

Chapter II

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Social Anthropology: A Historical Perspective

Social anthropology means the study of human beings in diverse ways such as condition in which people live, organize themselves as families and communities, think about the world around them to create a good society. Social anthropologist deals with the themes such as history, politics, law, economics, gender studies, globalism, transnationalism and so on.

Social anthropology originated in England and it spread to India, South Africa and U.S.A. The origin and development of social anthropology was started by Evans Pritchard in England. Social Anthropology was taught till 1885 in Oxford as anthropology and ethnology. Social Anthropology as a subject was started in London and Cambridge in 1900 and 1908. In 1908, the first university chair who bore the title of professor of social anthropology is Sir James Frazer at Liverpool in 1908. Some historians state that David Hume and Immanuel Kant were the first philosophers to define the origin of social anthropology. Hume argued the experience was the only trustworthy source of valid knowledge. The findings of Darwin and his contemporaries influenced the 19th- century social anthropology. Henry Maine and Lewis Henry developed theories about primitive society that influenced the 20th-century. Franz Boas and Malinowski were the first modern anthropologist.

According to Evans Pritchard, social anthropology means to study the structure of human societies and culture. Social Anthropology establishes that all societies are an organized whole. It not only finds the social and cultural variation among the tribal

society but also brings the similarities between them. The Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland states the important aims of social anthropology are - the study of primitive culture in its present form; Study of cultural contact; Reconstruction of social history and search for universally valid social laws. Thus the main objective of social anthropology is to study about human society, social institutions, culture and kinship bonds.

If history is the written account of events that actually took place in the society, literature is the written record of the actual as well as the imaginative events and happenings. Thus both history and literature use language in order to record the presence of man in this world. As said by Aristotle in his book *Poetics*, he has made a distinction between history and poetry by claiming that poetry is more serious and philosophical than history.

... it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that has happened, i.e what is possible of being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and other verse - you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consist really in this that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of grave import than history, since its statements are the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singular. (Irwin 549)

History and literature are similar in many aspects. History takes the facts whereas literature includes imagination with facts to create an interest among the readers. History

and literature are considered as the branches of the same tree. Linda Hutcheon's view regarding history and literature is as follows:

They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the text of the past within their own complex textuality. (105)

The term Historiographic Metafiction was coined by Canadian literary theorist Linda Hutcheon during the late 1980's. According to Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction is one kind of post modern novel which rejects projecting present beliefs and standard onto the past and asserts the specificity and particularity of the individual past event"(122). "History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of fact arise, and old, saurian truth go to the wall... History loves only those who dominate her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement" (Frank 199). Hutcheon also makes it clear that in historiographic metafiction, history is narrated as a matter of storytelling. She also states that rewriting or re-presenting the past events in fiction is to make the present generation from being conclusive about historical data. Further Hutcheon discusses the main concern in historiographic metafiction that is between what is fictitious and factual narration. "The eighteenth century concern lies and falsity becomes a postmodern concern for the multiplicity and dispersions truth(s), truth(s) relative to the specificity of place and culture" (Hutcheon 108).

There are several works which can be considered as historiographic metafiction such as *Ana Historic* by Daphne Marllat, *Running in the Family* by Micheal Ondaatje and *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. A few of the others associated with historiographic metafiction are Peter Ackroyd, Kate Atkinson, don DeLillo, Thomas Wulff, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Wu Ming and many more.

According to Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record. Historiographic Metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the reality of the past but its textualized accessibility to us today" (114). Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as "Functional writing which self- consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2). Historiographic Metafiction is a postmodern art form which relies on textual play, parody and historical reconceptualization. Historical events act as a tool and mechanism for an original reinterpretation of history. R. K. Dhawan states: "He [a writer of fiction] is not free to distort history, factual accuracy has to be strictly adhered to" (15).

History is the recurring theme in Amitav Ghosh's works. In all his writing, Amitav Ghosh's engagement with history is not the same kind as that of a historian but this does not lessen its significance as historical fiction. "Ghosh's fiction takes upon itself the responsibility of reassessing its troubled antecedents, using history as a tool in which we can begin to make sense of – or at least come in terms- our troubling present" (Bose 235). The characters are imaginary but the historical background is accurate. Amitav Ghosh says, "... I am drawn to the past because it provides instances of predicaments that are unique and unrepeatable" ("An Interview with Amitav Ghosh" 1). Ghosh reinvents history

thus creates stories with combination of factual and fictional characters. Ghosh juxtaposes historical and fictional characters. He paints his novels from the eye of a common man and connects them with the events in history.

The novels taken for study - *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and Ibis trilogy, deals with the history of World War II, British colonialism, Morichjihapi Massacre and the causes and effects of the opium war. Ghosh uses imaginary characters to blend imagination with reality to create factual fiction.

The Glass Palace begins with the decline of King Konbaung dynasty in 1885 in Burma. Burma was ruled by King Thebaw whose ambition was not to become a King but a monk. When he was young, he spent most of his days in a monastery. King Minton, Thebaw's father on knowing his son's capability remarked, "If Thebaw ever becomes a king, the country will pass into the hands of foreigners" (TGP 38). But fate plays a different role in his life in the form of mother-in-law, who arranges wedding for King Thebaw with her three daughters. After the death of King Minton, she places him on the throne against the wish of forty-six rivals. Among the other Princesses, Supayalat is the most willful and fiercest who matches her mother in temperament. She along with her mother joins hand in the cruel acts to protect King Thebaw from his family.

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. (TGP 38-39)

The invasion of the Britishers, led to the downfall of the king and the royal family. The royal family suffered great insult and dishonour when they were taken as captives. The Britishers never cared about the rules and privileges of the royal family. “The soldiers behave curtly and uncouthly with the royal family. The condition of the king is most dismissal as he who had for years enjoyed absolute power/authority and had a number of minions at his command is now at the mercy of the colonizers” (Singh, 152). The King requests the soldiers to permit him to leave through east gate. Initially the Britishers agreed, but the carriages were ready for exile only at the west gate. On seeing this, King holds his breath stating, “So the well-spoken English colonels had their revenge after all, given the knife of victory a final little twist” (TGP 43).

The King along with the Queen, Princess and few attendants were exiled to Ratnagiri in India. On the way the King sees people working there under the Britishers and thinks, “In Burma no one ever starved, everyone knew how to read and write, and land was to be had for the asking: why should they pull rickshaws and carry night soil?” (TGP 50). In the nineteenth century, Britishers were expanding their power, they found India to be a cheap source of labour and they transported labourers to various countries like Burma, Fiji, Caribbean and Africa. The title of the novel *The Glass Palace* acts as a metaphor as it reveals the colonial power of the Britishers.

In *The Glass Palace* ‘Glass Palace’ functions as a metaphor, Glass is a brittle and implies transparency. Palace is the symbol of power. Glass Palace is an illusion that is created around power. The people in the glass palace do not have the liberty to throw stones at others. The colonized

people are always imprisoned in the glass palace and they have lost the capacity to throw stones at the colonial masters. (Auradkar 93)

After the invasion of Burma, the Britishers started exploiting the natural resources of the country. Mandalay became a commercial centre and the palace was taken over by the British officials.

Burma had been quickly integrated into the empire, forcibly converted into a province of British India. Courtly Mandalay was now a bustling commercial hub. The Mandalay palace had been refurbished to serve the conquerors' recondite pleasures: the west wing had been converted into a British club; the Queen's Hall of Audience had now become a billiard room; the mirrored walls were lined with months-old copies of *punch* and *Illustrated London News*; the exquisite little monastery in which Thebaw had spent his novitiate had become a chapel where Anglican priests administered the sacraments to British troops. Mandalay, it was confidently predicted, would soon become the Chicago of Asia. (TGP 66)

The King became the guardian of Ratnagiri people and he is referred as, "The town guardian spirit, a King again" (TGP 80). The condition of the royal family was worse that they hardly come out of the fort. The royal family members never avert their eyes when they go out to temples or to meet the British officials. They wish to walk through the streets and bargain but they behaved as if they were not interested. People of the town, knew the condition of the royal family, the princess were brought up in seclusion.

They were children: what they had done that they should live like this?
 Why should they be prevented from visiting local families; from forming
 friendships with Marathi children of good education? Why should they
 grow to womanhood never knowing any company other than that of their
 servants? (TGP 77)

The princesses grew to be women, unaware of the outside world. The royal family has the tradition of marrying among their close relatives but they could not find any suitable groom. The eldest princess found a partner and eloped with him which eventually led to the death of the King Thebaw. The cruel acts of colonial British rule is clearly stated when they refused to bury the King's coffin in Burma.

The government was represented by a mere deputy collector!... No one could believe that this was the funeral of Burma's last King! We wanted the coffin stored in such a way that we could transport the remains to Burma some day. But when the authorities learnt of this they had the coffin forcibly removed from us. They are afraid that the King's body might become a rallying point in Burma! They built a monument on his grave, almost overnight, to make it impossible for us ever to take him back! (TGP 205)

After the death of the King, Queen returns to Burma where she too dies.

Ghosh intertwines historical characters with that of the non-historical ones. Rajkumar watches the scene of royal family being exiled; surrounded by British army. Indian soldiers were employed in the British army which made the Burmese restless and they started attacking the Indians who live in Burma. Rajkumar got stuck up in the crowd

and he is rescued by Saya John. As the situation grows worse, the Indians hide themselves among the Mandalay people. Indians are employed in the British army because they were poverty stricken. “Chinese peasants would never do this-allow themselves to be used to fight other people’s war with so little profit for themselves” (TGP 29-30).

The ideology of the Britishers changed the lives of the colonized people at varying levels. Beni Prasad Dey is the collector who is appointed to take care of King Thebaw who is living in exile at Ratnagiri. The Britishers had control upon the family issues of the King. The King was not allowed to arrange wedding for his daughters. Beni is proud of his profession. “The collector is impersonating the western code of conduct, keeps the Britishers above Indians and wants to be in a good books of the Britishers” (Nara 114). The collector is terminated by the Britishers for hiding the pregnancy scandal of the Princess. The collector feels humiliated and commits suicide.

Uma Dey, the collector’s wife plays a prominent role in the novel. “Uma Dey, the madame collector, is attractive, charming, lively and self-possesses. She becomes an elegant hostess, a mere adjunct to the collector. She is a role-filler” (Jaishree 265). Uma develops a close relationship with Dolly. Dolly remains as a faithful servant to the royal family even during their exile. As she grew up, Dolly has nothing to look forward to. She lived only for the sake of the royal family. When Rajkumar comes asking for Dolly’s consent to marry him, she is very much confused and it was Uma who convinced Dolly and made her get married to him. “Her weakness is her source of strength. Dolly yields. She gives in and that is why she is so much in demand, sought after by Uma, Raj Kumar, Princesses, King, Queen, Sawant, Just everyone” (Tiwari 97).

Uma becomes a freedom fighter after her husband's death. "The rise of Uma as an activist in the novel is highly significant. The tour of Europe she undertakes after the death of her husband marks the beginning of her headlong entry into the ongoing freedom struggle in India" (Shakir 65). Ghosh was inspired by Madame Piki Kama, an Indian woman who joined the national movement and Uma's character resembles Madam Piki Kama.

She (Madame Kama) became very involved in the nationalist cause and in opposing imperialism. I've really become completely fascinated by the part that Indians émigrés in the US played at the turn of the century in generating a certain anti-imperialism and certain ways of resisting colonialism. (Aldama 8)

The Indian contemporaries in New York take directions from newsletter published from Californian University in Berkeley, by Indian students. The newsletter was named after a Hindustani word 'Ghadar' and the students involved in it are called Ghadar party. The people involved in this party are against the colonial rulers. The supporters have settled mainly in the Pacific coast and they try to discourage people who are still serving the British army. After the First World War, the Ghadar Party dissolved and was renamed as the Indian Independence League. Uma witnesses communal violence in India. She saw a man beheaded in public place and was terrified.

Uma puts her head down on the floor-mat and closed her eyes. The rickshaw-puller's face appeared in front of her she saw his head once again toppling backwards. In that instant when the decapitated body had still been upright. Still moving forward, she had caught a glimpse of those white eyes, hanging down over his spine: their gaze had appeared to be

directed into the car, right at her. Uma felt her gorge rise and vomit came pouring of her mouth and her nose, fouling the floor mat. (TGP 245)

Earlier Uma was dismissive of Mahatma's principles but after witnessing violence, she realizes the value of ahimsa. She remembers Mahatma's words, "The movement against colonialism was not uprising of unarmed Indians against those who bore arms both Indians and British- and that its chosen instruments were the weapons of the weaponless, it's very weakness its source of strength" (TGP 254).

A generation later, Uma Dey's nephew, Arjun joins Indian Military Academy. Uma says, "The Mahatma thinks that the country can only benefit from having men of conscience in the army" (TGP 258). He joins the army and he is proud to earn the title 'The Royal Battalion' for helping the Britishers to capture territories in India, Burma, Mesopotamia and in China. Arjun boasts:

Every meal at an officers mess was an adventure, a glorious infringement of taboos. They ate foods that none of them had ever tasted at home: bacon, ham and sausages at breakfast; roast beef and pork chops for dinner. They drank whisky, beer and wine, smoked cigars, cigarettes and cigarillos. Nor was this just a matter of satisfying appetites: every mouthful had a meaning- each represented an advance towards the evolution of a new, more complete kind of Indian. (TGP 278-79)

Arjun's integrity as a soldier is questioned by the guests at Bella's wedding. Arjun retorts, "We aren't occupying the country. We are here to defend you". They raise a question, "From whom are you defending us? From ourselves? From other Indians? It's your master from whom the country needs to be defended" (TGP 287-88).

Burmese consider the Indian soldiers in the British army as slaves. This makes Arjun realize about the prejudice the Britishers have for Indians. Arjun seriously considers joining Indian National Army while fighting for the British in Burma. “In the Indian epic the Mahabharatha, Arjun is the warrior who pauses in battle to question the purpose of war and the kingdom he is fighting for. So too does this modern Arjun being to doubt his soldier’s training- during World War- II, when he encounters those drawn to the aims of the Indian National Army” (Budhos 127).

When Arjun decides to join Indian Independence League his commanding officer warns him, “When the time comes you’ll be hunted down, Roy. I’ll see you hang, Roy. I will. You should have not a moment’s doubt of that” (TGP 450). Arjun smiles and replies, “There is one thing you can be sure of, sir... On that day, if it comes, you’ll have done your duty, sir, and I’ll have done mine. We’ll look at each other as honest men- for the first time” (TGP 450). Arjun joins the Indian Independence League and acts against the Britishers. He tells Dinu, “We rebelled against that shaped everything in our lives... We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves” (TGP 518). Arjun dies while fighting for Indian Independence League in Burma and creates history.

Dinu is the son of Rajkumar and Dolly. When Dinu was young he was affected by Polio which made him limp. He becomes the student member of union politics and is the member of an anti-fascist magazine. During Second World War II he supported Britishers in order to put an end to Nazis and Fascists. Dinu, Arjun, Uma discuss about World War II. Dinu considers Hitler and Mussolini to be most tyrannical and he also states that if Britishers are defeated by Germans, both India and Burma will suffer. Uma says that Britishers have never felt guilty for killing millions of people. Dinu points out the evils of

Indian society such as caste system, untouchability, sati, etc. Uma emphasizes, "... we must not be deceived by the idea that imperialism is an enterprise of reform" (TGP 294).

The British army deployed in Burma has a greater percentage of Indian soldiers. As India was under the British colonial rule many Indians were forcibly recruited in the army. This makes the Burmese aggressive against Indians because most of the farmland is taken by Indian money lenders and it is they who run most of the shops. The Burmese women who marry Indians are considered as traitors. The students and nationalists strive hard to separate Burmese administration from the Britishers. During the riots, Dolly requests Rajkumar to shift to India but he refuses.

The Burmese uprising began under the leadership of Saya Sen. The nationalistic uprising turned violent. After the riots, many homeless Indians were admitted in the Rangoon Lunatic Asylum. The anger of the nationalistic movement was directed towards the Indians settled in Burma. The British empire sent more Indian troops to subdue the rebel groups. The presence of Indian troop instigated the hatred among the Burmese. Rajkumar blindly believed Britishers to be their well wisher, "Don't you see that it's not just the Empire those soldiers are protecting, it is also Dolly and me?" (TGP 247).

Ghosh reconstructs the lives of those who witnessed the Second World War. The violence acquired greater proportion, Rajkumar lost his property and left Burma. As a refugee, Rajkumar and Dolly settled in Calcutta and believed that Dinu was alive somewhere. Rajkumar became very close to his granddaughter Jaya. In January 1948, Burma attained freedom. Soon after that, Dolly went to Rangoon in search of Dinu.

Japanese had formed a new government under the leadership of Dr. Ba Maw in Rangoon. Few other members along with Aung San of Burma Independence Army

became the members of this government. Dinu's friends were among them. With the help of his friend U Thiha Saw, Dinu sets up a photo studio called 'The Glass Palace'. In a short span of time he gains reputation. U Thiha Saw's relative Ma Thin Aye joins Dinu as his assistant who is also a student of Rangoon University. Ma Thin Aye conducts research of 'Glass Palace Chronicles' a famous 19th Century history written during the reign of King Bodawpaya, an ancestor of King Thebaw. Aye writes articles in literary magazine. Dinu married Aye. When Ma Thin Aye was tutoring her students she heard gunfire and they came to know that General Ne Win has seized power.

Neither Dinu nor Ma Thin Aye were directly involved in politics. The newspaper magazine was shut down after the arrest of U Thiha. The new dictator was corrupt. The situation gets worse and Dinu remarks to his wife, "Look at the way in which these thugs use the past to justify the present. And they themselves are much worse than the colonialists; at least in the old days, you could read and write" (TGP 537).

One day Ma Thin Aye goes to a meeting with Aung San and she even calls Dinu to witness it. From then on, Dinu travels with the camera, framing a pictorial record of the political life of Burma. After the crackdown of Burma, both Dinu and Ma Thin Aye were arrested. Aye suffered from tuberculosis and died within a year.

Jaya gets married and she gives birth to a son, and her husband died in a train accident. Jaya continues her research in history of photography in India. Jaya finds a portrait of four figures seated. They are the collector Beni, his aunt Uma, grandfather Rajkumar and her grandmother Dolly and the picture was taken at the collector's residence.

Through photography, Jaya recollects histories and tries to reframe the lives of her relatives during the British empire. She goes to Ratnagiri and it is not the same as it was before. Though the Indians there longed for freedom, they are grateful for the good things that Britishers have brought for them. Ghosh beautifully shows, in spite of their oppression, British colonialism had helped them by building railroads, industries and hospitals. Jaya could see the change that the Britishers had made, “Ratnagiri lay spread out below, the perfect model of a colonial district town, with an invisible line separating its huddled bazaars from the ‘Cutchery’- the red brick Victorian compound that housed the district courts and offices” (TGP 491). The town of Ratnagiri has succeeded in keeping the memory of King Thebaw alive, “*Thiba- Raja* was omnipresent in Ratnagiri: his name was emblazoned on signs and billboard, 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’s known him at first hand” (TGP 491).

All the characters in *The Glass Palace* have lived through British imperialism, Second World War II and Japanese invasion of Burma. In the novel, “The characters are often seen trying to decipher the data they have collected” (Hutcheon 113-114). Thus novel serves as a record of the historical past.

The novel *The Hungry Tide* can be categorized as historiographic metafiction as it is a combination of fact and fiction; the intermingling of past and present. “History acquires meaning and objectivity only when it establishes a coherent relation between past and future” (Carr 68).

Ghosh traverses a vast landscape of time and places, unfolding a broad spectrum of socio – political, cultural and historical changes that result in the individual’s peculiar

predicament. Ghosh refers to the partition of India in 1947 and its related themes along with the history of the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 and the separation of East Bengal, a major event that reveals greater insights into history. A large number of people became homeless as a result of these political events. These suffering masses, refugees as they are called, figure prominently in Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*.

The Morichjhapi Massacre is considered to be the darkest spot in history. "Morichjhapi incident was widely discussed in the Calcutta press, English as well as Bengali" (THT 402). Annu Jalais in her article "Dwelling on Morichjhapi" gives a detailed description about the Morichjhapi incident. The root cause for the massacre is the "intricacies of caste, class, and communal differences" (Jalais 3). During the partition of India in 1947, East Bengali Hindu refugees migrated to West Bengal in India. The first group of migration consisted of higher class Hindus who were oppressed by low class Muslims. The lower caste Hindus lacked shelter and so they occupied the public and private lands. The migration continued even after 1975 and the refugees fled to West Bengal. The refugees were huge in number and so the government sent them to Dandakaranya. ". . . to various inhospitable and infertile areas – most infamous amongst them being Dandakaranya, semi-arid and rocky place" (Jalais 5).

The opposition party promised to resettle them in the Sundarbans from Dandakaranya, a deep forest in Madhya Pradesh, but they failed to implement their promise. The refugees moved to Sundarbans hoping that there won't be any opposition. The government prevented them from entering into the Sundarbans. "...of the estimated 1,50,000 refugees, some 30,000 braved government opposition and sailed to Morichjhapi and under the leadership of one Satish Mondal, a refugee sympathizer of the Communist

Party they settled there” (Jalais 11). The eviction of refugees is accounted through Nirmal’s dairy.

Thirty police launches circled the island, thereby depriving the settlers food and water, they were also tear-gassed, their huts razed, their boats sunk, their fish and tube wells destroyed, those who tried to cross the river were shot at, several hundred men and women and children were believed to have died during that time and their bodies thrown into the river. (THT 17)

This real historical event is blended into Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh juxtaposes fact and fiction through Nirmal’s dairy. The Morichjhapi Massacre is revealed through the words of Nilima as follows:

Morichjhapi... was a tide country island... In 1978, it happened that a great number of people suddenly appeared in Morichjhapi. In this place where there had been no inhabitants before there were now thousands, almost overnight. Within a matter of weeks they had cleared the mangroves, built badhs and put up huts. It happened so quickly that in the beginning no one even knew who these people were. But in time it came to be learnt that they were refugees, originally from Bangladesh. Some had come to India after Partition, while others had trickled over later. In Bangladesh they had been among the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the Upper caste. Most of them were Dalits, as we say now Harijans, as we used to say then. Their aims were quite straight forward. They just wanted a little

land to settle on but for they were willing to pit themselves against the government. They were prepared to resist till the end. (THT 118-19)

The fictional representation of Morichjhapi Massacre shows us that it was different from other refugee settlements. The refugees were shifted from East Pakistan to West Bengal; then from West Bengal to Madhya Pradesh and then from Madhya Pradesh to Sundarbans. Finally they found a vast area of land in Sundarbans where they created their own settlement. “But the government had proved unbending in their determination to evict the settlers. Over a period of about a year there had been a series of confrontations between the settlers and government forces. And the final clash... was in mid May of the year 1979” (THT 119). The brutal eviction called Morichjhapi Massacre was witnessed by Sundarbans settlers. Nirmal states,

What had I expected? A mere jumble, perhaps, untidy heaps of people, piled high upon each other?... But what I saw was quite different from the picture in my mind’s eyes. Paths have been laid... little plots of land had been enclosed with fences; fishing nets had been hung up dry. There were men and women sitting outside their huts, repairing their nets and stringing their crablines with bits of bait and bone. Such industry! Such diligence! Yet it was only a few weeks since they had come. (THT 171)

The detailed description of refugees settlement are brought out through Nirmal’s dairy:

Salt pans had been created, tubewells had been planted, water had been dammed for the rearing of fish, a bakery had started up, boat-builders had set up workshops, a pottery had been founded as well as an ironsmith’s shop; there were people making boats while others were fashioning nets

and crablines; little marketplaces, where all kinds of goods were being sold, had sprung up. All this in the space of a few months! It was an astonishing spectacle-as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud. (THT 192)

The settlers rebuilt their land and opened organizations and institutions. They invited dignitaries to show their success. “Speeches were made, extolling the achievements of the settlers. It was universally agreed that the significance of Morichjhapi extended far beyond itself” (THT 191). The leader of the group shouts, “We need to let people know what we’re doing and why we’re here. We have to tell the world about all we’ve done and all we’ve achieved” (THT 172). But they were cleverly cheated and Nilima states, “The government is going to take measures. Very strong measures” (THT 252).

On January 26, 1976, the government of West Bengal started an economic blockade against the settlers and they were deprived of food and water.

The government announced that all movements in and out of Morichjhapi was banned under the provisions of the Forest preservation Act. What was more section 144. The law used to quell civil disturbances, was imposed on the whole one: this meant it was a criminal offence for five people or more to gather in one place. As the days wore on dozens of boats had encircled the island, teargas and rubber bullet had been used, the settlers had been forcibly prevented from rice and water to Morichjhapi, boats had been sunk, people had been killed. The seize went on for many days... food had run out and the settlers had been reduced to eating grass. The police had destroyed the tubewells and there was no potable water left; the

settlers were drinking from puddles and ponds and an epidemic of cholera had broken out. (THT 260)

On seeing the condition of the refugees, Kusum cries, Wher will I go? There is no place I want to be. And further: What will I do? There are still more than ten thousand of us here. It's just a question of keeping faith (THT 277).

The government forcibly evicted thousands of refugees in 1976. Hundreds of men, women and children were killed and their bodies were thrown into water. Through Nirmla's dairy and Horen, a local boatman, Kanai gets to know the reality of the incident.

I know no more than anyone else knows. It was all just rumor. The gangsters... were carried over in boats and dinghies and bhotbhotis. They burnt the settlers huts, they sank their boats, they laid waste to their fields. No one knows for sure... a group of women were taken away by force, Kusum among them. People say they were used and thrown into the rivers so that they would be washed away by the tides. Dozens of settlers were killed....The sea claimed them all. (THT 279)

The morichjhapi settlers were displaced from their land and their voices became a battle-cry. “*Amra kara? Bastuhara. Morichjhapi chharbona*’ Who are we? We are the dispossessed. We’ll not leave Morichjhapi, do what you may” (THT 291). Nirmal remarks, “Standing on the deck of the bhotbhoti, I was struck by the beauty of this. Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave” (THT 254). This Morichjhapi incident is a historical happening and Ghosh has done extensive research and collected data to narrate the incidents in *The Hungry Tide*. This text plays upon the truth of history with a tinch of imagination.

The arrival of Kanai Dutt, a 42 year old bachelor who runs a flourishing business in translation at Delhi and that of Piyali Roy, a cetologist of Indian origin settled in Seattle, and their interest in the Sunderbans provides a necessary link to the chain of events of the past and also determines the course of the future. Kanai's uncle and aunt, Nirmal and Nilima Bose from Calcutta had settled down in Lusibari, a remote island in the Sunderbans in the year 1950. Nirmal, a Leftist intellectual had got into trouble due to his political involvements, hence he left the job of a college lecturer in Calcutta and become a teacher in Lusibari school. Nilima is popularly known as 'Mashima' in Lusibari, she founded the Badabon Trust, the Women's Union, which in the course of time had blossomed into a big organization.

Nirmal died after his retirement as a schoolteacher and it is at the behest of his aunt that Kanai goes to Lusibari to retrieve the journal that Nirmal had left behind for him. Piya has come to the Sunderbans to study the rare dolphins unique to the islands and employs Fokir, to help her in her exploration trips in search of the dolphins.

Ghosh's historical insight into past, his deep sense of its understanding helps him focus on the realities and complexities of the present and the past figures prominently in this novel. This becomes a means of re-visioning the past and to relive its experiences to ennoble our future. Ghosh's major concern in this novel is to universalize subaltern history. In this case subaltern is not just the human beings but nature itself. These subaltern figures therefore are made the real heroes who by their sheer power of resistance amidst unbearable odds and adversities rise to the status of the real makers of history.

As Kanai reads Nirmal's diary, he gets an insight into the past. In the diary, Nirmal takes Kanai on a journey to the 1970's; a period that witnessed serious political

crises, with the partition of Bengal. The communal riots forced many to leave Bengal. It was in the early 1970's that refugees from Bangladesh, escaping political persecution and atrocities perpetrated by the government in the resettlement camp, started pouring into Morichijhapi an island reserved for tiger conservation by the government in the Sunderbans.

These settlers were forced to suffer exile due to the powerful political forces. They are underprivileged and marginalized, and are usually at the receiving end of all the violence, injustice and humiliation, inflicted by the ruling class. Nirmal sees the flowering of his own idealistic dreams in the settler's resistance to the callousness of the government. His belief in the Leftist ideology always made Nirmal cherish the idea of revolution. The settlers resistance and grit fuelled his hopes and he sees his dream, his vision materializing: "I felt something changing within me: how astonishing it was that I, an ageing, bookish school master, should live to see this, an experiment, imagined not by those with learning and power, but those without" (THT 171).

Kusum, Fokir's mother, who once worked for the Badabon trust has now joined the band of settlers. Nirmal considers Kusum as his poetic muse whereas his wife Nilima is pragmatic in outlook. Much against her wishes Nirmal firmly resolves to support the settler's cause. The courage and resistance of the poor settlers that Nirmal admires is not something unique, it is a part of the daily struggle of each and every inhabitant of the islands. The misery, suffering and exploitation has been their history, their destiny and since ages they had wandered from place to place in search of shelter. Their spirit of resilience in the face of life's hazards and challenges is in fact a received heritage from their ancestors. Their past, vibrant and alive in the form of religious myths, ideas of good and evil, lends the inhabitants exceptional strength to face life's miseries and difficulties,

with a vitality and forthrightness that people like Kanai, Piya or Nirmal find lacking in themselves. Stuart Hall says: “The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual past since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always ready ‘after the break.’ It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (qtd in Shakir 113).

Nirmal’s life had attained meaning and purpose only after witnessing the revolutionary fervor of the settlers in Morichjhapi. All his life Nirmal had lived with a void that was created in him owing to the disparity between the ideals and values he professed and the kind of life he had to live in Lusibari. He identifies the deepest urges of his heart and his philosophy with the indomitable spirit of the settlers. He saw his own dilemma reflected in the cry of the settlers when they shouted:

We are the dispossessed. How strange it was to hear this plaintive cry wafting across the water. It seemed at the moment, not to be shout of defiance, ... It was as if I were hearing the deepest uncertainties of my heart being spoken to the rivers and the tides. Who was I? Where did I belong? In India or across the border? In prose or in poetry? (THT 254)

It is in the wilderness that Nirmal, Kanai and Piya discover their roots and see their uncertainties and insecurities unfolding before their own eyes. Their sustained longing makes them aware of the cruelty of the people in power towards these poor and deprived people living in the periphery. Kanai is a successful interpreter and translator of languages but it is in the Sunderbans that he discovers the unfathomable mystery of life, and also the mystery of the history of the islanders struggle against the tyranny of power. “I am not the kind of person who dwells on the past. I like to look ahead. But we’re in the

present now, aren't we? ... Even here in Lusibari? Oh, no. For me Lusibari will always be a part of the past" (THT 198).

The odds that the islanders constantly encounter for their survival, their struggle with hurdles; natural as well as man-made makes Kanai aware of the atrocities committed by the government on these poor and deprived masses. When Piya reacts sharply to the killing of the tiger by the villagers, Kanai quickly responds. "I mean, aren't we a part of the horror as well? You and me and people like us? ... It happens every week that people are killed by tigers ... and yet here it goes almost unremarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers" (THT 300).

Present and the past are juxtaposed in the novel. Fokir, the poor, uneducated fisherman embodies the spirit of the past. His presence is a reminder of the history of suffering which is the heritage of the Sunderbans: "Piya understood too that this was a looking glass in which a man like Fokir could never be anything other than a figure glimpsed through a rear – view mirror, a rapidly diminishing presence, a ghost from the perpetual past that was Lusibari" (THT 220).

It is the oppressed people, the subalterns who in their own ways add a new dimension to the lives of Nirmal, Kanai and Piya. The death of Kusum in her fight against injustice or the death of Fokir in his attempt to save Piya from a cyclone may not seem to have any significance; but their lives and deaths determine the future course of action for Piya and Kanai. The short visit of Kanai and Piya to the Sunderbans changes them and they soon return to the islands with plans for the future. Piya manages to attract funds for her project of dolphin conservation in the Sunderbans. Kanai decides to return to Lusibari with a plan of writing his uncle's diary into an effective novel. The lives of

people like Kusum and Fokir correspond with the idea of truth, beauty and poetry.

Ghosh conveys the message of the novel through Nirmal's philosophy, "...life is lived in transformation" (THT 282).

Through the lives of ordinary people like Kusum, Fokir and Moyna and the other islander, Ghosh highlights the interrelation between the personal and the universal. Their personal lives portray the real picture of humanity. Their lives depict an entire history of the odds and adversities that ordinary individuals have to bear in their struggle for survival. This real history of survival, the pain and misery of the suffering masses is overlooked by mainstream history. By focusing upon the lives of these individuals, Ghosh highlights the missing dimension of history that is essential to present a complete and true picture of humanity. "If history forgets, fiction can remind us many things" (Ghosh, *The Past-master* 1). History and fiction does not look like separate entities but it compliments each other. Ghosh weaves a story through history and asserts himself thus: "History can say things in great detail, even though it may say them in rather dull factual detail. The novel on the other hand can make links that history cannot" (Ghosh, *The Past-master* 1).

Ghosh has created interesting factual fictions by diving deep into the unfathomed regions of history. Micheal Binyon rightly comments about *Sea of Poppies* thus:

Coarseness and violence, cruelties and fatalism are relieved with flashes of emotions and kindness. This is no anti-colonial rant or didactic tableau but the story of men and women of all races and castes, cooped up on a voyage across the 'Black Water' that strips them of dignity and ends in storm, neither in despair nor resolution. It is profoundly moving". (2)

Ghosh recreated a world which history has failed to acknowledge. Amitav Ghosh asserts,

For me novel is the most complete form of expressive utterance. Not only does it allow you to tell a story, but it also permits you to create the world within which the story is told. This means that a novel can create its own linguistics universe, and this to say to me was one of the most exciting things about writing *Sea of Poppies*. (Ghosh, *The Past-master* 3)

In *Sea of Poppies*, Amitav Ghosh takes us back to the 1838 India, to the opium war and British colonial rule. The novel revisions the voyage across Indian Ocean to Mauritius island in a ship in which the crew were sailors, indentured labourers, convicts and English men.

Ghosh recreates the historical setup of colonial India. The nineteenth century India is portrayed in a different light by Ghosh. He says, “When I look back at 19th century, what strikes me is the resilience, the resistance, the willingness to change and determination to learn. The past cannot and right not to, be planned down to one dimension” (Ghosh, *The Past-master* 6).

Historical novel sparkles light on the country’s socio-political life. Ghosh gives a new dimension to history by presenting fictionalized accounts of facts. His fiction is filled with political, historical and social consciousness, he narrates historical incidents without losing the charm of narrating a novel. David Robson comments about the theme of *Sea of Poppies* as, “If opium were the dominant theme in *Sea of Poppies*, it would probably be a less interesting book. Instead, Ghosh has used the voyage of the ibis as the centerpiece of a much broader canvas, a seething human diaspora in which every character has a story to tell and every passenger is on the run from someone to

something” (11). Ghosh succeeds in peeling off the multiple layers of complexities in history which really enables him to deal with contemporary realities.

Sea of Poppies is an amalgamation of history, fiction and anthropology. The setting of the novel is during the British East India Company. The colonial rulers enforced opium cultivation among the farmers and destroyed the agricultural practices. Ghosh has realistically depicted the authentic socio-economic condition during colonization.

Colonialism is not just the expansion of European powers in India or other countries but it has become the important feature of human history. The wealth of the local rajas and landlords were extracted by the colonial rulers. After colonizing the country, they brought down the economy by exploiting the natural resources. The natives had to work as slaves or indentured labourers for the European colonizers and they were employed mainly for the profit of the Europeans.

Sea of Poppies deals with the theme of opium war. Opium trade encompasses profit, people and migration. The opium trade made an enormous global change resulting in the migration of both the colonizer and colonized around the world. Ghosh speaks about lesser known history of the opium trade and opium war. The utmost wealth grabbed by the colonizers was from the royal families. The other events that affected Indian economy are cultivation of poppy for the Chinese market, transportation of indentured labourers to sugarcane plantations in the islands of Mauritius, Fiji, and Trinidad. O.P. Dwivedi comments about the novel thus: “Uncovers the inhuman brutalities and flagrant violence which the Indians confronted during the blood thirsty period of colonialism in the nineteenth century” (7).

The British East India Company had the monopoly of opium trade all over the world. For a period of fifty years, opium trade supported the economy of the Britishers to a greater extent. They began to trade opium illegally into China. Opium would be hidden in the British ships, and then it would be smuggled by native merchants. In 1797, a direct trade relation was formed between the opium farmers and the Britishers, thus ending the role of Bengali purchasing agents. From 1730 to 1773, opium export to China grew from 15 tons to 75 tons. By 1820's the import of Bengal opium rose to 900 tons annually which eventually led to the opium war. Frank Sanello, a historian states, "The Opium wars, were the climax trade dispute and diplomatic difficulties between China under the Qing dynasty and the British Empire after China, sought to restrict illegal opium trafficking. It consisted of the first opium war from 1839 to 1842 and second opium war from 1850 to 1860" (23).

Sea of Poppies vibrantly narrates the historical period when China declared ban of opium import because of its addicted citizens. "Recreational consumption of opium in China was initiated by the Dutch and English who laced tobacco with opium... to trick Chinese out of their money" (Brook 6). The East India Company forced the Indian farmers to grow poppy instead of wheat. The Britishers were ready to wage war against the Chinese to save their economy. "The trafficking in opium tilted the balance of global trade to benefit the west" (Brook 3). Opium is a drug which leads to addiction by controlling the nervous system. "Opium's addictiveness has proved irresistible to buyers, profitable to producers and dealers, alluring to states... so much power vested in one simple substance" (Brook 1). Opium appeals to both controller and the controlled.

Sea of Poppies unfolds during the eve of the First Opium War in the year 1838 and it is set in the Northern part of India. Ghosh traces the minute details of the exploitation of Indian peasants and labourers by Britisher with opium war and opium trade as its background. “For in Eastern India, opium was the exclusive monopoly of the British, produced and packaged entirely under the supervision of the East India Company, except for a small group of Parsis, few native born Indians had access to the trade or its profits” (SOP 85).

The framers were forced to abandon their old agricultural tradition because of East India Company’s policy and their land gave them no grains, and fruits and their cash crop poppy was sold to the Ghazipur opium factory. “The Ghazipur and Patna opium factories between them produced the wealth of Britian. It is astonishing to think of it but the empire was really founded on opium” (qtd in Badgujar 9). The detailed description of Ghazipur opium factory is understood through the words of J.W.S. Mc. Arthur, the Superintendent of Ghazipur opium factory in the nineteenth century. His work, *Notes on Opium Factory* reveals, “Bare-bodied men, sunk waist deep in tanks of opium, tramping round and round to soften the sludge. Their eyes were vacant, glazed and yet somehow they managed to keep moving, as slow as ants in honey, tramping, treading” (SOP 94-95).

In the factory, the poppies are made into opium balls and they are transported to China. The scenes of the Ghazipur opium factory prove to be the world’s largest opium production factory. Britian’s war against the Chinese was mainly to sell opium and to increase their revenue. Burnham asserts to Zachary, “British rule in India could not be sustained without opium... the company’s annual gains from opium are almost equal to the entire revenue of your own country, the United States” (SOP 115). These incidents

show the shameful acts of the colonizers. Canton was the only port in China used by the foreigners for trade and commerce. Under the Charter Act of Crown, East India Company had developed the monopoly trade with India and China.

Ghosh has created the character Raja Neel Rattan based on the life history of Raja Nandhan Kumar of Bengal who had failed to win the favor of East India Company governor, Warren Hastings. So Raja Nanda Kumar was imprisoned based on forged documents. Neel and his father won the favor of the Britishers and they had invested huge amount of money in Mr. Burnham's company which is involved in opium trade. During the heights of opium trade, they incurred huge amount of money as profit. But after the ban of opium in China, the price of opium crashed which led to the debt in Neel's share. Mr. Burnham proposes a deal to clear off all his debts but Neel rejects stating that it would be mean to turn against his relatives and attendants. So Mr. Burnham plans against Neel and forges his signature. This further led to the court trail with the punishment of imprisonment and to be transported to Mauritius. "Amitav Ghosh has a distinctive style of writing that synthesizes the imagination of a writer with the insightful detaining of an anthropologist. He takes up the obscured events in history and transcends the boundaries of fiction/non-fiction by sprinkling over them the colors in his imagination" (Bhushn 12).

The novel *Sea of Poppies* is a blend of fact and fiction which conglomerates history, opium trade and opium war. Ghosh asserts, "In my historical novels I try to be faithful to the setting but I would never confuse what I do with what historians do" (qtd in Badgujar 13). Raja Neel's fortunes are thrown down and the Britishers had no difficulty in charging a forgery against Neel. Neel comments about the system of justice, "It was

the English themselves Mr. Burnham and his ilk- who were exempt from the law as it applied to others” (SOP 239). This clearly shows that many landlords and rajas have become the victims of colonial rulers. Salil Tripathi says, “Deep into quirky footnotes of history, he likes to unravel sprawling sagas brimming with social, political, anthropological and indeed environmental significance” (qtd in Badgular 63).

Opium was not at the forefront of my mind when I started thinking about this book. I was more interested in travel, migration, and the dispersal of Indians across the globe. But this dispersal began in earnest in the 1830’s just before the first opium war, and the earliest immigrants were from a part of British India (Northern Bihar) which became under the rule of the East India Company, the single most important opium growing region of the world: in the period, India, China and England were joined by a *Sea of Poppies* (Ghosh, An interview by Micheal Caswell).

The novel records the plight of indentured laborers in the nineteenth century. It documents the condition of the people who became indentured laborers because of poverty. This novel projects the ambitious nature of the empire builders and its effect on ordinary people. The journey of the Ibis starts with indentured laborers and opium from the port of Calcutta. After the abolition of slavery, laborers and coolies were much in demand. So Mr. Burnham the owner of the ship transports coolies and labourers for greater profit.

The lives of the labourers in the ship take twists and turns and the ship acts as a microcosm of life. These indentured labourers had no choice but to face the reality. Mr. Burnham in an auction at the East India Company says, “In the good old days people

used to say there were only two things to be exported from Calcutta: thugs and drugs – or opium and coolies as some would have it” (SOP 76). The cruel acts of the Britishers are portrayed when they force the farmers to cultivate poppy.

Little did they know of the perils of the consignment trade and how the risks were borne by those who provided the capital. Year after year, with British and American traders growing ever more skilled in evading Chinese laws, the market for opium expanded, and the Raja and his associates made handsome profits on their investment. (SOP 85)

By trading opium into China, the Britishers havoc the lives of people in China. Through Mr. Burnham, Ghosh asserts,

To put simply: there is nothing they want from us- they’ve got it into their heads that they have no use for our products and manufactures. But, we on the other hand, can’t do without their tea and their silk. If not opium, the drain of silver from Britain and her colonies would be too great to sustain. (SOP 112)

Ghosh with clarity discusses the true colour of the Britishers during the nineteenth century. They did not follow any rules or principles and their only aim was to import opium to China. Opium was considered as highly priced commodity at the Chinese market which earned the Britishers a good sum of money. Mr. Burnham says to Mr. Reid about the opium trade:

Do you imagine that British rule would be possible in this impoverished land if it were not for this source of wealth? And if we reflect on the

benefits that British rule has conferred upon India, does it not follow that opium is this land's greatest blessing? (SOP115)

It is clearly understood that the revenue of the East India Company mainly depends on the opium trade. The Britishers motto of opium trade with the Chinese is to “intoxicate, impoverish and demoralize them” (Brook 2). Marx calls opium trade as “free trade in poison” (Brook 2).

The power of higher authorities is clearly shown in the ship Ibis which carries girmitiyas. These coolies were not provided with enough food and water. They girmitiyas had separate rules even for drinking water. The authoritative attitude of Captain Chillingworth makes the girmitiyas shudder,

By early afternoon, the days allowance of drinking water had dwindled to a point where men were fighting for possession of those gharas that still contained a few sips... they climbed the ladder and began to beat on the gratings of the hatch: Water! Listen, Up there! Our gharas need to be filled... there was a near riot: dozens of men scrambled up the ladder on a desperate effort to force their way out on deck... the lathis came crashing down on the girmitiyas skulls and shoulders knocking them backside, one after the another. (SOP 401- 02)

History speaks about the injustice done to people by the empire through incidents like Jallian Walla Bhag, Wagon tragedy and so on. Like these incidents, there are so many untold stories meted out to indentured labourers while travelling in ship as they were waiting for a better future.

While travelling in the ship Ibis, there was only one law: the law of highhandedness and muscle power. This is clearly evident through the words of captain Chillingworth: “The difference is that the laws of the land have no hold on the water. At sea there is another law, and you should know that on this vessel I am its soul maker. While you are on the Ibis and she is at sea, I am your fate, your providence, your lawgiver” (SOP 404). The suffering of the labourers in the ship was unbearable. After hearing the Captain’s words, they were overcome with fear. They also realize that they are in state of existence and their walking hours will be ruled “by the noose and the whip” (SOP 404).

On seeing any distant land, they long to go back to their homeland. The pull of the land is so strong that, one of the labourers jumped into the sea, “This man made a sudden turn, shoved a lascar aside and vaulted over the deck rail” (SOP 405). In the meanwhile, other two labourers broke through “hurling themselves over the bulwar” (SOP 405). On seeing all this, “They start to fail their lathis in an effort to herd the men back into the dabusa” (SOP 405). These incidents terrified the migrants and they jumped into the water.

... one of the three swimmers had already disappeared below water, the other two were thrashing against a current that was sweeping them towards the open sea...within a few minutes the swimmers head vanished, but still the birds remained, wheeling patiently above, as they awaited for the corpse to float back to the surface. Although the bodies were not seen again, it was clear from the way the birds were circling in the sky that the corpses had been seized by the outgoing tide and were swept towards the horizon. (SOP 406)

The Ibis trilogy is the scourge of imperialism and colonialism. Ghosh states, “[C]ontrary to popular belief, empire is by no means a strictly conservative project: Historically it has always held just as much appeal to liberals” (qtd in Mishra.R 65). Chillingworth, Captain of the ship Ibis considers selling opium and transportation of indentured labourers as free trade and says,

The truth is sir, that men do what their power permits them to do. We are no different from the Pharaohs or the Mongols: the difference is only that when we kill people we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this pretence of virtue, I promise you, that will never be forgiven by history. (SOP 388-89)

River of Smoke, the second novel in the Ibis trilogy explores colonial history of early nineteenth century which is connected with opium trade. Britain’s First Opium War was fought with China and it became the myth of modern Chinese nationalism and it is mainly remembered by Chinese people as their country’s heroic struggle against the western countries. “With the turmoil of the Tiananmen uprising of 1989 blamed on ‘western bourgeois liberalization’ the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the first opium war in 1990 offered a public relations gift to the government, the opportunity to splash stirring editorial across the media about this national tragedy inflicted by the gunboats of the West” (Lovell 27).

Antoinette Burton defines Ghosh’s writing as, “World of histories from below” (71). Ghosh articulates the lives of characters involved in historical events. Ghosh scrutinizes historical data to create a realistic picture of the past. Ghosh states,

For historians it is an abstract love of the past. Historians are interested in theories. I'm not. I'm a very empirical person... To evoke the place and time. I have to have detail. I need the place to be real. Nobody knows much about the life in Canton; so I had to make that happen for them, to write about a place which has left no trace in the global memory. By the time I finished, it was like I knew about every house, every lane. Really, there is no such dividing line between science fiction, story writing and historical fiction. (Solitary Weaver)

Ranajit Dasgupta speaks about the agricultural economy of the provinces of Bihar and Bengal under the colonial rule. "It was the destruction of local resources that acted as the initial trigger which subsequently launched a series of incidents leading to the migration of labourers from India to Britain's maritime colonies" (Dasgupta 82). The regions of Bengal, Bihar and Malwa were under the British rule. The colonists held the agricultural lands captive for opium cultivation. Due to the enforcement of Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, "Several farmers and share croppers were forced to become *girmityas* in sugar plantations in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean again controlled by the British" (qtd in Poddar 4). Lommarsh Roopnarine argues, "India as a dispatching colony experienced uneven development because of British colonialism. Foreign penetration and imperialism disintegrated and dissolved the traditional economic and social structure in the countryside, rendering massive population available for recruitment" (103).

Deeti recalls the conditions at the sugarcane plantations before the indentured labourers came. Deeti narrated the story of mass suicide of the fugitive slaves (*marrons*)

who mistook soldiers sent to inform them about the abolition of slavery in 1834, “That the soldiers might be messengers of freedom was beyond imagining- mistaking them for raiding party, the marrons had flung themselves off the cliffs” (qtd in Poddar 11). Throughout the novel, Ghosh subtly fascinates the real life stories with the history of migration under British rule. Mauritius was considered as a penal settlement where convicts were employed in manual labour.

British colonial control over the penalized body was ensured through the modus operandi of transportation of convicts and undesirable to other colonial acquisitions in the neighborhood. This served dual purpose of sanitization of the mainland as well as provision of cheap labor in the upcoming island colonies. (Anderson 8)

Bahram Moddie is directly involved in smuggling opium whereas Robin Chinnery is a mere spectator who records the historical events. Through Ah Fatt, Ghosh explains in detail the manner in which opium was smuggled into China. On the way Ah Fatt shows Neel, the Pearl River leading to Canton and some other small islands. Ah Fatt says, “To foreign merchants, like father because foreign ships cannot bring opium into Canton. Forbidden. So they pretend, they do not bring to China. They go... to Lintin Island. There they sell opium. When price is settled dealer send out boat, quick boat, with thirsty oar-‘fast crab’” (ROS 92). The step taken by Chinese against opium inflow is brought out through the problems faced by Bahram Moddie. Zadig Bey informs Bahram about the most influential British trader William Jardine who had decided to leave for England.

The Chinese authorities have come to know that this company has been sending ships to the northern ports of China, looking for new outlets of

opium. The rumor is that they are planning to throw Jardine out of the country. Rather than face extradition he will leave on his own. (ROS 199)

Zadig Bey recounts to Robin Chinnery about the mutual relationship between the Chinese and the foreigners. Robin in one of his letters to Paulette says:

But how is it possible, I said, that people from Hindustan and Arabia and Persia were able to build monasteries and mosque in a city that is forbidden to forgiveness? It was then I learnt it has not always been thus: there was a time said Zadig Bey, when hundreds and thousands of Achhas, Arabs, Persians and Africans had lived in Canton. Back in the time of Tang dynasty: the emperors had invited foreigners to settle in Canton, along with their wives, children and servant. (ROS 131)

Bahram Moddie, a Parsi opium trader with his friend Zadig Bey meets Napoleon Bonaparte who is imprisoned in St. Helena. In their conversation, “They present the details of the triangular relationship between India, Britian and China” (ROS 57). They speak about how the initial trade relation between China and Britian were mainly for tea, silk, porcelain which was very profitable for Chinese and it balanced the trade due to the high demand for tea in England. “All British efforts to expand the export of goods beyond the existent commerce in tin and calico were rejected by the cautious and self-sufficient Chinese nation” (qtd in Poddar 132). In 1793 Britian’s Lord McCartney tried to make friendship with Qianlong emperor by offering gifts but he rejected telling, “I set no value on strange or ingenious objects and have no use for your country manufactures rebuffing all efforts to expand imports” (qtd in Poddar 157). Britishers became aggressive and tried to subdue Chinese economy by increasing opium export to China. Within forty years,

opium became the most valuable commerce for Britain. This commercial move of the Britishers affected the commoners by making them addicts. This resulted in Britain's economy to be the highest but the consequences for China and India was catastrophic.

Robin's letter to Paulette throws a piece of message regarding Jardine. Jardine has come initially as a doctor but he enters into opium trade earning millions. Zadig Bey shares his views to Bahram about the opium trade in China. "The Angrezes- and I mean by that the Americans as well as the British- are not all of one mind right now. There is lot of confusion about what has been happening here these few months. Jardine and his party have been pushing for a show of force from the British government. But there are other views too: there are some who think this is just a passing phase and the opium trade will soon be back to what it was" (ROS 200). Chinese did not interfere with the foreigners. It was their own local smugglers who helped them in the smuggling process. Over a period of time, the Chinese could not bear the foreigners smuggling opium so they confiscated the boats of the Englishmen and they were expelled from China. Zadig says to Bahram,

The power of the Europeans we have seen at the work, in Egypt and in India, where it could not be withstood. But we know also, you and I, that China is not Egypt or India: if you compare Chinese methods of ruling with those of our Sultans, Shahs and Maharajas it is clear that the Chinese ways are incomparably better- government is indeed their religion. (ROS 202)

Robin mentions about the construction of hospitals by the Dutch in the eighteenth century. All these clearly indicate to the Chinese that Europeans would stop at nothing but seize their land. "Fanqui town. It was built not because the Chinese wished to keep the aliens at bay, but because the Europeans gave them every reason for suspicion"

(ROS 132). Ghosh speaks about the new governor Lin Zexu and his letter to Queen of England and his conversation with the members of the Co-Hong members. “The monopoly of British East India Company over trade with China was abolished in 1813, traders from other nations such as America and Holland, as well as India- the Parsis in particular became participants in trade. Some Chinese businessmen, mainly the members of Co-Hong were also part of the trade” (qtd in Poddar 6).

Ghosh dramatically brings out the debates that took place in Canton between the Chinese mandarins and the opium traders. He weaves fictional characters but the leading opium traders of Canton Jardine, Dent, Matheson are historical figures who are represented based on documentary evidence. “History documents that Jardine, Matheson and others- the largest stakeholders in the opium trade-returned to England and lobbied successfully for military intervention in China, which led to war and even greater ruin for the Chinese”(qtd in Poddar 158).

Ghosh has documented the speeches of John Slade, who defends smuggling of opium and its illegal trade. Ghosh also presents the “Anti-opium lobby led by Charles King, an American trader who dealt in only legal goods” (ROS 121). The lobby favored the principle of free trade supported by Adam Smith and they refused any interference of the government. They ignored the fact, “It was the ready availability of opium and its addictive nature which led to its extensive use and demand that only increased with time” (qtd in Poddar 56). “The fact that the opium found no eager buyers in China in 1782, suggests that it had not yet become a nation of addicts although that would change dramatically in next century. Indeed, 15 years later, the British were importing 400 chests per annum into China” (qtd in Poddar 89).

The hesitant standard of Britain in this issue is clearly seen when Bahram narrates the manner in which two Britishers ruined the ship building industry by imposing unfair trade limitations. Ghosh highlights the alleged standard of Britishers. He dramatizes them through archival materials and historical evidences. The British merchants who were not interested in the interference of government sought the help of Charles Elliot to smuggle opium but were trapped by the Chinese government. General Lin orders the traders to stop opium trade in Canton. Neel, the multilingual translator, translates the letter sent by Lin to Queen Victoria:

It appears that this poisonous article is manufactured by certain devilish persons in place subject to your own rule. It is not of course either made or sold at your bidding, nor do all the countries you rule produce it, but only certain of them. We have heard that England forbids the smoking of opium within its dominions with the utmost rigour. This mean you are aware of how harmful it is. Since the injury it causes has been averted from England, is it not wrong to send it to another nation? How can these opium sellers bear to bring to our people an article which does them so much harm for an ever-grasping gain? Suppose those of author nation should go to England and induce its people to buy and smoke the drug – it would be right that you, Honored Sovereign, should hate and abhor them.

(ROS186)

General Lin questions the policy of English to ban opium in England whereas it is active in China. The English government facilitated its production in India through East India Company. Captain Elliot brings to notice that war will commence in a year.

Zadig states to Bahram that conflict between two strong nations does not justify Britain's action against China. "In life it is not only the weak and helpless who are always treated unjustly. Just because a country is strong and obdurate and has its own way of thinking—that does not mean, it cannot be wronged" (ROS 74).

Neel reads to Bahram from the newspaper *The Register* about Chinese resolve to put an end to opium trade. Chinese take different steps to stop the inflow of opium into China. They tried to block the Chinese ports to prevent foreign ships from entering. They could not do this because China's coast is too long and it is impossible to close it completely. The foreigners developed a close connection with the Chinese traders and officials to bring opium into China. Chinese traders were forced to stop trade and interaction with the foreigners. Foreign ships were gathered offshore and the Chinese would send fast boats to smuggle opium into China. As the paper was read out, Bahram was shocked to hear that the Chinese had been making a study of illegal opium in their country. The article stated, that Chinese government has decided to reform all the opium smokers in China and to punish the smokers by declaring death penalty. Ghosh brings out the history of opium war in a unique way and shows how the traders smuggled opium in the name of Free Trade.

The members of Chamber of Commerce discuss about deporting Mr. Innes from China after the seizure of opium. Charles King supports the Chinese government in stopping the opium trade and he is against Mr. Innes. Charles King says, "Support Innes?... A crime had been committed we are to support the perpetrator? In the name of freedom?" (ROS 344). This reveals the hypocrisy of the Britishers. In the name of free trade and individual freedom British perpetuate a huge crime. Innes hurts the sentiment of

local traders by saying, “I will not be defamed by a caffle of yellow-bellied heathens” (ROS 349).

In historical novels the past can sometimes feel tamed, hindsight, hovering just off the page, tells us that we know what it all added up to and what came of it. But Ghosh novel’s somehow succeeds in taking us back inside the chaos of when then was now. His grasp of the detail of the period is exhaustive he is so thoroughly submerged in it- that readers cannot possibly remember all the things he shows them, or hold on to all the life-stories of all the characters he introduces. (Hadley 6)

Bahram who is a successful businessman meets tragic death at the end by the whirlwind of opium trade. Neel acts a mere spectator, who watches the sequence of opium trade in India and China. Paulette, an orphan from Calcutta joins Fitcher Penrose on an expedition to China to collect rare species of plants. It was through Robin, son of George Chinnery, Paulette traces the golden camelia flower. Ghosh has weaved all these imaginary characters on par with the historical characters like Charles Elliot who was the superindentend of trade in China at the start of opium war. William Jardine was the co-founder of largest opium trade house in China. Lin Zexu was the commissioner of Canton in 1839. Thus Ghosh beautifully carves both the fact and fiction together.

Bahram wanted to be successful in business so he motivated himself to enter into opium trade. His luck and hardwork made him a successful trader. Bahram established his trade relation in Canton and he often stayed there for a long time, it was at that time, he developed a relationship with a Chinese boatwomen named Chi-Mei and they had a son named Ah Fatt. He was very happy about his son but was not willing to take him to

India. Due to the ban of opium, Bahram became aware that he cannot continue his trade any longer in China and he was deeply upset by it.

To be forever banned from setting foot in China? He realized now, as never before, that this place had been an essential part of his life, and just for reasons of business: it was here that he had learnt to live. Without the escape and the refuge of fanqui-town he would have been forever a prisoner in the Mistris Mansion; he would have been a man of no account, a failure despised as a poor relative. It was China that had spared him that fate; it was Canton that had given him wealth, friends, social standing, a son; it was this city that had given him such knowledge as he would ever have of love and carnal pleasure. If not for Canton he would have lived his life like a man without a shadow. (ROS 147-48)

Bahram is portrayed as a tragic hero who failed to support the voice of humanity. The execution of Allow, a Chinese opium smuggler made Bahram guilty because he was the one who gave Allow, a pinch of opium that turned him to an addict. “In some part of his mind, Bahram knew his eyes were playing tricks on him- and yet, in that other part of him that had now become prey to all kinds of fear and fancies, Allow seemed always to be waiting in the shadows” (ROS 383). Charles King informs Bahram about the confession of Allow before his death. This made Bahram tremble with fear and was deeply disturbed by it.

Mr. Bahram Moddie... is at heart good man, says Charlie,... he seemed to be utterly haunted by the events of the last few months. At the very mention of the opium dealer who was executed on December 12, he stared as if he

had seen a ghost! This is a sign, Charlie claims, That Mr. Moddie's conscience had been touched: it is not impossible therefore that at the moment of decision he will choose to do what is right. (ROS 458-59)

Charles King asked Bahram to choose between morality and money. Bahram failed to choose right and he thus goes against his religion. Bahram came to know that he would be arrested. Zadig warned that the chamber would be ready to give him up instead of Dent. Zadig says, "Listen, Bahram-bhai, you are not an American or an Englishman. You don't have any worship behind you. If the chamber had to surrender you or Dent, who do you think they would pick" (ROS 494). After the surrender of opium and witnessing the execution of Allow, Bahram was deeply detached and started taking opium secretly and later drowns himself.

The novel ends with Neel describing the painting of the thirteen Factory, "If it were not these paintings no one would believe that such a place had ever existed" (ROS 553). Ghosh creates stories set in the historical background and characters are created through imagination.

Ghosh bridges the gap between fact and fiction by exposing the darker side of British colonialization. He addresses the fundamental paradox in the opium trade as Indians are also involved in it. The East India Company and the British firms gained more profit and the Indians suffer double humiliation in Canton. Thus Ghosh brings a whole panoramic view of world history where he exposes a collective historical amnesia over a significant time period, creating stories and characters with the blend of history and imagination. Ghosh's artful narration of history brings freshness of the incidents as if they were happening in the immediate present.

The novel *Flood of Fire* deals with the historical events leading to the first opium war. The novel begins with the group of characters and the ship Ibis connects them and has great influence on them. One of the major character Neel, who travelled in Ibis quotes in his diary: “The shared secret of our escape from the Ibis has become a link between who we were then and who we are now; between past and present. It is a bond more powerful even than ties of family and friendship” (FOF 288).

The novel brings in detail of the Opium War which took place between Britain and China. Due to the ban of opium inflow in China, there was great economic downfall for the Britishers so they wanted to wage war. Through the continuous effort of Captain Charles Elliot, the British fleet arrived at China and they destroyed the Chinese fleet. The Macau battle was very worse and the emperor received a letter from Captain Elliot stating, “The British had asked for a sum of six million Spanish dollars in compensation for the opium that Commissioner Lin had confiscated the year before. In addition they had demanded that an island be ceded to them, as a trading base” (FOF 398).

The strangest act of the Britishers is that they did not accept their mistakes. They never acknowledged about their smuggling or their going against the Chinese laws in China. “They placed blame entirely on Commissioner Lin, accusing him of criminal conduct and unlawful seizures” (FOF 398). After much confusions and discussions, “The emperor had agreed to hand the Commissioner to the British, to face whatever punishment they saw fit” (FOF 398). The Britishers were allowed to trade in China and the Britishers established free trade. “And Today when people talk about the doctrine of free trade, they do it as though it had nothing preceding it. And yet, this doctrine comes to us soaked in blood and soaked in criminality” (qtd in Poddar 10).

Few months after the war there was momentous news. The Qing emperor was ready to give the compensation for the burnt opium and also to “Give the British the base they had long been clamouring for: the island of Hong Kong- known as ‘Red Incense Burner Hill’ in Chinese official documents” (FOF 479). These true facts show the cruel acts of the colonial power over the natives.

Through the character of Kesri Singh, Ghosh brings out the injustice meted out to the Indians soldiers during the British rule. The Indian soldiers however powerful, they were treated as subalterns in the British army. The payment of the Indian soldier was a common grievance. “Expedition’s Indian troops would be paid less than their British counter parts” (FOF 286). It was said that the British soldiers were paid high because they were serving in a “foreign country” (FOF 286). “China was foreign to sepoy and swaddy alike; why the expedition’s white soldiers earn more than them? But other than grumble there was nothing the sepoy could do: to make a bigger issue of it was to invite a court material” (FOF 286).

Indian soldiers were provided with inferior weapon than the British soldiers. White troops when they proceeded for the war, they were given more powerful weapon than the Indians and the Indians were blamed for performing low. On seeing this Captain Mee utters in resentment: “They send to us to fight with old equipment and then they complain that sepoy’s don’t match up to white troops” (FOF 280).

If the food provisions are in shortage, the food would go to the white soldiers first whereas the Indian soldiers were made “to eat potatoes and other stuffs or they are left to die of starvation and disease” (FOF 287). These scenes vividly portray the power and position of the Indian soldiers in the British army and the cruel treatment meted out to

them. Ghosh unfolds soldier's life through Kesri Singh within the complex politics of the society, his life in British army and his relationship with Captain Mee. The utmost dedication of the Indian soldiers is expressed through Kesri and other soldiers.

Kesri's sister had been married to Hakhum Singh, who is an ex-soldier and distant relative of Subedar Bhyro Singh. Chandan Singh, the brother of Hakhum Singh reports the news of Deeti's elopement with Kaula, an untouchable man to the Subedar and Subedar warns Kesri to hand over his sister to them.

From now on you have no place in this paltan- if you choose to remain here it will be as a ghost. I will explain all this to the English officers in the morning; as you know, in matters of family and caste, they always respect our decisions. I will tell them that as far as we are concerned you are now a paraiyah, an outcast. In our eyes you are no better than a stray dog; you are worse than filth. For you to remain in this tent for another moment is intolerable: it is an insult to our biraderi. You will never set foot in any of our tents ever again. (FOF 174)

These incidents show the caste based discrimination and caste hegemony that existed among the Indian troop. After these incidents, Kesri joins Captain Mee in his expedition to China. Kesri's soldiers feared about their expedition to China. The month long sea journey was difficult. It is mainly because of the help of the Indian soldiers, the Britishers were able to open ports to expand their opium trade route.

On entering the battlefield, Kesri was shocked to see the Chinese dying in great number without surrendering themselves. Though the Chinese were aware that they would not be able to withstand against the Britishers they willed death rather than

surrendering. When he pulled out his sword, Kesri saw the man's eyes was half open, his eyes was fixed on Kesri and his expression seemed like, "Looks that appears on men's face when they fight for their land, their homes, their families, their customs, everything they hold dear" (FOF 472). It struck Kesri that never in his lifetime of soldiering he had experienced, "For something that was your own; something that tied you to your fathers and mothers and those who had gone before them, back into the dimness of time" (FOF 472). When Kesri saw the eyes of the dead soldier he was overwhelmed with grief. It was then he realized about the meaning of sacrificing oneself for the motherland. Later, Kesri was reminded that they were just hired to be murderers and they were meaninglessly engulfing the Chinese with "flood of fire" (FOF 505). Kesri thinks, "So much death: so much destruction- what was it for all" (FOF 506).

During the British invasion of Chinese territories, Indian soldiers safeguarded the Britishers. Many historical records accuse the Indian soldiers in the involvement of malpractices. It refers about the soldiers involving in "rape, robbery arson and murder" (FOF 575) in the process of destroying villages and plundering the food. The possibility that other alternative might well have existed beyond the official record is represented in the novel. Kesri's relationship with Captain Mee is an important redeeming factor in his soldiering life. They share a personal space even though the discrimination between the British and Indian soldiers exists. At the end, Captain Mee gives all his money to Kesri and sacrifices his life.

Neel's archives is an important historical narrative and it is through his dairy records that Ghosh brings out the grand outline of history. Ghosh uses Neel as a historian with the notion of conventional archive. Neel's journal provides an in depth view about

the Opium War crisis and he acted as the chronicler of his times. Neel learns to read and write Cantonese and his thirst for languages helped him to survive in the alien land where, they were called as “‘Gwailo’!, ‘Haak-gwai!’ and ‘Achhas’” (FOF 18). Ghosh prefers translators and researchers with knowledge of many languages provides us the records of their times. Ghosh’s intension is to record history which has been destroyed in due course of time.

There is a famous Chinese historical movie *The Opium War* directed by Xie Jin in 1997. This movie shows how the Qing empire suffered great humiliating defeat in the First Opium War. This movie mainly focuses on the cunning Captain Charles Elliot’s role in sending the British army against the Chinese commissioner Lin Zexu, in favor of the opium traders. This movie beautifully showcases the role of the Indian soldiers and the Parsi opium traders in the opium war. Through the Indian soldier Kesri Singh, Ghosh brings out the defamiliarised historiography which was silenced by the epic narratives of the Chinese and Britishers. This novel recuperates the aspect of history through grand recite, with all encompassing viewpoints of history.

Ghosh creates the stories of ordinary people from the historical events. The silenced stories are narrated in an imaginative way. Ghosh beautifully presents a captivating story by juxtaposing history, nation and society. Ghosh’s work alters the historical suggestions without escaping historic notions. His novels serve as a microscopic lens in picturing the out of focus historical events. He documents the neglected area of the untold history in a fictional way explaining the cause for maladies of the past. Ghosh presents the socio-cultural prejudices prevalent in the past and being a humanist he strongly believes

in the freedom of ideas. History affects people by making them aware about the past.

As T.S. Eliot says in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Enright 233).