

Joy T.T. "Indianness in Indian Writing in English: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's Novels." Thesis. Research and Postgraduate Department of English, ST. Thomas' College, Thrissur (Autonomous), University of Calicut, 2021.

Chapter IV

The Geographical and Cultural Aspects of India

and Ghosh's Narration of them

Geographical and Climatic Descriptions of India

The readers in other countries prefer to read fiction not only to enjoy the stories of a country but also to know more about the country including its geographical and climatic conditions. Many people all over the world have been attracted by the phrase 'Incredible India' and they wish to know how far it is truthful. The Indian English novelists have done great service in this regard because they have showed genuine enthusiasm and direct experience of each place in describing the background of their stories. The way of thinking and living of a community is closely associated with its geographical specialities and changes in climate. The mindset of the fishermen community is entirely different from that of people living near to forests and hill areas. Similarly, people living in villages follow a different style of living from that of the people in cities.

Most of the Indian English writers have chosen either rivers or seas as the background for their stories. Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his *Indian Writing in English* comments on this aspect of Indianness like this:

Novels whose action is set by the side of a river are a category by themselves. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has advanced the ingenious theory that, for the Aryans in India, the 'river cult' is a symbol of their pre-Indian existence-a survival of the Danube! (322).

Iyengar gives a few examples also for his remark. K.S. Venkataramani's novel *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) is set in the background of the village Alvanti on the shore of Cauvery. The action of Humayun Kabir's novel *Men and Rivers* (1945) takes place on the banks of the Padma. R.K. Narayan's novels centred in Malgudi on the shore of the Sarayu. In Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) the river Hemavathy is a person and presence. In his *The Serpent and the Rope*, Raja Rao describes the beautiful pious city of Benares, the holy Ganges river as a goddess and other important surrounding places in detail.

Ghosh has given much preference to local and indigenous knowledge in his writing and the knowledge of Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* is a good example for this attitude. Pramod K.Nayar analyses how Ghosh has used knowledge and power based on the character Kanai in *The Hungry Tide*.

Kanai has inherited a story, and he wants to tell the story to the world. Considering it is Morichjhapi that he will narrate, the uncanny persistence of the ghosts of the refugees and state violence in the postcolonial age is significant. The postcolonial uncanny in Ghosh is working - out of the question of knowledge and power. The knowledge of the tide country, dolphins and its bloody history is now "open source" the adopt a contemporary idiom: it will be made available through public databases and narratives. The uncanny agora's past - of - repeated floods, massacres and predators - has to be uncovered, not through sophisticated technologies alone, but with the help of local knowledge (113).

Ghosh also follows his predecessors to present the background of his story. In the first part of the novel, *Sea of Poppies* 'Land' the protagonist Deeti and her daughter Kabutri are living and working in a village near Ghazipur, some 50 kms east of Benares (Varanasi), on

the shore of the Ganges. The second part 'River', centers on the activities of the owner of the *Ibis* and of his friends in Calcutta on the shore of the Hoogli. The final part 'Sea' takes place in the schooner the *Ibis* in the Indian Ocean on its way from Calcutta to its destination in Mauritius.

The places in India presented in *The Glass Palace*

Madras

After overcoming the nominal resistance of the Burmese soldiers, the British army with the help of the Indian soldiers captured The Glass Palace in Mandalay and took King Thebaw, Queen Supayalat and the Princesses as prisoners. The Royal Family spent the night in one of the buildings in the palace grounds and the next day Colonel Sladen, the spokesman of the conquering British army informed the King that the Royal family would be transported from Mandalay the following day. He added that the king could use the remaining time to make his preparations.

The Royal Family were taken to the riverside in two bullock-carts and the maids carrying boxes and bundles followed the carts on foot. They boarded a steamer named Thooriya and after five days on the Irrawaddy it anchored in the Rangoon river. From Rangoon port it continued its journey to Madras. In Madras the Royal Family were taken to a mansion that had been arranged for the duration of their stay in the city. They left Madras a month later on a steamer called the Clive. They sailed through the Palk Straits, with the northern tip of Ceylon visible on the left, and the southernmost point in India, Cape Comorin, in view on the right. Four days after leaving Madras the Clive anchored Ratnagiri.

Ghosh gives a clear idea about the location of Ratnagiri through the conversation between King Thebaw and Mr Cox, the English policeman who was in charge of the Royal Family in their journey from Rangoon:

‘What?’ The King stared at him, nonplussed. ‘Where is this place?’ ‘Some hundred and twenty miles south of Bombay. An excellent place, with fine views of the sea.’

‘Fine views?’

The King sent for a map and asked Mr Cox to show him where Ratnagiri was. Mr Cox indicated a point somewhere between Bombay and Goa. The King was thoroughly alarmed to note that the place was too insignificant to be marked on the map.

‘But we would rather be in a city, Mr Cox. Here in Madras. Or Bombay or Calcutta. What will we do in a small village?’

‘Ratnagiri is a district headquarters, Your Highness, not a village by any means’ (64).

In Ratnagiri a large, two-storeyed bungalow set inside a walled garden was allotted for the stay of the last Burmese king and his family. It was called Outram House and it faced the sea. It was very near to the Mandvi jetty. The novelist describes the life of the royal family in exile in Ratnagiri.

Peculiar aspects of the Indian seas especially tide in Bengal in *Sea of Poppies*

Most of the Indian writers in English have taken much pain to depict the geographical features and climatic conditions in India during the different seasons. Salman Rusdhie picturises Bombay genuinely in his work *The Midnight Children*. Several readers prefer books belonging to Indian writing in English in order to understand more about India. Ghosh has never disappointed such readers for he narrates the varied aspects of the Indian rivers and seas. As a native of Bengal, he speaks on the tide in the Hooghly based on his direct

knowledge. He says that no human agency cannot fix the date of the *Ibis*'s departure to Mauritius. Instead 'a quirk of the tides' would fix such things:

...the more dangerous oddities of the waterways of Bengal: namely the ban, or bore - a tidal phenomenon that sends walls of water hurtling upriver from the coast. Bores are never more hazardous than in the periods around Holi and Diwali, when the seasons turn upon an equinoctial hinge: at those times, rising to formidable heights and travelling at great speed, the waves can pose a serious threat to the river's traffic. It was one such wave that determined when the *Ibis* would weigh anchor: the announcement of the hazard having been made well in time, it was decided that the schooner would ride the bore out at her moorings. Her passengers would come on board the day after (343).

Ghosh describes in detail how people get ready for the tide. The harbour-master warned in the morning that the bore was expected on the river around sunset. The moment onwards the riverfront was busy with preparations. The fishermen worked together to carry small boats, sailing boats and even light weight boats. They were moved out of the water and placed them beyond the river's reach. Patelis, budgerows, batelos and other river crafts were too heavy to be lifted from the water. So they were anchored at safe places. Brigs, brigantines, schooners and other ocean - going vessels anchored strongly and unbent their sails.

Cities in the background of the novels in Indian English

Raja Rao has described in detail the beautiful pious city of Benaras, the holy Ganga river and other historical places in his novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. Ruth Praver Jhabwala, born in Germany of Polish parents, married to an Indian architect and settled in New Delhi. Though she is a foreigner, she has chosen Indian themes for her novels,

especially the background of New Delhi. She describes the over-inflating population of the city and their specialities in their way of thinking and living. She gives minute observation about the numerous foreign embassies, international agencies, foundations, cultural centres, clubs and groups, etc. in the capital city. Anita Desai's novel *Cry the Peacock* (1963) is presented in the background of Delhi. She paints lively and colourful pictures of Delhi with its grand majestic Birla Mandir, old Delhi, Garden, etc. In *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai describes Calcutta city as an area of smoke and darkness, of noise and squalor, and of disease and death. She depicts it as a soulless evil city. Kamala Markandaya's novel *A Handful of Rice* explains the strange aspects of Madras city. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* describes the darker sides of Bombay city. She says that the pavements of Bombay are garbage-strewn, shit-pocketed, and foul-smelling.

The novel *The Hungry Tide* presents in the background of the 'tide country' of West Bengal - the 'archipelago of islands'. It comprises the Sundarbans delta where the Ganga unfurls into the Indian Ocean. The place is closely connected with a littoral ecosystem that includes the largest surviving mangrove forests and adjacent tiger population in the world today. There remains the nearly extinct or critically threatened Gangetic and Irrawaddy dolphins. Moreover, there is a human population of approximately 4 million settlers drawn to the tide country by a series of utopian social projects. As a writer Ghosh always follows three great principles in his narration: love of humankind, an ethic of tolerance and mutual respect in a world of strangers. He faces the dilemma of how to balance the protection of prevailing ecosystem and the miserable life of the poorest people in the islands. Meg Samuelson of University of Cape Town in South Africa summarises Ghosh's strain to present his theme in the following words:

He seeks to strike the desired balance through a littoral imagination that dissolves distinctions between apparently opposed categories and which

disperses agency without losing sight of the forces of power assembling against the ecosystem and its human components (196).

Geography and life of people in the Sundarbans

Being a Bengali Ghosh has been able to observe the salient features of the Indian life, especially of Bengal. Robbie B.H. Goh of National University of Singapore has appreciated Ghosh's ability to narrate such things in the following remark:

The inhabitants of the Sundarbans are intimately but also tragically tied to the land, a particularly treacherous and unforgiving territory of small islands filled with predators like crocodiles and tigers, and deeply affected by silting and changes in the river's course over time. Survival in this strange land depends heavily not only on strength, hard work and courage, but also on deep local knowledge, and almost mystical reverence for the land, which is personified in the local god and protector – figure Bon Bibi (100-5). In this novel, Ghosh is fascinated by the body of the terrain, and the effect that it has on the body of its inhabitants. The first description of the Sundarbans occurs in the excerpt from his uncle's journal that Kanai reads on the train, a highly poetic and symbolic description that emphasizes the region's vast body and complex contours: it is an "immense archipelago of islands", "stretching for almost three hundred kilometres", with each mangrove forest "a universe unto itself", often filled with an "impassably dense" foliage (6-8).

Amitav Ghosh gives us a genuine picture of Calcutta city in his second novel *The Shadow Lines*. As he has spent his childhood days there, he knows the city more closely and intimately. The unnamed narrator and other local boys meet Tridib, the elder son of his grandmother's sister Mayadebi at Gola Bazar in Calcutta. The novelist presents a colourful

picture of Calcutta through his lively narration. The busy streets of Calcutta during pooja days deserve our attention because the novelist gives us a photographic picture of the city. Here also we see Indianness in its grandeur. In this context we have to remember that though Amitav Ghosh has settled with his family in New York, he visits Calcutta every year to spend a few days in his home town. That attachment is shown about Calcutta city in many of his works. The unnamed narrator explains:

It took us much longer than usual to drive through the city: cars have no privilege on the roads at that time of the year; the streets are overwhelmed by the festivities. We had to inch forward near Gariahat, with Nityananda and Tridib hanging out of the windows, begging shoppers to make way. Near Sealdah it took us almost half an hour to skirt around a pandal that was jutting out from the pavement, right into the middle of the street (44).

G.R. Taneja in RLA College, Univeristy of Dehi, has made an interesting observation about Calcutta city related with modern Indian history in the conclusion of his brief review of *The Shadow Lines*:

The author's evocation of the city of his birth and adolescent years, Calcutta, depicted in remarkably vivid detail, is comparable only with Anita Desai's re-creation of Bomaby in *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988). His experience as a social anthropologist at the Universities of which they exist. He reveals a sense of history and a firm grasp of sociocultural and historical material that underlies his narrative. One of his earliest memories of Calcutta is that of a mob surrounding his house, a memory that he decided to "exhume" and confront after he witnessed the 1984 riots (the most traumatic event in contemporary Indian history) that spread through the country after Indira

Gandhi's assassination. *The Shadow Lines* takes in war-devastated London, civil strife in post-partition East Bengal, and riot-hit Calcutta and projects a major critique of the psychological make up of the contemporary man who thrives on violence(365).

The novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* takes readers to various important places in Calcutta. Sudeep Sen of Aark Arts Books in London has made a striking comment in his this book review:

Another important strand in the book is painted Urmila Roy, a journalist whose movements allow us to see the present day lower – middle – class Calcutta, revisit real locales such as Rabindra Sadan and Lower Circular Road, and experience the world of Bengali literary fiction and culture. There is always a tension between the said and the unsaid, the known and the unknown, and between what is considered eerie and what is normal (221).

Dutta K. points out how Ghosh has described the geographical aspects in the narration of his novel *The Circle of Reason*:

Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* presents a much more enigmatic appreciation. It combines within itself an uncompromising restlessness with a poise and control that suggests peace rather than longing. This is remarkable, for really *The Circle* offers nothing which it can call home. Initially located in a refugee village, the story refers back to Bangladesh and Calcutta, finally moving to the Middle East via Kerala where it reaches its denouement in a desert of shifting sand-dunes. And all the while it travels through environments which are never entirely rural or urban. Nor do its ideas provide a stable attitude. Each idea evolves from the story, posing a challenge to the

preceding one and is itself qualified by a succeeding understanding. Even a basic element like Time, is not uniformly patterned. *The Circle* is an epic of restlessness (62).

Cultural Aspects of India

The Indian English fiction is quite attractive to readers all over the world for its presentation of the vast and enduring culture of India. Culture is generally defined as the sum total of all that is reflected in the mode of life of people, their thought process and outlook of life and their needs, and aims and aspirations. These abstracts are best expressed through the arts and literature of a country. When a writer is writing either in English or in one of the regional languages, knowingly or unknowingly demonstrates his / her cultural background. Being an ancient culture India has followed certain principles as love, brotherhood, benevolence, tolerance, truth, non-violence, faith in God and reverence for the old, the Guru and the parents. Our culture is closely associated with the faith of the people in their concerned religions.

The Indian English novelists have analysed the eternal values of our ancient culture and emphasized their significance in the present context of individual, family, social, national and international life. These writers have been able to point out how the Western Culture influenced our traditional culture. That is why, Dorothy M. Spencer rightly regards Indian fiction in English as a major source for a systematic study of culture - contact and cultural change, with Indian world-view as the focus.

The narration of a story, background and characters in an Indian English novel will definitely reveal an Indian flavour which will reflect the Indian thought and culture. A close study of Indian English novels can bring out the various aspects of the Indian culture, such as the status of woman in a traditional Indian society, the disruptive influences of femme fatale,

male domination in a society, importance given to the concept of family, Hindu concepts like asceticism and renunciation, the cyclic progression of life and death, attitude of Indian society towards the sufferings of people in other countries, etc.

Raja Rao's second novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) which won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963, is an outstanding model to bring out the cultural legacy of India. Ramaswamy, a young Hindu, who goes to France to do research in history. There he meets, loves and marries Madeleine, a lecturer in history, but they gradually drift apart as Ramaswamy comes to realize the gulf between the Indian and Western conceptions of love, marriage and family. His realisation of his own identity becomes clearer, when he meets Savithri, a Cambridge - educated and militantly modern girl, who is a hard-core Indian at heart. Madeleine finally withdraws not only from Ramaswamy but also from the world itself. He realizes that his love for Savithri is something not meant for mere physical union, but also an ultimate union of the soul with God. Savithri is a paragon of wifely devotion, the Savithri of ancient Hindu legend, who rescued her husband Satyavan from death. Savithri does the same role in the novel - to bring enlightenment to Ramaswamy and save him from dying into a purely worldly life. At last Ramaswamy goes to meet his Guru who alone can destroy his ego and make him fit for his salvation. This novel brings out the Indian view on some basic issues such as love, marriage, sex, family, society, religion, learning, death, etc.

Gisele Cardoso de Lemos summarises what Amitav Ghosh has done in the conclusion of his essay, 'Questioning the Western idea of reason through Hindu philosophy: An analysis of *The Circle of Reason* by Amitav Ghosh':

In *The Circle of Reason* Ghosh shows the same situation with the incorporation of the fruits of Western analytical reason, symbolized through the sewing machine, phrenology, carbolic acid, etc. and its appropriation

(selection and transformation) in contact with Indian culture and local needs. However, Ghosh goes further. Using Hindu philosophy as a critical tool of this project, he ends up rehabilitating the notion of reason, turning a limited reason into a liberating one, and showing readers that a former British colony does not necessarily have to reproduce the European reason, as some former colonies did, but offers the example of Indian civilization as an alternative (20).

As a writer it is pointed out that Ghosh is a product of two or more cultures. At the same time, he has been able to make him free from the limited spheres of nationalism, language, or ethnicity. Stephen Alter has mentioned this postcolonial aspect of literature in his article “Writing Between Cultures” like this:

“ The cages in which writers were once confined have now been sprung open. Essentially, the problem of alienation is less acute today, because the world is so much more complex, so polyglot, so full of competing voices, that most writers have become nations unto themselves.”

Unity in Diversity in *The Shadow Lines*

Almost all religions have followers in India. They live together without any ill feeling towards other believers. The two families, the Datta Chaudharies in Bengal and the Prices in London, belong to entirely different religions. There is great amity between these two families despite the racial, religious and cultural disparities. Iia, the Indian girl gets married to Nick, the English boy. May, the English girl falls in love with Tridib, the Indian boy. The consequences after the disappearance of the sacred relic from the Hazratbal mosque in Kashmir is another good example for ‘unity in diversity’:

As the news spread, life came to a standstill in the valley of Kashmir. Despite the bittercold thousands of people, including hundreds of wailing women, took part in black - flag demonstrations from Srinagar to the 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, Sunday, 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 (225).

The narrator's grandmother believes the principle of diversity of the country. She has her own ideas to retain the diversity of the country. Here is one example: "When she was headmistress, my grandmother had decided once that every girl who opted for Home Science ought to be taught how to cook at least one dish that was a speciality of some part of the country other than her own. It would be a good way, she thought, of teaching them about the diversity and vastness of the country" (116).

Changes happened to the Burmese princesses while their stay in India. It is said that human being is a creation of its circumstances. In anthropology changing circumstances are given supreme importance in the destiny of human beings. As an anthropologist Ghosh keenly observes such changes of his characters and highlights them spontaneously in his writing. During the stay of their early years in Ratnagiri (India) the Princesses usually dressed in Burmese clothes - aingyis and htameins. But with the passage of time their garments changed. The novelist notes their changes like this:

One day, no one quite remembered when, they appeared in saris - not expensive or sumptuous saris, but the simple green and red cottons of the

district. They began to wear their hair braided and oiled like Ratnagiri schoolgirls; they learned to speak Marathi and Hindustani as fluently as any of the townsfolk - it was only with their parents that they now spoke Burmese (*The Glass Palace*, 82).

The King and the Queen had four Princesses, among them the first two had been born in Burma. The eldest one married Mohan Sawant, their coachman, lived with him and her children in a small house on the outskirts of Ratnagiri town. The Second Princess and her husband lived in Calcutta for several years before moving to the hillstation of Kalimpong, near Darjeeling. There the Princess and her husband opened a dairy business. So, it happened that of the four Princesses, the two who had been born in Burma both chose to live on India. Their younger sisters, on the other hand, both born in India, chose to settle in Burma: both married and had children.

The Concept of freedom based on culture in *The Shadow Lines*

The Indian concept of freedom is entirely different from that of the Western because it has certain frames and they are based on our culture and tradition. Ghosh has conceived it well and depicted it touchingly. When the narrator, Ila and Robi go to a night club in Calcutta, Ila exerts her freedom. She goes to two businessmen and starts flirting with them. She gets ready to dance with one of them. Robi tries to discourage her from her attempt, but she is firm in her decision. Robi is a physically strong boy. He simply throws away one of the two businessmen. The singing and dancing stops. Robi takes out his purse and hands over one of the waiters a fifty rupee note. Then he puts his arm around Ila and leads them out. The waiters follow them all the way to the pavement. Ila feels humiliated and bursts out. Robi pacifies her:

Listen Ila, Robi said, shaking his head. You shouldn't have done what you did. You ought to know that; girls don't behave like that here.

What the fuck do you mean? She spat at him. What do you mean 'girls'? I'll do what I bloody well want, when I want and where.

No you won't, he said. Not if I'm around. Girls don't behave like that here.

Why not? She screamed. Why fucking well not?

You can do what you like in England, he said, But here there are certain things you cannot do. That's our culture; that's how we live.....

Then she pushed me away and waved a taxi. It stopped, and darted into it, rolled down the window, and shouted: Do you see now why, I've chosen to live in London? Do you see? It's only because I want to be free.

Free of what? I said.

Free of you! She shouted back. Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you (*The Shadow Lines*, 88-89).

Ila represents the concept of the Western or modern civilization. She finds there, freedom for everything. To her, freedom is something which allows her what she likes to do. To be free of commitments, of relationships, of duties, of everything. Live for one's own self, that seems to be the motto. Certainly, these crazy, mad, free generations do not wish to taste the joy of surrender, unconditional love and acceptance. Robi is the symbol of concept of freedom according to the Indian culture.

The narrator's grandmother Tha'mma also finds the same reason for Ila's decision to live in London. The narrator told his grandmother that Ila lived in London only because she wanted to be free. Tha'mma's reaction is very sharp: "It's not freedom she wants, said my grandmother, her blood shot eyes glowing in the hollows of her withered face. She wants to be left alone to do what she pleases: that's all that any whore would want. She'll find it easily enough over there; that's what those places have to offer. But that is not what it means to be free" (89). Tha'mma makes clear what Ila's concept of freedom is. Later scenes convince us that Ila's concept of freedom is shortlived. It is a synonym to selfishness. Ghosh appreciates the Indian concept of freedom despite its restrictions because in effect it is positive.

Erik Peeters has made an indepth study of these two characters in his article. "Crossing Boundaries, Making Home: Issues of Belonging and Migration in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*" and has found out this:

Despite both women's claim that they seek only freedom, both Ila and Tha'mma become equally and permanently dislocated as a result of their belief in the imaginary idea of culture-space and spatialised belonging. Where Tha'mma submits to an idea of belonging and social being that denies, that she can ever fully belong in India because her place of birth is at odds with her cultural descent, Ila can never belong anywhere because she rejects completely any notion of belonging or descent. Where Tha'mma is forever haunted by the suspicion that she is, after all, a refugee in her homeland because she has lost her place of birth, Ila rejects the notion that she might be at home anywhere, seeking only to be free, a concept utterly vague even in her own mind (33).

Padmini Mongia also has compared these two characters, Tha'mma and Ila, and has suggested the reason for their great difference in attitude like this:

But although Tha'mma's desire for nationhood is historically determined, as the only woman in this novel whose convictions translate into meaningful action, her actions and beliefs being represented as dated is problematic. Her natural inheritor, Ila, is allowed only the meanest notion of freedom, for to Ila freedom means the freedom to choose to dance in a disco in Calcutta as she would in London. That Tha'mma has no respect for such an idea of freedom is no surprise (227).

East - West encounter in Indian English fiction

The prolonged colonial rule made drastic and tremendous changes in the social and cultural life of the Indian society. As an ancient civilization the Indian society has been following its own traditional culture in some spheres of life. Whereas the colonial rulers propagated the ideas of west as the modern in the thought and action of the Indians. So naturally it began to lead a clash between the indigenous Indian tradition and the imported European conceptions. The Indian intellectual witnessed the two forces in his life - the ancient traditional values of Indian and ultra-modern enlightened scientific ideas and attitudes of the West. Thus, an average Indian personality becomes a combination of these two forces, a product of conflict and compromise of the east and the west. The theme of this cultural conflict or reconciliation occupied a pivotal place in the novels written in the post - independence India. Besides the western education and culture injected new thoughts and beliefs in the minds of those Indians living abroad. On their return to India they began to struggle to readjust and reevaluate the ideas they received from abroad. Indian English novelists are more serious and conscious about the tension and rift in the personality of an

average modern Indian, according to the changing circumstances in Indian society. Gradually their characters began to adopt western ways in manners and customs, in dress, in eating habits, etc.

Christopher A. Shinn has admired *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a science fiction and has found out a genuine difference between the eastern and western attitude towards science. He has expressed his opinion in the words given below:

‘As a postcolonial novel, however, Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* does to a certain degree privilege the work of radical subjects in the race for the future. Their opposition to the nineteenth-century bacteriologist Ross and to the late - twentieth - century multinational corporation the International Water Council confronts the assumed authority of the colonizer. Ghosh situates the reader in close proximity to the novel’s non-Western subjects to critique the multiple uses of biopower in the calculated global management of life. Bodies have always been discontinuous sites where fierce battles between colonizer and colonized and are waged. In Ghosh’s novel, resistance can be found in the massive experimental neural connections that exist in continual tension between the forces of biopower and the politics of life.’

Amitav Ghosh shows great skill in introducing the cultural interaction between the East and the West in his novel *The Shadow Lines*. He makes it more touching by depicting two families - one is Datta Chaudharies in Bengal and Prices family in London. The contrast between these two families itself is a good example for Indianness in this novel. Comparing to the Western concept of family, the Indian concept is more mutual and respectful. Till death Tha'mma is the head of her family. Even her disagreeable character at times is never questioned by others. They bear them silently. Her sister Mayadebi also has her own status in her family.

Ania Spyra examines closely the sense of safety of belonging for women in the modern world based on two female characters Sita Mirchandani in Qurratulain Hyder's *Sita Betrayed* and Ila Datta – Chaudhuri in Amitha Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Sita is a woman initially displaced by the Partition and later by her Western education. Ila does not know where she comes from because she spent her childhood in constant movement as a daughter of a U.N. official. Sita lost her family home because the redrawing of the national borders which accompanied Partition. Ila, on the other hand, chooses to live abroad in hopes of evading the communal, patriarchal expectations that bourgeois women in India are supposed to fulfil, but she finds similar patriarchal binaries at work in England. Both women do not find a comfortable space for them to live. Both Sita and Ila are constantly in motion, traveling between communities and nation– states, crossing boundaries in a relentless search for a space belonging. Ania Spyra comments:

‘While such an inescapability of patriarchy and its epistemic violence on women’s bodies may be precisely what Hyder as a feminist writer wanted the reader to see as the reason for her character’s sense of being at a loss (rather than at home) in the world, a similar yet inadvertent message can be inferred from Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*. The novel’s female traveler, Ila, shares with Sita a similar uneasy and exoticizing relationship with the men of the “modern world.” Ila’s situation, however, is all the more difficult in that she puts her faith in this modern world, in which she hopes to find both her home and her freedom from the rigid ideals of bourgeois femininity in India.’

Tridib’s relationship with May Price is essentially tragic. 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. They are attracted to each other. 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, a pornographic letter to her.

May Price comes to India and finds that Tridib is not a monster after all. She finds him lovable. When she first spots him at the railway station, she thinks:

He looked awkward, absurdly young, and somehow very reassuring. Also, a little funny, because those glasses of his hugely magnified eyes, and he kept blinking in an anxious embarrassed kind of way. She hadn't been able to help throwing her arms around him; it was just pure relief. She knew at last why she had come and she was glad. It had nothing to do with curiosity (167).

May's humanitarian attitude to all living creatures is praiseworthy. While on a drive with Tridib, she forces him to stop the car to attend a wounded dog on the way. She herself slits the throat of the creature to relieve it of its pain. First Tridib resents, but later accepts that she did the right thing. A highly romantic and passionate relationship has developed between this Indian boy and English girl, but by a strange irony of fate, she herself becomes responsible for his untimely death. Tridib's death is the most tragical event in the novel.

The Concept of family in the Indian culture

Since the beginning of our culture it is seen that we give supreme importance to the concept of family. We make great sacrifice for the sake of our families. The master of the family is given utmost respect in our families. Often it is risen to the level of divinity or spirituality. Ghosh has depicted this aspect of our culture in the novel *The Shadow Lines* strikingly. Ghosh pictures the narrator's mother as a typical Indian housewife. Any man with an employed wife can be jealous of the kind of attention and care that mother of the narrator showers on his father. His father is getting rewards for living by convention. His mother

eagerly waits for his father to return from office. Transistor and other noises are shunned off. In this serene, wifely atmosphere, she brings “a clean fresh kurta and a pair of pyjamas and gently nudges him into the bathroom” (128). Then like a king he sits in an easy chair and she narrates soothingly the events of the day. It is a perfect, Indian family picture. Here we never feel it a work of art because it is so common in Indian families.

The attachment to one's family can be seen in Tha'mma's decision to visit her ancestral home in Dhaka after her retirement. She feels to bring her aged uncle Jethamoshai from Dhaka and look after him well till his death. The respect given to Tha'mma in her family is another good example for the Indian concept of family. Apparently, she is very strict in her conduct. It is very difficult to adjust with her as the head of the family. She has her own insistence in everything. As the daughter-in-law the narrator's mother struggles hard to follow her principles. Even then she does not question her. She bears everything silently for the sake of the family. The narrator also knows that some of her ideals are unjust, but he bears them silently.

When we observe the Price family in London, Ghosh's attitude to the concept of Indian family becomes clearer. There the grown-up daughter May lives at another place in London itself. Her mother doesn't feel anything wrong in her living alone. Her son Nick also doesn't show much attachment to his mother. Whatever he does, he thinks of his own achievements. As a mother she doesn't have any importance in his life. Ila's attitude to family life also is worth analysing. After her marriage with Nick, she happens to know that he has contact with some other women. She cannot even think of such a thing. She becomes really helpless. She has a divine concept of family and that is entirely different from that of western. Nick does not have any love at all towards Ila. He marries her only for his material prosperity i.e. the money which her father will invest for him on account of her.

Ghosh's historical and geographical knowledge in *Sea of Poppies*

Sandra L. Richards explains why she has recommended *Sea of Poppies* (2008) as a faculty reading for her students in the beginning of the essay 'My General Education: "Discovering" Amitav Ghosh':

Reading Ghosh has offered me not only a fascinating introduction to the Indian Ocean world but also an occasion to reflect upon the dynamics of a good classroom in which both instructor and student are called upon to acknowledge their intellectual vulnerability, commit to working with others to produce knowledge, and recognize that our efforts may result in more questions than answers or in disagreements as well as consensus. Critical generosity and a doubly attentive listening are proposed as strategies by which faculty and students may navigate Ghosh's large geographical, historical, and intellectual terrain and strengthen muscles of reflexivity, collaboration, and respect (255).

After mentioning the travellers on the schooner *Ibis* going from Calcutta to Mauritius, A.Arora makes the following remark:

As this abbreviated cast of characters suggests, Ghosh constructs a world in which people of different cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds, propelled by desperate courage, naïve arrogance, greed, or simple happenstance, find themselves in a new environment in which they must learn how to communicate with each other and craft new identities. His creole society – in – the making harkens to an earlier epoch of globalization that has had a profound impact upon our own era.