

Tribhuvan University

New Historical Perspective in Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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April 2018

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled
"New Historical Perspective in Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*" submitted to the
Department of English Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Ratna
RajyaLaxmi Campus for the award of Master of Arts in English is the result of my
own independent work and except to extent assistance from others in the design and
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All sources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited.

It contains no material which led to a substantial extent has been
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made in the thesis.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "New Historical Perspective in Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*" submitted to the Department of English, Ratna RajyaLaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, by Ramesh Sharma Chalise has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee:

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my respected teacher and supervisor Toya Upadhyay for his most competent guidance, encouragement and the suggestion throughout my work that enabled me to bring the present form.

I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Pradip Sharma, Head of the Department of English for the approval of this thesis in its present form. I am also equally grateful to my all respected teachers for their invaluable suggestions, inspirations and other kinds of help who graciously respond to some of my queries in course of writing this thesis.

I am especially indebted to my parents as well as my sister for giving me all the warmth and affection that enabled me to complete this research work without which the completion of this thesis would have not been possible.

April 2018

Ramesh Sharma Chalise

Abstract

Using New Historicism the researcher examined to depict the history of marginal people and community of ancient period in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* which bears partially history, partially fiction and partially travel writing in which Ghosh trails back to twelfth century and brings the issues how India came into the contact with Egypt at that time with the story of Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisia and his Indian slave Bomma. *In an Antique Land* is a story about Egypt, the antique land and is narrated by a man who himself belongs to another antique land, India. The similarity deals even in the conquests made by the intruders who set up colonies in parts which they made their own. It has three major aspects. First, as a student of Anthropology the novelist searches for the life of Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisia and his Indian slave Bomma. Secondly, he has a deep insight into the cultural and social development of Egypt from the religious movements to Operation Desert Storm and thirdly, the dreams and aspirations of ordinary human beings and the effect of political and historical changes in their live. In this sense, Ghosh searches the hidden history of subaltern in this novel.

The researcher got the reports the facts from the observation of the events as an occasional visitor to Nashaway and Malabar. He is also affected by the discourse and power of the class he belongs to. Thus, looking into the novel with the critical examination of the discourse it constructs with the representation of historical facts.

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New Historical Perspective in Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*

This research work depicts the history of marginal people and community of ancient time based on Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*. This book bears the quality of partially history, partially fiction and partially travel writing in which Ghosh trails back to twelfth century and brings the issues how India came into the contact with Egypt at that time with the story of Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisia and his Indian slave Bomma. By trailing to the antic past and revealing the history of commoners, Ghosh has not only written historical novel rather he has evoked the history of marginal people who have been abandoned by mainstream history. In this sense, Ghosh has taken the New Historical standpoint while writing this historical fiction, he overlaps time and presents the societies of two centuries separated from one another eight hundred years ago and he uses mix genres fiction, history, travel and anthropology.

In the novel *In an Antique Land*, Amitav Ghosh set out to find an Indian slave, name unknown, who some seven hundred years before had traveled to the Middle East. The journey took him to a small village in Egypt, where medieval customs coexist with twentieth-century desires and discontents. However, even as Ghosh sought to re-create the life of his Indian predecessor, he found himself immersed in those of his modern Egyptian neighbors. Combining shrewd observations with painstaking historical research, Ghosh serves up skeptics and holy men, merchants and sorcerers. Some of these figures are real, some only imagined, but all emerge as vividly as the characters in a great novel.

Based on the literary criticism of Stephen Greenblatt and influenced by the philosophy of Michel Foucault, New Historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times and circumstances, but that the critic's

response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs, and prejudices. New Historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times, in turn recognizing that current cultural contexts color that critic's conclusions.

New historicism is a method based on parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical era. Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, H. Aram Veseer, are some of the prominent of new historicists. According to new historicist, every literary text has its situation within the institutions, social practices and discourses that constitute the overall culture of particular time and place. In this regard, Louis Montrose takes new historicism as, "a shift from an essential or immanent to a historical, contextual, and conjectural model of signification and a general suspicion of closed systems, totalities, and universals" (393).

It is impossible to get objective truth in any text because like all human beings, writers also live in a particular time and place and their views are shaped consciously or unconsciously by the experiences within their own culture as Louis Montrose defines the new historicism "as a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and textuality of history" (416). The 'historicity of texts' means that the text is embedded with certain economic, cultural, social and political conditions of its production.

In an Antique Land by Amitav Ghosh is a story about Egypt, the antique land is narrated by a man who himself belongs to another antique land, India. The similarities deals even in the conquests made by the Intruders who set up colonies in parts which they made their own. It has three major aspects. First, as a student of Anthropology the novelist searches for the life of Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisia and his Indian slave Bomma. Secondly, he has a deep insight into the cultural

and social development of Egypt from the religious movements to Operation Desert Storm and thirdly, the dreams and aspirations of ordinary human beings and the effect of political and historical changes in their lives. In this sense, Ghosh searches the hidden history of subaltern in this novel.

Likewise, Ghosh ends his tale there and tries to wrap up his historical thread also, drawing tenuous parallels between modern times and a story that he is largely obliged to guess on the basis of some ambiguous letters. He includes some explanations on the nature of ancient slavery as a social institution rather than a crime and he also sheds some light on the destructions of Arab-Indian trade due to the conquering navies of Europe who, seeing that no one else claim the naval traffic for themselves, reasoned that it must be up for grabs.

In an Antique Land is not an anthropologist trying to cash in on years of tedious study because Ghosh writes with great care and tenderness and is honest, funny and wry—all the great qualities of a travel writer. The only shame is that he overstretchers himself with the dual narrative theme, a challenge that few ever manage to pass off successfully and even more unlikely a stunt when dealing with ancient anthropology. Ghosh trails back to 1146 through a letter catalogued MS H.6, by a merchant Khalafibn Ishaq to a trader name Abraham Ben Yiju who was living in Mangalore on the south-western coast of India became the center of interest. The letter mentions a certain slave and sends him plentiful greetings. Ghosh is mesmerized with the history and soon found himself in Tunisia learning Arabic specifically Judaeo-Arabic, a colloquial dialect of medieval Arabic, written language. In 1980 he travels to Egypt, to a small village Lataifa where he began to observe and learn about the Egyptian people and their lifestyle. Ghosh travels another Egyptian village, Nashawy and then on to Mangalore, India living with the people in the towns and

villages. He was doing this mainly to track the travels of Ben Yiju and of his slave a man whom Ghosh began to think of as Bomma. Ghosh's characters are coquetted in a complicated web of kinship relations of which Ghosh is curious. The perceptions of these people regarding India, is ancient and construed as for them, Hindus remained uncircumcised, burnt their dead, consumed spicy food and worshipped cows. He was interrogated about his culture. Why Ghosh has trails back to the ancient time in *In an Antique Land* through the narrator's research of the times of Abraham Ben Yiju? Why he has brought the history of commoners which is not included in official history?

By trailing to the antic past and revealing the history of commoners, Ghosh has not written historical novel rather he has taken a new historical or critical perspective towards the history in order to voice the subaltern characters of history in *In an Antique Land*. In this sense, the novel is a meditation on history in which Ghosh overlaps time and presents the societies of two centuries separated from one another by eight hundred years by combining fiction, history, travel and anthropology.

Ghosh is well known for his interest in the Indian colonial history and the contribution of the English language in the postcolonial world. About Ghosh's writing pattern his critic Khandoker Farzana mentions: "Ghosh's writing style is very much inspired by the other Bengali Indian writers such as Rabindranath Tagore or Phanishwar Nath Renu. He spent in Calcutta and his representation of the geographical picture of Calcutta in the novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* is also influenced by his personal experiences" (2).

Amitav Gosh's novel *In an Antique Land* has been analyzed through various perspectives by different critics. Sumitra D' Chettry has analyzed the novel with Ghosh consciousness to build his large canvas of history. She mentions:

In an Antique Land has plot, theme, and characterization, a complex fiction engaged with a specific history uninteresting and offering critical interpretation of that history today. In the main plot, is the journey of Abraham Ben Yiju and his slave while in the sub-plot is in the opposite direction i.e, towards guns , bombs and tanks of the Western Imperialists Powers which caused destruction of the world when Egyptians were stranded in Iraq during the Operation Desert Storm. (180)

The colonizers who built the man-made barriers and introduced the deep scars between the Hindus and the Muslims based on customs like burning of the dead, absence of circumcision in boys and clitoridictomy in girls. This is the ushering of modern age where brother betrays brother for money, cherished codes of ethics are compromised and commitments to larger causes are drowned under waves of cupidity.

Ghosh writes about cunningness, egotism and betrayal. The characters of the contemporary world are people whom the research scholar meets during his pursuit of Bomma. In doing so, Ghosh trails back to the ancient time frame. According to his characterization, Abu Ali personifies cupidity, Imam Ibrahim symbolizes bigotry and narrow-mindedness, Sheikh Musa symbolizes humane and tolerance, while Zaghoul remains the same. Jabeer grows from a quiet boy to self-critical and Nabeel is found to be ambitious. Ghosh seems a keen observer of these minority characters from history.

Amitav Ghosh has been an important presence, bringing to fictional practice his grounding not only in anthropology but in subaltern history. *In an Antique Land* is

much more anthological. About Ghosh's writing pattern comparing Salman Rushdie Nandana Dutta mentions:

Ghosh does not cut a swathe through an entire national imaginary like Rushdie. Instead he adopts a complex inversion of the subaltern method that involves two processes: one, the selection of small, neglected events from the national story in a concession to subaltern practice –the little narrative against the grand; and two, the neglect by the narrative of some aspect of these stories. He does this by choosing his historical area carefully, keeping some part of it silent and invisible and then meditating on silence as it is revealed as a fictional and historical necessity. (18)

These retrievals are necessary aspect of both the method of subaltern history and of its critique that the Ghosh text offers. Amitav Ghosh holds a place of singular distinction in the contemporary Indo-Anglian literature. He has started writing in the 1980s, and strengths the new English fiction for his new themes and techniques that deserve freshness and vitality. However, some of the critics even have focused his writing as a post-colonial of diasporic writing. In this connection, Md. Abul Kalam Azad mentions:

In his fiction, Amitav Ghosh brilliantly deals with the postcolonial identity of subaltern and their diasporic movement. In his essay, "The Diaspora in Indian Culture" Amitav Ghosh tries to see Indian diaspora from cultural and political points of view. He observes that the huge migration from this subcontinent that began in the mid-19th century is not only one of the most significant demographic dislocations of the

modern world; it represents nowadays an important force in global culture. (124)

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta on July 11, 1956 in a middle class Bengali Hindu family. As a diasporic identity, Ghosh lives in Brooklyn of New York with his wife, Deborah Baker and their two children, Lila and Nayan. He has also residences in Goa and Kolkata of India. After completing his PhD, he decided to pursue his career in writing. First, he worked as a journalist with the Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi. Md. Abul Kalam Azad mentions,

Though the various critics have focused on the various perspectives while observing the novel *In an Antique Land* they have not deeply focused on his perception of critical history. Thus, this research brings the new historical perspective to observe the novel in order to trace the history of subaltern in the novel. The interface between history and fiction has been an area of rich potential for the postcolonial novelist in South Asia and this is evident in the practice of many novelists from the region who have used historical material as backdrop but have also used fiction to comment on recent events in their countries. This research work shows that Ghosh, retrieving and giving place/voice to the historically repressed event in the fiction, achieves a swerve from simply 'righting the record' and releases the marginal as a referent in the present with his deep mediation upon history.

This research work aims to include the theoretical modality of New Historicism to deal with the voices of the marginal characters from the history in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*. This deals with the relevance of the events and incidents mentioned in the text with the historical facts of ancient India and Egypt. Peter Barry regards New Historicism keeps "the reciprocal concern between history and fiction" (10). Thus, a text is not free from the sociopolitical and historical

influence as told by Michael Foucault. Keeping this notion into the consideration this research work will include the ideas from the new historians such as Louis Montrose, H. Aram Vesser and Peter Barry etc. Furthermore, the research will include proper library research, proper suggestions from its supervisor and teachers to complete the project.

New Historicism developed as a literary theory in the late 1970s. Yet, the term was only coined several years later by Stephen Greenblatt, an American critic who first used the term in a 1982 essay collection dealing with Renaissance studies. According to a very basic definition in Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory*, new historicism is "a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period" (172). Previously, literary critics had predominantly used text-only approaches to interpret a literary work and, thus, historical influences on a text had often been neglected. This experimental gets succeed with power of human not with boundary of gender, class, nation and scientific freedom and pure phenomenological ambition. Murugan's team deserves power 'New Science' with its great depth and originality because the experiment is being conducted on the next human being with hegemonic position. Every experiment cannot be heard in the close laboratory.

Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* being the nonliterary text, it is relevant to deal with New Historical perspective to evoke the historicity of text. Even in the literary text the New Historicism might be effective perspective because every text is situated in certain time frame. So, In contrast to former approaches, New Historicism does not privilege the literary text, but instead "literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other" (Barry 172). This new understanding of the relationship between these different types of texts also calls for

new understanding of the relationship between texts and history. Hence, advocates of theories are interested in representation of history in written texts as Barry calls it, in “history-as-text” (175). That is why it is obvious to deal both the literary and non-literary texts with New Historicity's ideas and perspectives.

A frequently quoted phrase by the theorist Louis Montrose identifies the new historicists’ “reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (qtd. in Abrams 219) as a key feature of the approach. It means that history is seen as 'textualized', i.e. as a group of linguistic traces that can be recalled, but is always mediated through the narrator and the reader. This, in turn, makes the attempt to depict history objectively impossible and changes the relationship of history and literature fundamentally. Therefore, new historicists consider historical accounts as equally interpretable as literary texts, since both are seen as “expressions of the same historical moment” (Barry 173) and can; therefore, both are analyzed in this respect. *In an Antique Land*, being the text of factual accounts of certain timeframe, bears the quality of New Historicism.

Exploring Hidden History In *In an Antique Land*.

As being the memoir, history as well as the journalistic report of the narrator's story of imprisonment, torture and traumatic experiences by the inhuman power exercise of the ruler group, the text could be placed in the non-literary genres. Being the non-literary text it is much relevant to deal with New Historicism. New historicists began to place literary texts within the frame of a non-literary text. The American literary critic M. H. Abrams says, "New Historicists conceive of a literary text as ‘situated’ within the totality of the institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both are product and producer of cultural energies and codes" (219).

He points to the disentanglement of texts and their historical co(n)text (Barry 173), which new historicists aim to stress in their analysis of literature. For the new historicists, every text is shaped according to certain social, cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, they seek for the function of power, ideology and different institutions in the formation of literature and writings.

Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* as a factual account of certain timeframe bears not only the quality of travel writing or journalistic report, being the account of the experiences of emigrants carries the notion of historical, cultural and political purpose. Similarly, it deals with the issues like function of institutions, power and discourses. Social, cultural and political purposes, function of power and discourse in the construction of truth from the ruling groups as well as counter discourse of the politically and culturally marginal groups etc. which are related with New Historicism could be traced in the text *In an Antique Land*. The text is the complete outcome of the power relationship between people of center and people of margin.

New Historicism is informed by Marxist ideas and Michel Foucault's notions of power relations. One effect of New Historicism in its time was that it forced "critics to focus on the problems of historical representation and knowledge that are parts of any critical endeavor" in time when text-only approaches dominated literary criticism. The new historicists' general view of culture and power has been widely accepted, even by severe critics of the movement such as Jean Howard, Carolyn Porter and Theodore Leinwand.

In this particular context it concerns not only the relation of the work of the new historicists to politics and culture in general but also to the work of the theorist who has been identified by Greenblatt and others as having provided a major impetus

for their own rethinking of cultural and political minorities especially the discourse made by power and counter discourse against the power holders.

Historical Criticism insists that to understand a literary piece, we need to understand the author's biography and social background, ideas circulating at the time, and the cultural milieu. This school of criticism fell into disfavor as the new critics emerged. New Historicism seeks to find meaning in a text by considering the work within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era. New Historicists concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves. These critics focus on revealing the historically specific model of truth and authority (not a "truth" but a "cultural construct") reflected in a given work.

New Historicism is delving into factoids: concern with ideological products or cultural constructs which are formations of any era. So, New Historicists, insisting that ideology manifests itself in literary productions and discourse, interest themselves in the interpretive constructions which the members of a society or culture apply to their experience. The issue of culture has been at the center of critical and literary-critical studies for quite some time now, and nowhere it has been more prominent than in the influential form of literary criticism that has come to be known as the "New Historicism." There is the difficulty of summarizing convincingly the project of the new historicism given both the diversity of the work of those who have been labeled new historicists and the multifaceted nature of the project itself. But certainly one of the most important contributions of the new historicists lies in the insistence and persuasiveness with which they have argued for the central importance of culture not only in relation to literary studies but to the human sciences in general.

A portrayal of complexity in history with the nation in the Indian context inserts of the mixed feelings, contradictions, and sorrows into the history of modernity. History can be seen to function in accordance with fixed agenda that seeks to domesticate variety of things by way of persuading, both personal and impersonal. It is important in the establishment of meaning, in the creation of truth, and in deciding the master and the slave. The novelist reflects, “Among many castes and religious communities of the Malabar Coast few have past as interesting as that of a small group of fisher folk, known variously by the name of Magavira or Mogera” (221). This explains Europe’s acquisition of the epithet “modern” which established the existing notion of imminent colonial expansion as witnessed by the world history.

Likewise, from the perspective of Stephen Greenblatt and others, culture could no longer be considered merely the mirror of so-called deeper political forces and powers but must be seen instead as a political force or power in its own right. The research purposes here is not to review the numerous provocative discussions of the New Historicism that have focused for the most part on the relation of New Historicism to other forms of literary, historical, or cultural analysis and criticism. The issue, this research proposes to examine is somewhat a different one of the relationship between power holders and powerless people. In this regard, the text blurs all the false notion, truths, assumptions created by the ruler with its position in parallel historical position than mainstream history. In this sense, the text could be taken as the counter-discourse against ruling class history. Ghosh has mastered over the rural mid-mountain area by giving the details of farming and has painted with all vividness of powerful imagination. Imagination has deceived him as it puts him rallying in the side of the power center. Many critics compare him with his

contemporaries and endeavor to show why we need to believe him to stand both in breadth and depth of genius supreme among his living rivals.

Amitav Ghosh is a postmodern writer who attempts to express different discourses on the history of some nations in his fiction. After the arrival of post-structuralism and later Post colonialism on the academic scene, history has been refused and its truth has been questioned. Ghosh presents:

In Egypt, everyone I talked to seemed to be in a state of confused apprehension: in the taxi from Cairo to Damanhour, the other passenger talked randomly of disaster killing and vengeance. In the countryside, the confusion was even worse than in the cities; Lataifa alone although had been trying to invasion. (293)

Amitav Ghosh effectively makes use of it to promote the narrative as an alternative mode of knowledge to the scientific one which has been founded the western imperial enterprise. The basic idea which reflects his writings is that history like culture and knowledge are not an absolute independent thought, but a construct. So it is possible to remake it with intuition.

Amitav Ghosh always researches and brings together the social, cultural, and political events of the past, the far-past, the present and the future. He has stuffed his research too much in *In an Antique Land* which has made the text as the mixture genres of history, travel, research and fiction. He has done so because he aims to counter the official ruling class history and aims to speak through the voice of margin from the New historical perspective.

Ghosh himself is given permission by Oxford to use the Geniza library, “The study of Egyptian antiquities passed from being as esoteric and quasi-mystical pursuit

into a freshly-charted field of scholarly enterprise, and in the service of the new science where several travelers undertook journey of discovery into Egypt” (131).

Ghosh’s ability to tell a tale by using memory is an important aspect to reveal the past. As an anthropologist, Ghosh is interested in ancient culture and he manages to translate this very aesthetically into fictional form in *In an Antique Land*. Ghosh too blurs the various genres, which is so common in 20th century writing. History is an important and inalienable aspect of much of Ghosh’s fiction. *In an Antique Land* is allegorical and that in the novel, there is a clear demarcation between history and historiography. The novel raises certain ambivalent issues and attempt to subvert them. Alienation is not merely a modern concept of feeling. Ghosh believes that migration compounds the feeling of alienation as is evident from the past.

The novel reveals Ghosh’s research abilities and interest in Anthropology. As a postcolonial writer cultural heritage and identity have become important facts of Ghosh’s personality. The keen ability for deep research which is seen in this novel is a quality to reveal the history through marginal perspectives. History is easily interwoven into the narrative framework and Ghosh attempts a comparative study of Asian and African, Indian and Egyptian, Jewish and Islamic cultures. Using the autobiographical traveler’s tale to study the past, Ghosh’s canvass is vast and wide. Character delineation has been handled expertly by Ghosh in this novel and the three dimensional characters—Abu Ali, Musa Mustafa Jabir, Sabry bring life and color to his fiction. Ghosh blurs the barriers of nation, country and time dissolve in the consciousness of the author and he reaches tragic realization of how unscrupulous political forces continue to suffocate human aspirations. The narrative of *In an Antique Land* has two plots. This novel also repudiates canonical forms of history. The story of the Egyptian merchant Ben Yiju and his slave Bomma is intertwined

with the narrator, Amitav's own story of his stay in the two villages of Egypt while doing research on the merchant.

This is a comment on the fact that historical research was activated by the Oriental School after the discovery of the colonial 'other.' Though the Geniza library contains every written document of the past, the historical documentation of Ben Yiju and his slave is inadequate. Amitav finds it imperative to make connections between the letters exchanged by the merchant with this slave, and the customs followed by the people in the villages of Egypt as well as in Mangalore in India, to arrive at authentic facts about the life of the two men. These attempts at the research reveal certain truths hitherto known to him, "You have to put a stop to it", she called out after me as I hurried away down the lane. 'You should try to civilize your people. You should tell them to stop praying to cows and burning their dead' (126).

Postcolonial history is reflected by various characters throughout the novel. It clearly refers to the fact that canonical history is imperialist in nature. It has created stereotypes about the Orient and these are stacked in books as objective records of truth. The expression of history is not general and overall information about the world but it is selective picture of the past events. Amitav's attempt at the scholarly research on the life of Ben Yiju and Bomma is also an attempt at questioning postcolonial history.

Amitav does not make any statements about the merchant or his slave; he makes references to historical incidents to justify his research. In the end, the story this novel comes across as important, not as an objective, but as an event which not clear has connections with various events of recent times, though it happened centuries ago. Ghosh, therefore, seems to parody history's claims to objective factuality in order to highlight the personal and the individual. While referring to Ben

Yiju reasons for marrying a girl outside his faith, he says, “If I hesitate to call it love it is only because the documents offer no certain proof” (230). A parody of the idea of recorded history as truth is evident in the use of words like ‘proof’ and ‘documents.’ Amitav stays in Nashawy for his research; but over a period of just a few years, he sees the village getting affected the storm of ‘development’. Like modern India, modern Egypt too loses its local identity and enters the age of machine-guns and technology offered by the West.

The history of the ordinary people and their ordinary rural live will never be a part of recorded history: "If was thus that I had my first suspicion of what it might mean to belong to a ‘historical civilization’, and it left me bewildered because, for my own part, it was precisely the absoluteness of time and the discreteness of epochs that I always had trouble in imaging" (*Antique Land* 201).

The Ghosh tries to present the velocity of life for survival. In a span of time, he presents the same character in different tasks. He focuses to decode the life into different companionship. Unlike liberal humanists who assert totalitarian views and establish mainstream values, in order to set voice of voiceless reveal the other sides of truths. In this sense, also both authors are anti-liberals or Levisian- Sartrean ethicists. Therefore, Ghosh remarks:

'It does not matter,' she said. 'You are quite right about sonali -di. But at the moment we have something else on our minds. We come here to see Mrs Aretonian. Can we tell us where she is?'

'Mrs Aratounian?' the bespectacled man said dreamy, 'his eyes drifting back to sonali. 'She has gone. "Gone where?' said Murugan.

'Just gone.' The man shrugged, losing interest in the conversation. Suddenly a thought struck him and he turned to Sonali, his face brightening. 'Perhaps you will constant to make an appearance at our society?' he said. 'Is it possible, madame?' (166)

Sonali depicts her sudden speech in front of western to encounter in each sector. However, the scientific knowledge provides the meaningful resource to human being to understand the life through the sensibility. With the stake of speech Sonali, being a star, delivers a slogan for human being in the non-western society. This point analyzes the Cartesian model of idea to draw the human life.

Amitav finds a number of common traits between Ben Yiju and his slave who crossed the Indian Ocean in the Middle Ages, and the people he has met in Egypt and in India, but he feels sad to realize that these people are not prepared to understand the similarities among themselves. They all are carried away by the notion of 'development' and 'progress' created by the West. The story of Ben Yiju reveals to him how Mangalore "came to lose virtually every trace of its extraordinary past" (245) with the advent of the colonial power. Amitav refers to a range of popular traditions and folk beliefs "which upturn and invert the categories of Sanskrit Hinduism" (263).

The hybridity which he finds in local faiths in India is also prevalent among the villagers of Egypt. Imam Ibrahim is knowledgeable about the traditional kinds of medicines and there are festivals such as Mow lids in honor of the saints who are not a part of the mainstream Islam. The exclusion of different characters shows inferior quality of civilization in the western side, whereas it depends on the condition of nonwestern. Lucky and Maria are not excluded whereas Urmila, though a human being, is boycotted in ceremony.

He further adds the European's behavior lacks the notion to understand and all are to approve Bengali's view and sentiment. The Arabic speaker could not understand and vice-versa. Therefore, language can be a site of politics for many reasons. Language can be a site of inclusion and exclusion in the sphere of human kingdom. Language should be used in countering the elite and high culture. Humanism defends the voice of these ignored people, who resides outside the reach of discourse formation. Again, in this equality within humanity cannot be established until we try to raise the issues of marginalized groups. Antar worships the miracle of humans but he combines ideas of the westerner and the non-westerner. The condition of humanity in the non-western seems inferior because the western mode is turning the world into physical development rather sensible sense of mindset. "He looked over his shoulder again. Ava was taking longer than he'd thought: she was just getting started on the photograph, at the top right-hand corner of the card. He glanced at the timeline. He really didn't have much time if he was going to walk down to Penn Station before his neighbor". So, Ghosh presents the mutuality and presents:

Bomma, came over."Antar had started going to the doughnut place because the owner of the franchise was an Egyptian, like himself. Not that he missed speaking Arabic: far from it. He got plenty of that all day long, from Ava. Ever since she was programmed to simulate 'localization' Ava had been speaking to him in the appropriate rural dialect of the Nile Delta. Her voice-reproduction capabilities had been graded so that she could even switch intonations depending on what was being said – from young to old, male to female. (9)

The argument for the moment, ignore in the western for short time. Why Murugan gets surprised after seeing the civilization of non-western is questionable. It is

significant in the voice of Said because he focuses on the rationality but asserts the whole narration of European literature in comparison of oriental culture. He identifies the Arabic language and culture as elite in the enlightenment. In the colonial he finds high humanism not only in the western but also in the non-western. I discover the same diversity and pluralist sentimentalism in the history of humanism in the non-westerner. The non-westerner behavior is tolerable, accommodation and cultural pluralism.

But colonization has led to the destruction of all these local histories and cultures and given rise to mainstream canonical history and religion. The colonial power colludes with the dominating power of the colonized country. Therefore the mainstream “history” is a product of the collusion between various dominating forces the colonial and the colonized. Ghosh writes: “[Zaghoul] has read many of the classical texts and he is very knowledgeable about plants and herbs and things like that’’ Those leaves and powders don’t work anymore,” he [Zaghoul] said. ‘Nowadays everyone goes to the clinic and gets an injection, and that’s the end of it’” (142). Indians and Egyptians both have shared similar religious practices, attitudes, and lifestyles which do not fit into the framework of modern Western notions of ‘progress’ and development.

The narrator laments on the fact that in present times they hate each other not on the basis of personal experiences but stereotypes created by history which is written in Western Orientalist academies. He finds it miraculous that parts of Bomma’s story have survived in spite of the historical interventions, “It seemed uncanny that I had never known. All those years that in defiance of the enforcers of history, a remnant of Bomma’s world had survived, not far where I had been living” (432).

The parody of historical facts is evident throughout the novel. The narrator relates to “document” and ‘proof’ whenever he talks about Ben Yiju or Bomma and yet calls it a story, “Bomma’s story ends in Philadelphia” (348). He refers to his stay and experiences too as story, “I sometimes wished I had told Nabeel a story” (204). This story is about the communal riots of 1964 in Dhaka which Ghosh has witnessed as a child. Another incident of communal and provincial violence in Egypt and Algeria triggered off by a football match is a fact in Ismail’s life also refers to as story, “Later Ismail told me a story” (352). He says, “the stories of those riots are always the same: tales that grow out of an explosive barrier of symbols” (210). ‘History’ and ‘Story’ are etymologically related. Journalists also call their news reports ‘Stories’. Therefore ‘Story’ is not necessarily the equivalent of ‘Fiction’ or ‘lies’. Ghosh, by using the word ‘story’ for the act of writing an autobiographical novel blurs both ‘history’ and fiction into ‘story’ (narrative).

This clearly shows that his aim in recreating the given history is not to make a new set of truth claims. The narrative of Ghosh is presented as a version of truth, because history in the form of fiction is itself subversive in nature, since it gives a new vision to the existing past and historicizes it. *In an Antique Land* raises certain ambivalent issues and attempts to subvert them. The writer is conscious with history in *In an Antique Land*.

Every artist contrasts his/her work within certain convention which we must accept before we are in a position to estimate his success. All novelists writer and their novel in different ages, by taking ranks, they have different temperaments and aims. Similarly, the novel refers to displacement of human beings, their psyches, as well as their identities in riots and communal violence. Amitav Ghosh in *In an Antique Land* witnesses how ordinary human beings are uprooted or killed in the

name of 'Freedom' and 'Progress'. It is history that defines, creates, and eliminates boundaries. The novel shows how geographical boundaries at times lead to cultural differences, which in turn create hatred among people. He mentions, "The celebration of Egyptian football victory against Algeria culminates in violence and ultimately a lasting fear and hatred among the people of the two states" (353). If history has created and named nations, it has also conditioned them into viewing each other differently and with feelings of antagonism. This feeling of fear and hatred of the 'Other' is very similar to what Said might call the Occident's fear of the Orient and therefore a desire to appropriate it.

History, which is monolithic, does not recognize the local or individual. It defines nations, cultures, and people only in terms of totalities creating homogeneous modes of 'Nationalism' or 'Freedom.'

History through allegorical fiction thus ceases to be a fixed monument and comes across as the creation of discursive practice, which therefore lends itself to the possibility of transformation. Ghosh reveals incredulity towards the universals created by history and subscribes to a postmodernist notion of history as a narrative and therefore the validity of all individual histories against canonical history which is treated as a metanarrative.

The novel is told in first person narrative, in which the narrator is using as lens through which one sees various paradigms of ideology and their constructs in the society. The narrator is therefore a historian and a character at the same time, therefore subject as well as object simultaneously. The ultimate irony is that the narrators speak 'objectively' about their situations; they have no power to either control or alter them. Their history remains a version which the writer appropriates

through the use of allegory. Ghosh thus recreates the past by creating subjective/individual history in his fiction.

Postcolonial writers would say fictionalizing of history is total subversion since as they contend; truth is not to be found in recorded statements but statements in the making because anything which is codified becomes institutionalized. To understand what the past was about, it is necessary to impose a narrative upon it. There are elements of fiction in all historical accounts and all are neglecting of this fact by all historians' abuse it by explaining away notions of history- writing as 'Scientific'. History, therefore people and their condition to believing only in the reality of their own history making with science. Every form of reality which is personal and not part of the written history is written off as fictive or imaginative. The novel also portrays how notions of nationhood are created. Though an individual like the narrator may not be able to free himself from the terrifying memory of Tridib's death in the riots, he is expected to believe that he is living in a 'free' country among 'free' people. The narrator's grandmother is a victim of a notion of nationalism which is fictional rather than factual. While on the one hand she aspires political freedom, on the other, she subscribes to stereotypical form the worship of heroism in the name of nationalism and patriotism, when the reality around her in the same and the reality created by history books.

The emphasis on discursive self-reflexivity and a meta discursive relationship to his own writing that come through in *In an Antique Land* are among the most apparent postmodernist features of Ghosh's work on an ideological level. Representations of the past are an integral part of his oeuvre. In the context of history, his message seems to be that fiction may be as good, if not better, a basis for representing the past as historiography, which is seriously inhibited by its own

discursive form and logic. The same is true of the scientific discourse in general. Science and its sub-branches stemming from the Enlightenment and modernity (with Ghosh, notably history, medicine, anthropology and ethnography) are inter-woven together with fictional representation.

Moreover, Ghosh's works usually contain metafictional and meta-scientific levels that comment on the nature of discourse in general or on the writing of fictional or scientific text. In *In an Antique Land*, he makes this technique an integral part of his argument.

Rosalind O'Hanlon is another critic who has examined the group's writings. In her view, the reconstructions of subaltern histories by some representatives of the group allow the traditional Western subject to enter their discourse:

At the very moment of this assault upon Western historicism, the classic figure of Western humanism—the self-originating, self-determining individual, who is at once a subject in his possession of a sovereign consciousness whose defining quality is reason, and an agent in his power of freedom—is readmitted through the back door in the figure of the subaltern himself. (191).

O'Hanlon ends up by arguing that the writing of subaltern histories require great skills and subtlety if slippage into essentialist humanism is to be avoided. Narrative subtlety and skills are usually recognized as the characteristics of the writer of fiction, not as historiography. But given the fact that they are both narration, O'Hanlon's argument supports the adoption of the traditional techniques of historiography when writing fiction and vice versa, as Ghosh does in *In an Antique Land*.

In O'Hanlon's view, the most important thing in these constructions of subaltern subjectivity is to forget the myth of origins as a means of legitimation. The

Cartesian ideas that the subject is self-constituting and that a being which has its origin outside itself is not a proper being to begin with has to be discarded. Only then is it possible to move on to the idea that histories and subjectivities are constructed from fragments that do not contain the signs of any essential belonging inscribed in them. O'Hanlon further argues that this kind of skill, "the ability to argue for distinctiveness of practice without slipping into a metaphysics of presence' is difficult to develop" (197).

Conclusion: Retracing Alternative History through New Historical Perspective

This research paper has traced that rewriting, re-creating or retelling the history is new historical standpoint of the post-modern author who by their new form of narration question or counter the official history created by power holders. Thus, this kind of historiography, unlike the history, is able to rise of voices from marginal or subaltern people and community. Amitav Ghosh in his *In an Antique Land* has countered the official colonized history by trailing back to ancient Egypt and bringing the hidden facts of commoners which were properly excluded by the official history.

In doing so, Gosh has shaped his novel as a mix genre. *In an Antique Land* is complex texts which bears the quality of partially history, partially fiction and partially travel writing. It trails back to twelfth century and brings the issues how India came into the contact with Egypt at that time with the story of Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisia and his Indian slave Bomma. Bringing the story from antic past and revealing the history of commoners, Ghosh has not only written historical novel rather he has evoked the history of marginal people who have been abandoned by mainstream history. This fragile condition of humanity at the present is the result of the western thoughts and dreams. Farley looks silent and critical sensible. Therefore, Ghosh visualizes, Once he was gone, Farley made his way silently across

the laboratory. Flattening himself against the wall, he crept towards the door until he had maneuvered himself into a position where he could look into the anteroom without himself being detected. Ghosh's new historical standpoint while writing this historical fiction he writes and overlaps with time and presents the societies of two centuries separated from one another eight hundred years and he combines with other genres like fiction, history, travel and anthropology as if it is an anthropological history. Thus, motif of Ghosh's historiography is to give the voice of margin or place in history as a counter against the official history.

Ghosh takes the static and objective picture of society for the factual events. But he does not go below the superficial manifestations of the events. He reports the facts from the observation of the events as an occasional visitor to villages. He is affected by the discourse and power of the class, which he belongs to. Thus, looking into the novel with the critical examination of the discourse it constructs with the representation of historical facts. It is concluded that the writer explores the history that has been hidden by the dominant ruling class.

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