publication was called Ghadar, after the Hindustani word for the revolt of 1857. The people who were involved with the magazine were known as the Ghadar Party. Much of their support came from the Indians who had settled on the Pacific coast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these immigrants were Sikhs - former soldiers of the British Indian army. The experience of living in America and Canada served to turn many of these former loyalists into revolutionaries. Perceiving a link between their treatment abroad and India's subject status, they had become dedicated enemies of the Empire they had once served. Some of them concentrated their efforts on trying to convert such of their friends and relatives as were still serving in the British Indian army. Others looked for allies abroad, developing links with the Irish resistance in America.

Uma said that the Indians were comparatively beginners in organising revolts. The Irish freedom fighters gave them necessary guidelines and techniques for collecting weapons and using them on unexpected occasions. On St. Patrick's Day in New York a small Indian group participated in the Irish parade, with their own banners, dressed in sherwanis and turbans, dhoties and kurtas, angarkhas and angavastrams.

Amitav Ghosh presents to the readers what he has collected about the freedom struggle in America through the character Uma. After the start of the First World War, the

British intelligence services tightened their network and the Ghadar Party was forced to go underground. Gradually it dispersed into a number of different groups. Of these the Indian Independence League was the most powerful with thousands of partisans among overseas Indians. It was their offices that Uma had been visiting in eastern Asia.

Dolly admits that she has never heard of anything about the League and adds that the papers are always full of Mahatma Gandhi, but no one ever speaks of the League. Ghosh gives his own reasonable explanation to this question in the freedom struggle of Indian history through the character Uma. Uma said that Mr. Gandhi had led the loyal opposition and he followed a soft cornered approach to the British authorities 'instead of striking at its iron first.' (223) Gandhi could not understand that the Empire would always remain secure while its Indian soldiers remained loyal. The Indian army would always put down opposition wherever it was possible, not only in India but also in Burma, Malaya, East Africa, etc. Therefore, the Empire did everything possible to keep these soldiers under their control. The colonial authorities were careful enough to recruit men from certain particular castes. All their soldiers were completely shut off from politics and the wider society. They were given land and assured jobs to their children.

Dolly who does not know much about the politics of the colonial rule and tactics of the freedom fighters asks Uma what she could do in the present context. Uma explains that she and her compatriots have to open eyes of the soldiers. Many of the League's leaders are old soldiers. She points out the example of Giani Amreek, the distinguished Sikh Giani who came to welcome her at the pier on that day. Uma narrates his life story in order to make Dolly understand the attitude of the Indian soldiers.

Uma first met Sikh Giani in California many years before. He was an old military man himself and had risen to the rank of a junior NCO in the British Indian army before his

resignation. He talked Uma for the first time the necessity of opening the eyes of Indian soldiers. At once she asked him why he had taken so much time serving in the army to realise that they had been exploited to conquer others. Then he explained that they were told that the colonial authorities were trying to make the Indians free from their bad kings or their evil customs. He added that it took them a long time to understand that the freedom offered to the people was an excuse for the colonizers to rule here as far as possible. When Dolly asked Uma her plan of action, she concluded like this:

Uma gave her a wan smile. 'I met many men, Dolly. But we were always like brothers and sisters - that's how we spoke to one another, bhai and bahen. As for me, because they knew that I was a widow, I think the men looked to me to be a kind of ideal woman, a symbol of purity - and to tell you the truth, I didn't much mind. That's the thing about politics - once you get involved in it, it pushes everything else out of your life' (224).

The mass-migration from Burma to Calcutta in *The Glass Palace*

The Glass Palace (2000) Ghosh's fifth novel deals mainly with the theme of the fall of empire of Burma during the period of pre-independence India and how the change of rule affects the life of the royal family members. It also highlights the theme of mass-migration of people from Burma to Calcutta during the Second World War between British and Japanese. These two foreign countries were ready to do anything to make sure territorial domination over Burma. It is an important event in the modern history of India, especially of Bengal. The Japanese took hold of Burma in 1942 and thousands of people mostly Indian and refugees fled away from Burma to Calcutta traveling long distances in their struggle for existence. Rajkumar, Dolly, Manju and the baby reached to the river in an ox-cart. They found a boat that took them upriver, through Meiktila, past Mandalay to the small town of Mawlaik, on the

Chindwin river. Ghosh's talent as an English writer is clearly evident in the narration of their miserable journey:

There they were confronted by a stupefying spectacle: some thirty thousand refugees were squatting along the river-bank, waiting to move on towards the densely forested mountain ranges that lay ahead. Ahead there were no roads, only tracks, rivers of mud, flowing through green tunnels of jungle. Since the start of the Indian exodus, the territory had been mapped by a network of officially recognised evacuation trails: there were 'white' routes and 'black' routes, the former being shorter and less heavily used. Several hundred thousand people had already tramped through this wilderness. Great numbers of refugees were still arriving, every day. To the south the Japanese army was still advancing and there was no turning back (468).

The above passage shows the disastrous effects of war on common people and how it affects the neighbouring countries. The events occurred in Burma cause great changes even in Indian social and cultural life.

The Mu-I-Mubark Incident in *The Shadow Lines*

Amitav Ghosh gives us a minute description of the Mu-I-Mubarak incident. Before narrating the climax scene of the novel, the novelist explains three historical events namely the Mu-I-Mubarak incident in Kashmir, riots in Calcutta and Khulna in Dhaka. Here we forget that it is a novel and begin to think that it is a historic study. The novelist is very careful not to make any comment on the incident. On the contrary, he simply narrates what he has seen in newspapers about the incident.

It was supposed to be a hair of Prophet Mohammed, purchased by a Kashmiri merchant in 1699. It was kept in Hazratbal Mosque near Srinagar. This mosque became a great centre of pilgrimage and every year multitudes of people, Kashmiris of every kind,

Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists, would flock to Hazratbal on those occasions when the relic was displayed to the public. Even the European observers have admitted the faith of those ecumenical pilgrims. Over the centuries, the shrine became a symbol of the unique and distinctive culture of Kashmir. On 27 December, 1963, two hundred and sixty three years after it had been brought to Kashmir, the Mui-Mubarak disappeared from its place in the Hazratbal mosque.

As the news spread, life came to a standstill in the valley of Kashmir. Despite the bitter cold, thousands of people, including hundreds of wailing women took part in black-flag demonstrations from Srinagar to Hazratbal mosque. Schools, colleges and shops pulled down their shutters all over the valley and buses and cars vanished from the streets.

The next-day, 29 December, there were huge demonstrations in Srinagar, in which Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus alike took part. There were a number of public meetings too, which were attended and addressed by members of all the major religious communities. There were some incidents of rioting and a curfew was quickly declared by the authorities. The rioters targeted properly identified by the government and the police. The government blamed these attacks as 'anti-national elements'.

There was a spontaneous show of collective grief in the valley for the next few days. There were innumerable black flag demonstrations. Every shop and building flew a black flag. Every person on the streets wore a black armband. The most remarkable thing was that there wasn't even one single incident of animosity between Kashmiri Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Strangely enough, the theft of the relic had brought together the people of Kashmir as never before. This credit goes to Maulana Masoodi, an authentic hero of the time. He persuaded the first demonstrators to march with black flags instead of green and thereby drew the various communities of Kashmir together in a collective display of mourning.

Prime Minister Nehru appealed for patience and dispatched the highest officials of the Central Bureau of Intelligence and the Home Ministry to find the missing relic. The Premier of Kashmir declared that the theft was a 'mad act of some miscreants'. There were meetings and demonstrations in towns and cities in Pakistan. The religious authorities declared that the theft of the relic was an attack upon the identity of Muslims. December 31 was observed as a 'Black Day' in Karachi and soon other cities followed suit. The Pakistani newspapers declared that the theft was a part of the deep - laid conspiracy for uprooting the spiritual and national hopes of Kashmiris, and rumbled darkly about 'genocide'.

On 4 February, 1964, the Mu-i- Mubarak was 'recovered' by the officials of the Central Bureau of Intelligence. There were no explanations. So far nobody really knows what happened to the Hazratbal relic. The city of Srinagar was in great happiness. People danced on the streets. There were innumerable thanksgiving meetings. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs marched together in demonstrations demanding the revelation of the conspirators behind the plot. The very rare slogan 'Central Intelligence zindabad!' rang out on the streets of an Indian city.

The same incident created a contrast reaction in Khulna, a small town in the distant east wing of Pakistan. There a demonstration protesting against the theft of the relic turned violent. Some shops were burnt down and a few people were killed.

The Partition and communal riots in Indian English novels

The post-independence Indian English novelists have seriously and painfully recorded the tragedy of Partition and the consequent communal riots in their novels. Evidently writers were at first unable to articulate the enormous tragedy that had unfolded in front of their eyes. They wrote more about violence taken place in those days. It was based on the demented hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims at that time in India. The lack of adequate

preparation and safeguards at the time of the Partition led to a communal carnage of unprecedented proportions resulting in 6,00,000 deaths and exodus of 8.5 million refugees from Pakistan with stories of untold inhuman sufferings.

There are many arguments about the reasons for the Partition. However, it is generally estimated that the Muslim League distrusted a possible dominion status for India with the Congress Party in the governing position because the league leaders believed the Muslim minority would remain in a subordinate position. Gandhiji and Pt. Nehru tried their best to convince the Muslim leaders that they would stand for a secular structure in the Congress Party. Unfortunately, the League agitated for a separate state. Finally, the British Parliament permitted the Viceroy Lord Mountbatten to give freedom to India as two independent states, India and Pakistan, in 1947. Strictly speaking, the basis of Partition of India was the communal and not the economic factor. However, the Partition led to severe bloodshed and communal riots, especially in Bengal and Punjab.

The Partition has been a recurrent theme in Indian English fiction, with a new perspective on the event emerging in each succeeding decade. Though they are branded as partition novels, they highlight the social, political, cultural and religious realities on the Indian subcontinent from the 1950s onwards. The popular writers and their novels on the theme of the Partition are the following:

1. Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (1956)
2. Manohar Malgonkar, *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964)
3. Nayantara Sahgal, *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969)
4. Chaman Nahal, *Azadi* (1975)
5. Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day* (1980)

6. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1980)
7. Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (1988)
8. Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice - Candy - Man* (1989)
9. Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* (1993)

Communal hatred and the mechanics of riots is another important dimension discussed in *The Shadow Lines*. Panic, rumour, fear and hatred are universal components of riots. Riots are the same everywhere. The riots started in Khulna. Soon it spread in the neighbouring towns and districts and towards Dhaka. Hindu refugees began to pour over the border into India, in trains and on foot. The Pakistani government provided these trains with armed guards and tried best to protect them. At some places on the border the trains were stopped by mobs with slogans like 'Kashmir Day Zindabad'. The towns and cities of East Pakistan were now in the grip of a 'frenzy' of looting, killing and burning. There is a very moving account of riots in Calcutta. We see riots as they come to children. Children, narrator as one of them, are struck with fear. He climbs his school bus and every one stares at his water bottle. He gets unnerved. Then he comes to know that everyone is advised to drink soda as water supply itself has been poisoned. Strange, loud noises are coming to their classroom when Mrs. Anderson is teaching them. They are deported to their houses amidst a drama of terror and violence. Experiencing the riot, the narrator says, "The streets had turned themselves inside out: our city had turned against us" (203).

There were many rumours in Calcutta about the riots in Khulna. One of them was that the trains from Pakistan were arriving packed with corpses. There were pictures of weeping, stranded Hindu refugees in Calcutta dailies. Angry crowds began to gather at the station. On 10 January Calcutta erupted. Mobs went rampaging through the city, killing Muslims, and burning and looting their shops and houses. The police opened fire on mobs in several places

and a dusk -to-dawn curfew was imposed on parts of the city. The police couldn't control the situation. On 11 January, the army was called out of Fort William and several battalions were deployed throughout the city. It took about a week to get the normal life back.

It was not still estimated how many people were killed in the riots of 1964. It is believed that more people were killed in these riots than that in the war of 1962. The riots taken place in Khulna and Calcutta had its echoes in Dhaka also. That ended in Tridib's tragical murder. Tha'mma and others witnessed the killing of innocent people in communal riots. Tha'mma's aged uncle 'Jethamoshai' and his protector Khalil are cruel victims to this unjust social danger. The drastic event becomes the turning point in the life of Tha'mma. She cannot accept the border line that exists between India and Bangladesh, until her nephew Tridib gets killed. It flashes on her mind that the line of separation is marked not only on the map, but also in the minds and hearts of the people. Hate replaces love, and Th'mma is eager to pay back the Pakistanis in the same coin. She gives away her precious necklace to the war fund.

Had not the tragedy struck Tridib, he would have married May and led a happy married life, setting an example of the conquest of racial and cultural frontiers with love. The nightmarish experience haunt May Price for seventeen years and she cannot recall it without a pang of conscience. She considers herself responsible for the death of Tridib.

Hugh Charles O'Connell assesses Ghosh's skill in countering the western scientific knowledge with the subaltern knowledge of the east in the following remark:

To imagine subaltern silence turned postcolonial secrecy as the staging ground for the possibility of the radically new, Ghosh subverts the novel form to present this knowledge as something profoundly, nonlinear, indeterminate, and beyond our current phenomenological understanding. Since the reader is

unable to acquire this knowledge, what the novel ultimately reveals by decentering the Western grip on visions of futuricity, then, is this utopian postcolonial longing for form – for possibilities, unwritten maps, and modes of social organization and being the seemingly impossible - which then requires the realization that our histories are not teleologically determinate, but rather pregnant with possibilities (792).

As a postmodernist writer Ghosh has definite and specific ideas about the concept of a nation - state. It is closely associated with the consequences of the Partition of India. While analysing this aspect of his writing Anshuman A. Mondal has made the following observation:

Ghosh's anxiety over the fragility of a secular national identity in India is consistently reinforced by the effacement of his national identity as an Indian by that of his religious identity as a Hindu, or a non - Muslim. This anxiety raises further ambivalences. If nationalism and communalism are implicated in each other, then they are both consequences of modernity. They are also both, ultimately, concerned with "identity politics" and with articulating difference. On the other hand, this is structured by Self / Other dialectic that is totalitarian and does not permit an awareness of difference that is open and respectful. This, too, is a consequence of modernity (29-30).

As a postcolonial writer Ghosh does not agree with the concept of nationalism that prevailed during the two World Wars. Hind Wassef has mentioned Ghosh's view in clear cut terms on this topic in *Newsweek* in an interview:

Today nationalism, once conceived of as a form of freedom, is really destroying our world. It's destroying the forms of ordinary life that many

people know. The nation-state prevents the development of free exchange between peoples.

Ghosh does not think that the Partition between India and Pakistan was not a permanent solution to the conflict that disturbed the two dominant communities in the subcontinent. This is what he has highlighted in the climax of the novel, *The Shadow Lines*.

Tha'mma, the grandmother of the narrator of the story was born in Jindabahar in Dhaka in a joint family. She loved her native place Dhaka, but she had to leave it early in her life. After the premature death of her husband, Tha'mma took up the job of a teacher in a school in Calcutta. She served there for twenty-seven years and retired as principal in 1962. After retirement Tha'mma longs to visit Dhaka, her native place. By a strange coincidence, Mayadebi's husband has been transferred to Dhaka then. He has been made Counsellor in the Deputy High Commission there. Later Tha'mma's sister Mayadebi invited her to visit her in Dhaka. Tha'mma did not want to enjoy a holiday trip, but wanted to visit her only uncle Jethamoshai and to take the poor old man back to Calcutta if she could. A few weeks later Tha'mma receives a plane ticket to Dhaka for the third of January, 1964. Oddly enough, May Price happens to visit India at the same time. She wishes to visit Dhaka. Tridib accompanies her. On 2nd January, 1964 the three left for Dhaka from Calcutta.

Tha'mma and others met Mayadebi and others at the Dhaka airport. She took them to her house in Dhanmundi in new-born Bangladesh. After a few days Tha'mma expressed her impatience to go to the old house to fetch their uncle. Mayadebi agreed to go there next day. At once the Shaheb, Mayadebi's husband objected the decision saying that, that was not a good time to go there. He pointed out that the house was in the heart of the old city and there was going to be trouble there. He added that they should not go there then.

Tha'mma was not willing to admit the Shaheb's objection. She added that they had come all the way to Dhaka to save their old uncle and she would not make any delay in her purpose. At last they agreed to go there on next Thursday, one week later. On Thursday morning they started to the old house in Mercedes. There was a security guard in addition to the driver according to the suggestion of the Shaheb. Tha'mma dressed a white sari with a red border. Mayadebi laughed at her saying that she was anxious as a bride going home for the first time. Tha'mma smiled back and retorted that she was going home as a widow for the first time. Robi, Mayadebi's youngest son also accompanied them in the car.

Robi scanned the streets as they drove through them, watching alertly for signs of 'trouble'. But he was soon disappointed: all the shops were open and the streets were crowded at the New Market as usual. The driver pointed out the sights to Tha'mma as they went by: the Plaza Picture Palace with a fifteen-foot hoarding of Ben-Hur hanging outside, the Gulshan Palace Hotel, Ramna Race Course, and so on. Tha'mma admitted them all wonderful. But she enquired where Dhaka was. Soon after they had crossed a bridge, the sights changed. The streets grew narrower and more crowded, the houses older, more dilapidated. Tha'mma was alert sitting on the edge of her seat, looking out, sniffing the air. A few minutes later they turned in to a narrow lane that was lined with shops on both sides. Tha'mma twisted and turned in her seat pointing at everything. Both Tha'mma and her sister Mayadebi were in nostalgia.

Tha'mma and others reached an old house, their destination. When they got off the car, a crowd of curious children swarmed after them. Most of them attached themselves to May because she was an English girl. Robi heard them whispering to each other about her and one little girl tried to touch her. Saifuddin, a mechanic and owner of garage ushered them in. He offered them a bench to sit on. Saifuddin told them that they should do something immediately for the old man. If they delayed, it would not be easy for them to save him.

Mayadebi gave Saifuddin a gift, a saree for his wife. When she tried to step in, Saifuddin stopped her, asking her to wait for Khalil another refugee from Murshidabad in Bengal. The old man sheltered him and later he had been looking after the old man. Khalil made his livelihood by running a cycle rickshaw and doing odd jobs with which he had to maintain his family, his wife and two children.

Tha'mma's old uncle had been an advocate and later he was bedridden. Tha'mma was thunder-struck on hearing that Saifuddin's wife cooked food for the old man. She remembered that the old man had been a genuine orthodox Hindu and never permitted a Muslim to pass a shadow within ten feet of his food. Since the Partition, the refugees had been pouring in, and the old man had been receiving them with open arms because he did not like any of his relatives to come back and claim a share in his house.

When Khalil arrived, Saifudin introduced the visitors to him as Ukil Babu's relatives, who had come to take him back to India. Though Khalil smiled, the very idea of parting with the old man was intolerable to him. May Price liked his smile as simple and sympathetic. Khalil opened the door to let them in. The room was large and very grimy. It was densely crowded with tubes, handle bars and such things. A woman dressed in a sari, with two children clutching her knees, was watching them from the shelter of a curtained door at the far end of the room. Khalil introduced them to his wife as Ukil-Babu's relatives from Calcutta. The curtain dropped and she disappeared, but the children stayed, watching them with bright round eyes.

The old man was sitting on a high four-poster bed at the far end of the room, looking out of the window, unaware of their presence. Robi shrank back. He had never seen anyone as old as that: he was so old that he seemed childlike-shrunken, tiny, with spit hanging in threads from the corners of his mouth. Tha'mma's eyes misted over as she looked at the old

man. She called him Jethamoshai and told him that they had come home at last. He saw her then and turned his head slowly to look at her. She covered her head and hurried towards him. She told him sobbing that they had come to take him with them. It was very clear that he didn't recognise her. The old man stopped her saying that he would not allow women to touch him. Tha'mma taken by surprise obeyed him and sat down.

Khalil told the old man loudly that the visitors were his relatives, not his clients. But the old man didn't listen to his words. His eyes were fixed on May. His sagging mouth had fallen open and his tongue had spilled out from the gaps between his teeth. Khalil introduced her as a foreigner who had come from Calcutta with his relative. The old man began to sing "God save our gracious..." (213). But then he forgot the tune and managed somehow to convert the words into a cheerful hum. May laughed and began to sing too; "God save our..." (213) The old man appreciated her song slapping his pillows.

Tha'mma repeated to the old man with great effort that they had come to take him back to India and not to claim their share in his house. She reminded him that it was not safe for him to be there. The old man admitted that he had understood the meaning of her words. But his response was really shocking:

Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in this India - Shindia. It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here (215).

At that Tha'mma gave up. She sighed and got up to go. She said that there was no use talking to him anymore. She added that they had done what they could. They would

better go then. Saifudin the mechanic understanding the situation suggested that they would have to think of some other way of taking him back. Khalil requested them that they should not take him away. He feared that the old man would die. Moreover, the old man was like a grandfather to his children and what they would do without him.

Khalil's wife came forward against her own husband. She requested to take the old man with them. She felt that Khalil did not know what he was saying. He did not have to cook him and feed him. She had two other children too. She worried that how long they could go on like that and from where they would get money for the family. In that moment of utter confusion, the driver of their car came running up to the door. He shouted that they should return immediately because there was going to be trouble outside. Tha'mma told Khalil in a stern voice that they would take the old man then and keep him with them for a few days, until the trouble was over. Then if he wanted to return, they would bring him back. Khalil didn't try to defend himself any longer. He took up the task to bring him to the station in his rickshaw. He would tell him that he had to go to court, otherwise he would not leave the house. He would follow their car carrying him.

Khalil went up to the old man and whispered something into his ear. Though the old man resented at first, later he surrendered himself. Khalil took a black cotton coat off a peg and helped him to dress it. He pulled out a pair of shoes from under the bed, put them on his feet and tied the laces. He handed him his walking-stick, put an arm around his shoulders, and helped him climb off the bed. Tha'mma and others went to their car. Khalil and the old man followed them behind. When they reached the yard, Tridib helped Khalil to lift the old man into the rickshaw. When the car turned around a corner, a mob stopped their car. Some of them attacked the passengers in the car. They broke the windscreen and injured the driver. The security guard in the car fired a shot at them. They drew back. Soon they saw Khalil's rickshaw carrying the old man and circled round it. Tha'mma wanted the driver of their car to

drive away. But May Price got out of the car and screamed loudly to save the old man and Khalil from the rioters. Tha'mma shouted at May Price that she didn't know what she was doing and due to her every one of them would get killed. May did not listen her words. She was a heroine at that time. She was not ready to listen to a stupid, cowardly old woman. Every one of them except May understood what was going to happen. She began to run towards the rickshaw. Tridib shouted and ran after her. He caught up with her and pushed her, from behind. She stumbled and fell. She thought he would stop to take her back to the car. But he ran on towards the rickshaw.

The mob had surrounded the rickshaw. They had pulled the old man off it. Tridib ran into the mob, and fell upon their backs. He was trying to push his way through to the old man. Then the mob dragged him in. He vanished. May could only see their backs. It took less than a moment. Then the men began to scatter. May picked herself up and began to run towards them. The man had melted away, into the gullies. When she reached there, she saw three dead bodies. They had cut Khalil's stomach open. They had hacked off the old man's head. They had cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear.

May plays a great role in the tragedy that overtakes Tridib. The old man's fate has been sealed, but if she has not got out of the car in her humanitarian zeal, Tridib would have been driven away to safety. May on her part, is on penance ever since Tridib's death. She sleeps on floor. She fasts. She works for earthquake relief and things like that. She collects money from streets with all her banners, and posters for social welfare. May, like a true disciple of Christ, suffers his death like hell. She is literally on a self-torturing spree. It is only at the very end of the novel she realizes the meaning of sacrifice. She frees herself of her burden of guilt, "But I know now I didn't kill him; I couldn't have, if I'd wanted. He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice. I know I can't understand it, I know. I mustn't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery" (251-252).