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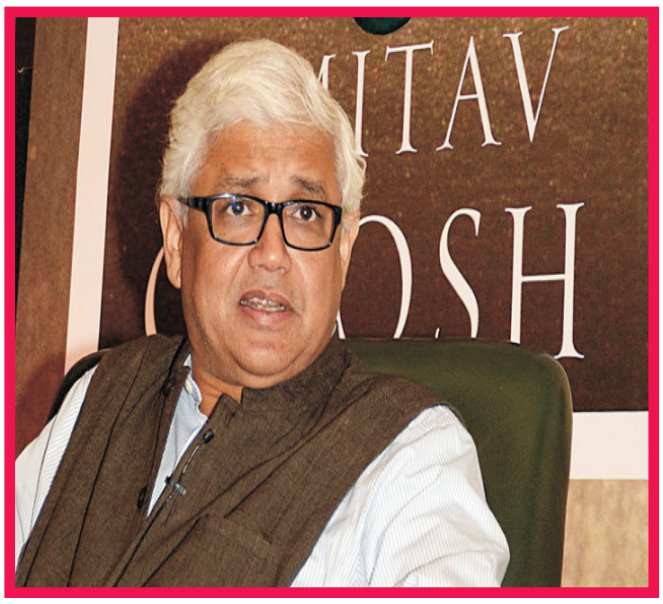


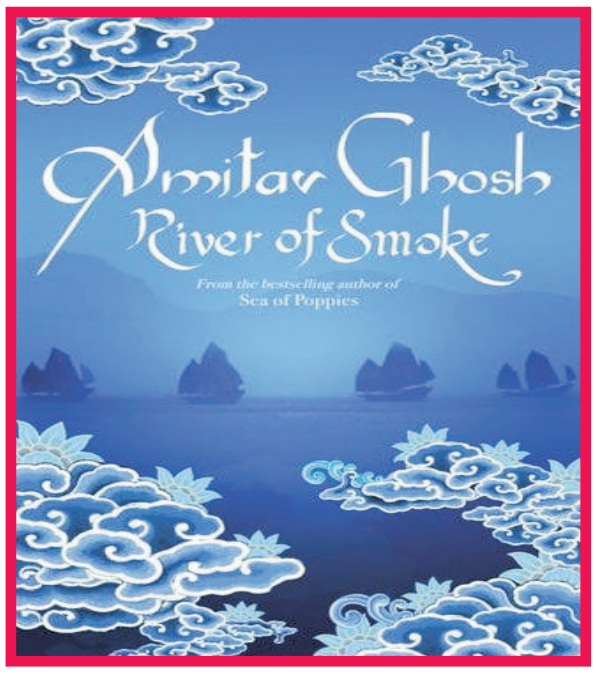
THE HORIZONS OF INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL EXPLORED IN THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH

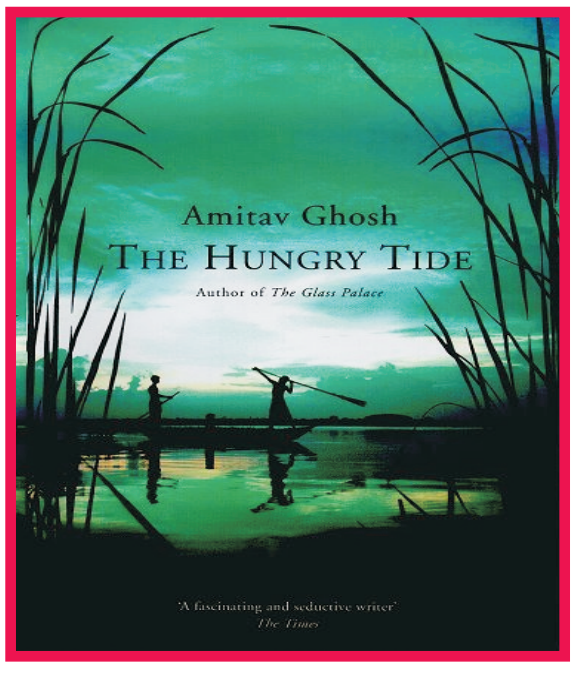
Abstract:-

The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, real¬ity itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as process. The novel has become the leading hero in the literary development of our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it.Bakhtin was writing in a European context, but could have been addressing with even sharper relevance that of new literatures in English. Bakhtin identified the novel as the "open ended" literary form of the modern age, reflecting and bringing together many languages ("heteroglossia"). These languages are not simply linguistic, but socio-ideological" idioms and forms, voices from different strata of cultural experience.

Keywords:

Amitav Ghosh, realism, Tradition, commercialism, colonialism.





INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh's work introduces a number of "languages," includ¬ing those of the Indian folk-tale, the *Mahabharata*, journalism, and the memory patterns of the extended family, radically de-constructing tradi¬tional novel forms. In a genre associated in Europe with "realism," Ghosh explores Vedic concepts of Maya (illusion) and transcendence to question the possibility of Western realism. In the opening section of The Circle of Reason, the village capitalist, Bhudeb Roy, organizes a festival to Saraswati which Ghosh identifies rather loosely as "the Hindu Goddess of Learning."[2] He has a six-foot image built, with spin¬ning electric lights behind the eyes and a silver-foil halo. During the ceremony the rationalist Balaram leaps onto the platform with defiling sandals and tears off the dyed cotton hair, revealing the clay underneath. "This is not Saraswati, Learning," he cries to the electrified crowd, "it is Vanity." At a deep level, the image of Saraswati is»"Vanity" for in The Vedic tradition she is a feminine principle and aspect of nature, and only becomes "knowledge" in flowing through the enlightened devo¬tee—Bhudeb Roy is certainly not enlightened. But Balaram is equally benighted—he "exposes" the image not because this misrepresents the tradition, but because it does not represent his concept of Westernized rationalism.

Towards the end of the book there is another festival, the reenactment of Chitrangada's appearance to Arjuna. In the story, taken from the *Mahubharata* via Tagore, the warrior princess Chitrangada is granted the gift of physical beauty for a year in order to attract Arjuna. She becomes his lover, but Arjuna, not knowing the transformation, is drawn by hear¬say to Chitrangada's other self. After the year, Arjuna sees her without her beauty, and understands the illusion of the physical. (382) The two episodes are alike and yet opposites. In the first, a religious image is un¬masked, showing the crude substance beneath; in the second, physical reality is dissipated to reveal the spiritual.

In both, the real significance of the ritual has been missed. In the first, traditional belief has been prostituted as a means of publicity by the grossly materialistic Bhudeb Roy; in the second, the original legend has been sentimentalized by Tagore and is being played on a gramo¬phone record, in a language the participants cannot understand, in an alien country. Chitrangada is being played by a prostitute, Kulfi. This does and does not invalidate the myths. Misused and misunderstood, the two episodes do have a meaning—the first in the cycle of conflict within which Alu begins his quest for a higher meaning; the second, in the movement that redeems Kulfi (who is given a full ritual burial), and turns Alu back to India. Only through illusion can truth be found.

The concern with the cyclical process of the activity of life underpins the whole book. Reality is Maya, illusion, but only through Maya can reality be understood. The three sections of the novel follow the three Vedic Gunas—Sattva, Rajas and Tamas,—the three aspects of nature (prakriti') without which no action is possible, taking the development from rising awareness of "Reason," through "Passion," to "Death" or entropy The process also brings together the divergent stylistic levels of the book—that of an exuberant folk-tale, of the emergence of a human community, and the dialectic between Indian and European consciousness in an alien predicament.

The opening sections focus on a village near the future India-Pakistan border. where Balaram embodies the impact of nineteenth-century scientific reason on India. For Balaram, the modem age began with Pasteur's development of disinfectant and inoculation, and Madame Curio's experiments with tradition to control cancer cells. With these scientific discoveries Balaram believes superstition and ignorance were done away with and the scientific basis of life established. Armed with this knowledge he wages a heroic war against the corrupt commercialism of his arch-enemy, Bhudeb Roy. Yet the inadequacy of this view is hilari¬ously underlined by Balaram's attempt to answer all problems, includ¬ing war, with buckets of carbolic acid.

Indeed Balaram's concepts of the 'new science" were already out of date, Curie and Pasteur being both creators of a new consciousness and the inheritors of the old. Again Ghosh complicates the issue. For Balaram's reliance on a nineteenth-century pseudo-science, Phrenology, in fact approximates to the Indian "superstition" of popular religion and astrology that he opposes. His search for a new Western vision of real¬ity, reflected in the chapter titled "a Pasteurised universe," brings to mind the Vedic legend of the creation of the world, in which the milk ocean of creation was churned by the gods and demons using a snake to separate the poison from the "amrit" (ambrosia). Shiva drank the poi¬son, purifying (pasteurising) the universe. However the outcome was that only the gods drank the "Amrit": Ghosh suggests Balaram also has a one-sided strategy.

Into the story comes Alu, his name, literally "potato." Alu gains his name because his head, of such interest to Balaram, is lumpy like a spud. But Alu, who emerges as the real hero of the book, is also basic, \ unlovely but ever-renewed, a child of the folk, a creature of the earth. While Balaram pursues his intellectual war against Bhudeb Roy in a landscape sacrificed by the internecine India-Pakistan conflict, Alu be¬comes a master-weaver. Weaving is a central image of the book, bring¬ing together its many paradoxes and opposites. A craft, using the cotton indigenous to India from prehistoric times, it is a paradigm of Indian cul¬ture. Yet as a mechanical process, it embodies the commercial exploita¬tion that undermine all human societies. "When the history of the world broke, cotton and cloth were behind it; mechanical man in pursuit of his own destruction . . . millions of African and half of America were

en¬slaved by cotton." (57).

When a misdirected flare ignites Balaram's defensive arsenal, Alu es¬capes with a sewing machine and Balaram's Life of Pasteur. Pursued south to Kerala by the police detective Jyoti Das, who becomes a figure of death as the book progresses, Alu crosses the Indian ocean to the imaginary Gulf State of Al-Ghazira with a boatload of Indian women, destined for the town's brothels by Zindi. Sexual, predatory and physi¬cally dominating, Zindi is an ambivalent figure of womanhood whose machinations continue whatever quest idealism may pursue. Al-Ghazira is an oil state, a chaotic meeting of the traditional folk, the old tyranny of the Emirs, and the Western pressures of colonial administration and postcolonial exploitation.

A huge economic centre has risen in the desert as a monument to a progress no one wants: when it collapses, Alu is buried in the dead-centre, the rubble arrested by a fallen beam inches from his nose. When he emerges after days of meditation, it is with the inspiration that money, not germs, are destroying civilization. The vision is as flawed as that of Balaram, and when the revolutionary society led by Abu Fahl is crushed by the state, it is with Zindi, Kulfi (an inmate of Zindi's brothel) and an orphan child called Boss that Alu escapes. Following in reverse the routes by which European culture travelled to India, they reach Tunisia, chosen by Amitav Ghosh as an instance of a political integration of European and African cultures. Here the trio meet with an expatriate Indian doctor, Dr. Verma.

The "circle" is closing. For if Balaram came to his vision of reason through biology, attacking deviant microbes with his panacea of car¬bolic acid, Dr. Verma comes to a Hindu reverence of life also from a basic in microbiology. Dr. Verma even has a Life of Pasteur. In it she points out to Alu that the germ brings both death and makes the possi-bility of life. "It says without the germ 'life would be impossible because death would be incomplete.'" (356) It is Dr. Verma who organ¬izes a dramatic reenactment of the play by Tagore, already mentioned, where the princess Chitrangada, returned to her plain appearance, is seen in her essence by Arjuna. Dr. Verma has to take what Indian actors she can find, and as noted above, when the scene is enacted, within the costumes Kulfi the prostitute takes the part of Chitrangada, while the warrior Arjuna is played by the police-agent Jyoti Das. Kulfi expresses a moment of intense sexual desire and crashes to the ground, clutching her heart, dead.

“Heavenly, Her fathers have gathered her to their heavenly abode" intones Dr. Verma, dressed as Madana, the God of Love. (400) The cy¬cle of death and regeneration is almost complete. After Alu has gone to great lengths to give Kulfi a proper Indian burial, he is told by Dr. Verma that this will give him a reason for going home, and the book ends with Alu, Boss and Zindi, turning back towards India, while the death-bearing Jyoti Das looks towards Europe.

The Circle of Reason is an extraordinarily accomplished first novel. It combines wit, intelligence and creative innovation to explore new possibilities for the novel form in the Indian context. Yet it is not wholly successful. The different narrative strategies pull apart, and the substructure, of knowledge working its way through the stages of the three Gunas, does not sufficiently unite the divergent sections. Moreover the work suffers from being too complex for its imaginative integrity: at times one becomes aware of Ghosh's manipulation.

In The Shadow Lines, Ghosh finds a sharper unifying focus. The novel brings together the forms of the autobiographical novel and the family chronicle, to subvert both. "I am born" begins Dickens' David Copperfield. "In 1939, thirteen years before I was born," begins The Shadow Lines. Ghosh's novel introduces a family "tree," but it is not the legally-defined family of European society, of Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga or Thomas Mann's Buddenhrooks—rather, it is the Asian extended family of loyalties, affections and associations. This becomes so com¬plex that even the narrator confesses confusion and the novel is to some extent about the meaning of family relationships in a disintegrating world. "Shadow Lines" of the title refers both to lines of separation, and the invisible links which bind.

There are several lines of family introduced—that of the narrator, based in Calcutta; that of his grandmother's sister, associated with Dhaka, and two further lines bringing into the story Robi and Ila. But the blood relationships merge with those forged by intimacy, as with the British family, linked through domicile in India, of Lionel Tresawsen. The narrator's closest links are with Mayadebi, his grandmother's sister, and with her son Tridib, the enigmatic older friend through which the "1" narrator experiences much of his life.

For if Circle of Reason is about "Knowledge," Shadow Lines is about "Knowing." The novel moves through an intricate weaving back- wards and forwards in time. Narrative sequence is constantly frustrated by the intrusion of memory— memory working not, as in James Joyce's Ulysses, as a stream-of-consciousness, so much as remembered family histories, restructured in a search for meaning. Memories sharpen into focus, then blur: "Although I cannot remember when it happened any more than I can remember when I first learnt to tell the time or tie my shoelaces."3 "I don't know, I can't tell: that world is closed to me, shut off by too many years spent away." (13) Can we ever be sure? One of the most vivid episodes in the novel, a sexual encounter in a bombed theatre, is related by Tridib to May and so taken at third hand by the narrator. But even Tridib cannot be certain of how far his memory has been accurate: "he didn't know whether it had really happened or he had imagined it." Yet this does not invalidate memory. "Reality" for its own sake does not have any specific truth." Ila who claims to be "objective” remembers the cities she has visited by the airport lavatories.(26) Tridib gives meaning to his experience through his imagination, but not willfully. He teaches the narrator to "use [his] imagination with pre¬cision." (29)

Not that the ostensibly "practical" Ila is free from illusion. One of the recurrent motifs in the book is the mental creation of a house from another, secret, place—a vivid expression of the relationship between real and imagined "homes." Arriving in the Tresawsen's house in London, the narrator knows the position of every room. This is because when a child he had been taken to hide in a cellar below lla's family home in Dhaka, where they had "played houses." Ila had traced out for him an imaginary house, which we discover is identical in form to the London house where Ila had spent her childhood. In the cellar, as they play at having a family, it becomes clear their doll-child represents the earlier Ila. Yet the doll is blue-eyed and befriended and protected by the son of the house, Nick Price. In reality Ila was dark, and Nick deserted her: lla's underground imagination evades reality rather than clarifying it.

The novel gains stature by placing the individual themes starkly in a contemporary context. The shadow lines divide and link peoples and na¬tions. The novel takes place largely on the newly-created Indo-Pakistan border which divides the family and its past. What is this border? Flying over it, the grandmother expects to see some sign. The father laughs— no, it will not be a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other. But the grandmother's question is a serious one. If there are no physical signs, where is the difference? Why cannot people as in the past travel from Dhaka to Calcutta without anyone stopping them? What are the shadow lines'? (154-55)

Their dual meaning emerges in the final sections of the book when the grandmothers discover a relative, turning senile, left behind in a hos¬tile Dhaka. They go to rescue him—with Robi, May and Tridib. He is trying to escape from the mob when May and Tridib run to his rescue— May is protected by being English, but Tridib, throwing himself to his own death, drawn by the 'shadow line' of imaginative sympathy. Why he should do it is the mystery left by the book. As May says, "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." (252)

The profoundly personal ending of the book is different indeed in tone to that of Ghosh's first novel. But both end with a ritual, a religious intimation of the cycle and continuation of life. Ghosh's work to-date extends the scope of the novel, not only within its own narrative, but moving outward and beyond the strategies of words, to an exploration of i.e past and the future of the culture he has inherited.

In the geography of human history no culture is an island. In effect tumid was a region in the sense of the word desa, or the French pays— 'country' is too loaded a term to use—an area. . . not 'independent' but distinctive and singular, and precisely because of that, enmeshed with its neighbors in an intricate network of differences.2

Is this, then, another irony of history, doubly confirming the appropriative powers of the dominant discourse: that like the subaltern himself, those who set out to restore his presence end only by borrowing the tools of that discourse, tools which serve only to reduplicate the first subjection which they effect, in the realms of critical theory?[3] Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject: *Subaltern studies and* Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies,* 22, 1 (1988), p. 218.

My interest in Ghosh's work arose initially from a growing concern with the way theories of colonial discourse have become globalized, while the practice of a good deal of post-colonial criticism has become overly theoreticized and predictable. Ghosh's training in historical and anthropological research, his eschewing of grand theoretic ges¬tures and his links with the SUBALTERN STUDIES project, make his work an interesting site around which current arguments in post-colonial theory can be conducted.

Ghosh's writing reflects the recent concern of anthropologists with the porosity of cultural boundaries. As Renato Rosaldo argues, 'In contrast with the classic view, which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be con¬ceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes cross from within and beyond its borders'.4 The characters in Ghosh's novels do not occupy discrete cultures, but 'dwell in travel' in cultural spaces that flow across borders—the 'shadow lines' drawn around modern nation states. Yet, like Edward Said's Orientalism, these novels also remain bound in the notion of a universal humanity and like the otherwise very different work of Homi K. Bhabha, they postulate a global theory of the colonial subject. As the Australia anthropologist Nicholas Thomas argues, 'Orientalist. . . pre-occupations . . . can be displaced, not by a new universalism, but by interest in a plethora of differences that would crosscut ethnic-cultural totalities'.5 Ghosh's ethnography *in an antique land* follows this trajectory. Influenced by his association with the Subaltern Studies scholars, Ghosh returns to a rigorous mode of empirical research recover the historically situated subjectivities of a network of traders and their slaves operating between North Africa and south-west India during the Middle Ages. This cultural space is a vast, borderless region with its own hybrid languages and practices which circulate without national or religious boundaries. Ghosh's nuanced and self-reflexive writing means that the subaltern consciousness remains a trace rather than a presence, 'a theoretical fiction' that allows him.

In the article, 'The Transit Lounge of Culture', the American anthro¬pologist James Clifford has attempted to frame Ghosh's work in the context of recent developments in the discipline of anthropology. Texts like Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands/La Frontera have shifted anthropology away from the study "of separate, authentic cultures to¬ward the borderlands between cultures;" away from separate to 'com¬parative inter cultural studies'. Such diaspora cultures are not oriented towards lost origins or homelands, but are produced by ongoing histories of migrations and transnational cultural flows. Once we begin to focus on these inter-cultural processes, Clifford argues, the notion of separate, discrete cultures

eclipsing some of them when they have out-lived the utility and purpose and sudden catastrophic changes like revolution which erupt like a volcano accumulating force and pressure over a period like French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. Scores of historical novels have been written from different perspectives and the writers tend to recreate the historical events in an accurate manner as much as possible in spite of the creative license they have. There can be no better illustration of the French revolution than "A Tale of Two Cities", Napoleon invasion of the Russia in "War and Peace" or the Russian Revolution in Gorky's 'Mother" and Pasternak's 'Dr.Zhivago' to indicate as to how history and personal lives of people are interwoven such that the collective fury of historical forces alter the lives of people, sometimes beyond recognition and often irretrievably.

The Indian struggle for independence right from 1885 to 1947 accompanied by the holocaust and trauma of partition which wrecked and uprooted the lives of millions while killing thousands of people still has resonances and reverberations in contemporary partition literature of which Amitav Ghosh The Shadowlines is a vivid and graphic example. Several people , now old, underwent the agony and affliction of being disturbed and displaced from the place of their birth like the writer Khushwant Singh still laments that his home place is no longer in India but in Pakistan and claims to have shed many bitter tears over his implacable loss. The partition of India is not on the basis of cultural divide but that on political basis with leaders fighting for satisfying their own demands and drawing imaginary lines on the political map of the country with scant regard or respect for the inter-meshed lives of the people. As Shakespeare points out in Julius Caesar the tide of human affairs subsides as time passes on leaving the traces and debris behind and often assimilated into the lives of people who may not be aware of how they came to be what they are, being ignorant of the silent forces that shaped their lives. It is only people with a broad understanding and vision of human life and its social evolution that can understand the course of history and the turns it has taken, along with the impact of other cultures in the process of living.

The induction and imposition of colonialism on Afro-Asian societies injected new force and energy into the socio-economic structure even though exploitation in nature is beneficial to the colonial ruler. Till the time these societies were caught up in a repetitive and cyclical mode of existence underscored by feudal structures of production and administration. The rise of industrialism in Europe coincided with the search for cheap raw materials and labour along with new centers of commerce and exchange. The colonial rule was supported with collusion from native rulers and sheer force of modern weaponry in the initial stage which later was substituted by political and bureaucratic administration with help and participation from the indigenous dominant groups. This has lead to gradual changes in socio-economic structures and way of life paving the way for the creation of modern society on the lines of the European societies way of living . How this process has worked at different levels of socio-economic and psychological process is a very interesting study undertaken by post-modern philosophers like Michael Foucault who radicalized the approach towards the study of societies at different stages of growth and evolution.

History, as a narrative of human socio-economic and political evolution, has multiple perspectives and depends not only upon the philosophy and perception of the historian who select his facts for chronological presentation but also which segment of society and from whose angle it is presented, counts a lot in understanding it. The best evidence for this argument is the recent development of a new school "The Sub-altern studies" which is history from below or rather history of the unarticulated masses. The colonial rulers indicted their own version of the history of the colonized which they projected as being stagnant and stratified which as rulers they were able to extricate and reset on the path of progress. This kind of skewed and slanted history gained much popularity among the people of the rulers who believed that their rule is beneficial to the colonized people and that they are rendering selfless service to their upliftment. These histories cleverly concealed the plunder, loot and exploitation of the rulers and the merchant class and presented the oppressive colonial rule as an altruistic one.

In contrast to the colonizers version of history, the indigenous historian rectifies and resets the picture of history from the oppressed and exploited peoples point of view and reveals the seamy side of colonial rule which is not presented in official version. There is a need not only to present a corrected picture of indigenous history but also to evolve a new methodology of identifying facts and underlining their significance as argued by D.D Kosambi in his popular history book "An introduction to the study of Indian history"

The colonial rule has introduced, though unwittingly, a new awareness which was not found in Indian history earlier as earlier groups or communities came, settled and became assimilated into the broad spectrum of the Indian way of life like Muslims, Parsees etc. The coming of English people created a new socio-cultural situation in which they not only maintained their identity and way of life strictly segregated from the lives of Indians but aggressively attacked the indigenous cultures as primitive and barbaric with their own culture as the criterion for which there cannot be worse testimony than their ignorant account of early rulers and their ilk. The English rulers never integrated into Indian societies but drained the country's resources with tremendous efficiency and whatever development they created is either incidental or subsidiary to the main goal of exploitation. What is more painful is the collaboration of the native elite who disdained the masses as beasts of burden and who are hand in glove with alien rulers and rather amorous and imitative of their habits and lifestyle. Ironically, it is under the exploitative and oppressive rule of the British that a new sense of self-awareness and political and cultural

evaporates; we become aware that all cultures have long histories of border crossings, diasporas and mi¬grations.7

In Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis, Clifford's colleague Renato Rosaldo describes a symptomatic exchange between delegates at a conference where the contesting paradigms within anthropology were vividly expressed in the metaphors of a museum and a garage sale:

... at a conference ... on the crisis in anthropology, Cora Du Bois, a re¬tired Harvard professor, spoke of the distance she felt from the 'complexity and disarray of what I once found a justifiable and challenging disci¬pline. ... It has been like moving from a distinguished art museum into a garage sale'. The images of the museum, for the classic period, and the garage sale, for the present strike me as being quite apt, but I evaluate them rather differently than Du Bois. She feels nostalgia for the distinguished art museum with every thing in its place, and I see it as a relic from the colonial. She detests the chaos of the garage sale, and I find it provides a precise image for the postcolonial situations where cultural artifacts flow between unlikely places, and nothing is sacred, permanent or sealed off. . . The image of the garage sale depicts our present global situation. . . . Ours is definitively a postcolonial epoch . . . the third world has imploded into the metropolis.

The remaking of social analysis Rosaldo describes in his book has re-defined anthropology's field of study, while at the same time draw¬ing attention to the role of the observer in producing that field. In this new context, 'the fiction of the uniformly shared culture increasingly seems more tenuous than useful'. 'More often than we usually care to think,' Rosaldo argues, 'our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets and eruptions of all kinds .'. . Along with "our" sup¬posedly transparent cultural selves, such borderlands should be re¬garded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation.'9

James Clifford illustrates this new paradigm with an allegorical reading of Amitav Ghosh's text, 'The Imam and the Indian', a chapter from what was then his work-in-progress, In an Antique Land, which Clifford assumed to be a short story.10 The novel describes the expectations of an anthropologisc doing fieldwork in an Egyptian village, which he assumes to belong to a settled, 'authentic' culture. What he finds, ins¬tead, is a palimpsest of movement, travel and inter-cultural cross in that is centuries old: 'The men of the village had all the busy restlessness of airline passengers in a transit lounge. Many of them had worked and travelled in the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf... a few had visit Europe: some of them had passports so thick they opened out like in' blackened concertinas.'11 Clifford argues that there could be no better image of post modernity than this an Egyptian villa with an airline transit lounge. Ghosh's writing, he argues, draws attention to the complex 'roots' and 'routes' that make up the relations between cultures: 'Everyone is on the move, and they have been centuries: dwelling-in-travel.'12

One consequence of the paradigm shift in anthropology has been to foreground the 'literariness' of ethnography. As James Clifford put it in the preface to Writing Culture, 'the 'literariness' of anthropology—and especially of ethnography—[is] much more than a matter of good writing . . . Literary processes . . . affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered'.13 The fact that Amitav Ghosh has been able to move freely in his writing between anthropology, history and fiction is symptomatic of the extent to which traditional boundaries between those disciplines have themselves broken down.

Ghosh's first novel, The Circle of Reason (1986), concerns the pica¬resque adventures of Alu, a weaver from a small village near Calcutta, who leaves home to travel across the Indian Ocean to the oil town of al Ghazira on the Persian Gulf. Reviewers of the novel read it as an allegory about the destruction of traditional village life by the modernizing influx of Western culture, and the subsequent displacement of non-European peoples by imperialism. In the long opening section, set in the village of Lalpukur, Alu is apprenticed as a weaver, while his uncle, Balaram, the village schoolmaster, is obsessed with Western ideas, epitomized by his passion for phrenology and the writings of Pasteur. Balaram establishes the Pasteur School of Reason, alternatively bores and terrorizes people with his scientific notions, and eventually destroys the village by sterilizing it with carbolic acid. Anthony Burgess read the episode as a satire on Western imperialism: while Alu for tradition, Balaram 'stands, in his demented way, for progress.14 The Circle of Reason certainly explores the relation between mimic and imperialism. But Burgess's argument that it juxtaposes, traditional cultures with a diasporic, post-colonial culture is a heading made within the paradigm of classical ethnography. For Gosh, even societies that appear to be static and traditional are always already diasporic.

Amitav Ghosh is distinct from several other writers of contemporary times as he takes a long shot of history and presents a complex picture of how people and events are inextricably interwoven into the fabric of history and how people realize the historicity of contemporary period as in the Indian struggle for independence.

An acute sense of being part of history in the sense that the forces, which fuel and propel the changes, either political or socio-economic touch and penetrate the private lives of individuals leaving them lesser or no choice in directing their lives but having to obey forces and issues larger than themselves. There are several philosophies of history which attempt to explain and interpret, not only as to how historical events happen but also why they happen but none of them can offer a satisfactory explanation other than saying that they depend upon three coordinates – the man, moment and the milieu.

Basically history moves in two streams or strands - the first slow and steady accepting and assimilating changes in the gradual process and acquiring new beliefs, values and practices while

consciousness emerged as a response and challenge to the claim of rulers that Indians are unfit to govern themselves. It also awakened the indigenous people to a sense of cultural identity which became a

6. O' Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject', p. 201.
7. James Clifford, 'The Transit Lounge of Culture', Times Literary Supplement, 1996 (3 May 1992), p. 7.
8. Rosaldo, Culture and Truth, p. 44. ;?
9. Ibid., p. 208.
10. Amitav Ghosh, 'The Imam and the Indian', Granta, 20 (Winter1986) pp.135—46.
11. Cited in Clifford, 'The Transit Lounge of Culture', p. 8.
12. Ibid., p.8.
13. Ibid.,
14. James Cliifford and George E. Marcus, eds. Writing Culture: The Poetics and of Ethnography (Berkeley: University of California Press critical Companion : edited by Tabish Khair, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003, 1986), p. 4.
15. Anthony Burgess, Review of The Circle of Reason, New York Times Book (6 July 1986), p. 6.