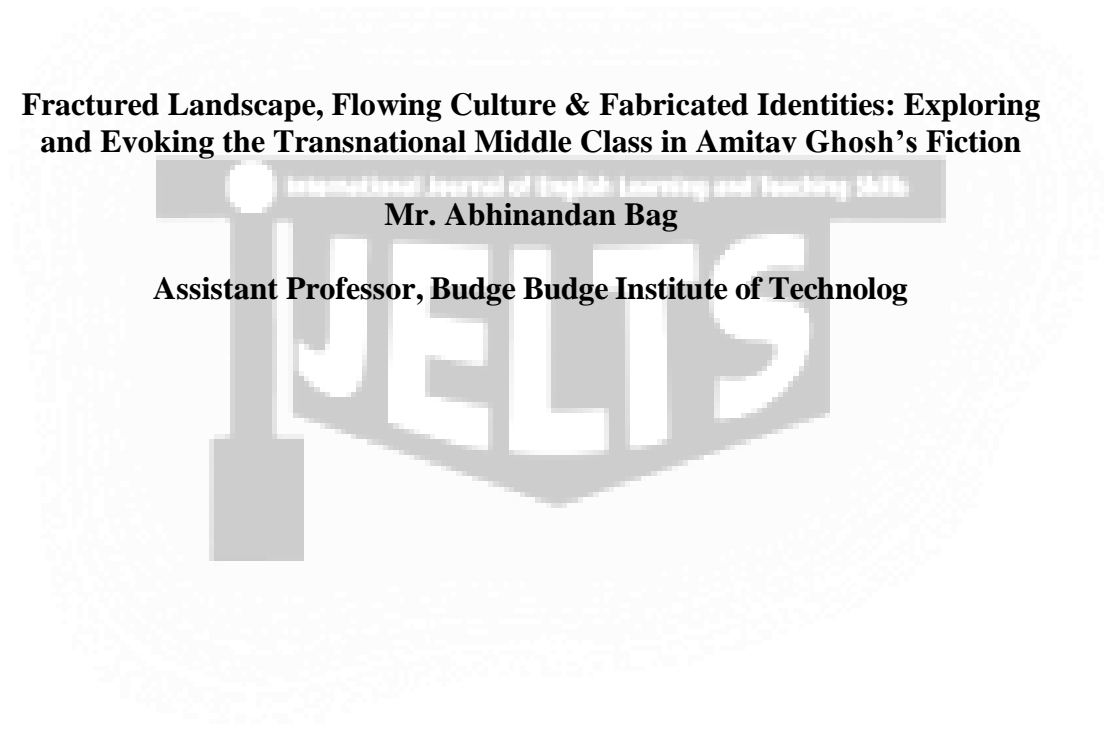


**Fractured Landscape, Flowing Culture & Fabricated Identities: Exploring
and Evoking the Transnational Middle Class in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction**

International Journal of English Learning and Teaching Skills

Mr. Abhinandan Bag

Assistant Professor, Budge Budge Institute of Technolog



Abstract

The transnational middle class provides us with notions about culture-areas that overlap several nation-states, or of multicultural nations. Cultural diversity, historical memory, and societal organizations are never inscribed on a neutral grid in transnational space. Amitav Ghosh invokes a crucial inquiry of transnationalism: how do we locate the hybrid middle class transnational culture? Does the transnational encounter unsettle the idea that cultures and countries are analogous, leading to a new middle-class culture? In my paper I am going to explore how transnationalism complicates the relationship between space and culture. How the question of interpreting social change and cultural transformation as occurring within interconnected areas is raised by the fractured landscape of independent nations and sovereign cultures. We can see that identity of place emerges from a specific dialogic involvement in a framework of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultured fabrication as a community in the middleclass notions of locality or community, which refer to both a demarcated physical space and clusters of interaction. Ghosh's transnational middle class has been mobile and identities less fixed than the static approaches of classical anthropology. The rapidly growing and intensifying movement of the middle class, combined with a rejection of cultural products and practices, has created a profound sense of loss of territorial roots, erosion of place cultural distinctiveness, and anthropological theory ferment. In the world of Diaspora, transnational cultural flows and mass movement of populations, old-fashioned attempts to map the globe as a set of culture regions or homelands are bewildered by a dazzling array of postcolonial simulacra, doublings and redoubling.

Keywords:Diaspora, Transnationalism, Multiculturalism, Middle Class

Indian middle class was an upshot of the British economic strategy, on the one hand, and social and educational strategy, on the other. This seemingly unfertile (unlike the European industrial bourgeoisie) and non-profitable (unlike the traditional Indian bourgeoisie) section played remarkable part in Indian history: (a) it has not only integrated the British rule in the subcontinent but also organized a triumphant freedom struggle against that very regime, (b) it was responsible for propelling a movement in the subcontinent which is particularly socialist in nature (c) it was responsible for the partition of the country and finally acted as the utmost influence behind a planned socio-cultural modifications in post-independent India. Western education instilled Eurocentric values within the newly generated middle class.

The Collector in *The Glass Palace* is representing this particular stratum of the society where his education distanced him from Indian values, which is essentially social in nature. It made him weak in terms of collectivistic orientation, and distracted him from the majority of Indian population. He is representing an artificially originated class, not duly affixed in Indian belief and refined understanding. The peculiarity of his anglicized education and total submission to the colonial masters made him stagnant both in his private and social life. The collector is unable to accept that Indian culture which has undergone through a series of social and historical processes representing certain common traditions that had given birth to a number of conventional inclinations. His Cambridge education incorporated blind admiration for his British masters. Thus when Uma proposed him to relocate the royal family to Bhutan, their ancestral origin, he completely disagreed with Uma explaining how his British masters fear of unrest that may erupt due to the presence of the royal family:

...our teachers don't want political trouble in Burma. It's their richest province and they don't want to take any risks. The King is the one person who could bring the country together, against

them. There are more than dozen different tribes and peoples there. The monarchy is the only thing they have in common. Our teachers know this and they want to make sure that the King is forgotten. They don't wish to be cruel; they don't want any martyrs; all they want is that the King should be lost to memory – like an old umbrella in a dusty cupboard.(Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 2000)

He was controlled by “rational” thinking that was built on the European metanarratives of scientific advancement and materialism but we must acknowledge that it was through the incorporation and antagonism of diverse agencies that Indian culture transformed into what it is today- neither Hindu, Buddhist nor Islamic, neither a mimicry of the European manner of livelihood and thought nor a purely Asiatic product(D.P.Mukherjee, 1948). Transformations may come to Tradition & culture influenced by internal or external agencies. External agencies were mainly economic in characteristics- such as transformations in the mode of production. This kind of transformations occurred in India after the British colonization. The British introduces an alien form of economy based on materialism and mechanical production. They fractured the economic structure by destroying indigenous merchandise, trade and commerce, uprooting the self-sufficient rural economy, and breaking the traditional *panchayat*. They introduced reforms in land-settlement based on the concepts of private property and profit, generated physical and occupational mobility in a hitherto more or less static society, and imposed on Indians an educational system with English as the medium of instruction. The new land-revenue system generated a section of absentee landlords –who constituted the main pillar of strength for colonizers in rural India. These landlords remained divorced from both agricultural productivity and responsibility towards the villagers. The British ruler resulted in the rootlessness and diversification of the middle class. Thus, the middle class became fluid in its form and, therefore, its handiwork in the social domains of education, culture, and politics as well as economy was bound to be non-structured in quality(Chakrabarti, 2010).

Rajkumar the protagonist of *The Glass Palace* is the product of the new economic system, he is the transnational Heathcliffian character who made his own way through the passage of history. He is the representative of the rootless middleclass who never laments for his uprooted circumstances.

His loneliness in the land of Burma was no less than Robinson Crusoe in the forsaken island. His obstreperous journey from the position of a dishwasher at the road side stall of Ma Chow to a rich timber merchant shows the development of his character as well the development & formation of the new transnational middle class. We have never seen him bothered of the moral codes neatly weaved by the society, for he never had a society. Mentored by Saya John at his early orphaned life, provided him with an insight of the larger world, of which he is a part. The multi-ethnic upbringing of Saya John coloured his stories that was very favorite of Rajkumar. John narrated how he was born an orphan like Rajkumar and brought up by the Catholic priests, in a town called Malacca. These priests were from everywhere- Portugal, Macao, Goa and they named him 'John Martins'. From them John learned different languages, including some Indian words. His knowledge in different languages and ability of communication helped to get a job at Singapore military hospital where the inmates were mostly Indian soldiers. They have a common question for John: "how is that you who look Chinese and carry a Christian name, can speak our language". They are astonished by John's hybrid background and laughed at him and say: "you are a dhobi ka kutta – a washerman's dog- na ghar ka nag ghat ka – you don't belong anywhere, either by water or by land"(Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 2000) Instead of getting angry Saya John was pleased with the metaphor used to denote him, and this portion of the story was Rajkumar's favourite, reciprocating with hilarious laughter. He represents a class who is hungry for food, for knowledge and for recognition; he is skilled in survival techniques. The intensity of survival of this new section of the society may have been reflected in bollywood through the image of an 'angry young man'but is best explained by Ghosh. Rajkumar's reminiscence about the loot of *The Glass Palace* draws the sketch of the human society that was struggling to rise with the fall of imperialism. He was astonished by the peculiar behavior of human beings; the people who looted the royal family were in grief for their banishment. Rajkumar recognized several people from the looting of the night before. He recalled how they had hacked at the furniture and dug up the floors. Now those very men and women were lying prostrate with grief, mourning the loss of their King and sobbing in what looked like inconsolable sorrow. Rajkumar was at loss to understand this

grief. He was in a way a feral creature, unaware that, “ in certain places there exists invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their commonality...beyond the ties of blood, friendship and immediate reciprocity, Rajkumar recognized no loyalties, no obligations and no limits on the compass of his right to provide himself”(Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 2000). This emotion, this behavior, this ethics was new to our general understanding. Ghosh provided us with a new unstructured structure of society.

‘His father was a big Seth from Bombay but his mother was Chinese, so we call him Cheeni, although his name is Ah Fatt’(Ghosh, *River of Smoke*, 2011)– thus was the introduction of the illegitimate son of Bahram Modi. He is an equally colourful figure like Rajkumar and Saya John. His portrayal never focuses a bildungroman, but he is the one who is best in shattering away the normative family structure. Drawn by the quest of union with his father& family, he has created an imagined sense of association with Bombay. A conversation with Neel explains this clearly: ‘Do you mean to tell me, said Neel, ‘that you’re related to Seth Rustamjee Meistrie?(Ghosh, *River of Smoke*, 2011)Yes, said Ah Fatt. For a long time, he didn’t even know about his lineage and at the end of his boyhood he found out that he had connections, relatives faraway. He came to know that his mother and father had died when he was a newborn, and that he was being brought up by his widowed Eldest Aunt- his Yee Ma. This was the story that was told to everyone who knew them, on the Canton waterfront and in Franqui-town. But later he came to know from Yee Ma, that ‘ “Uncle Barry” not kai-yea, but father. Vico’s stories about Anahita provide him the base for his imagination: “I saw in my head – a place, better even than mandarin-boat...that mast like tree. Around its roots, on quarter deck, there is carved bench, where people can sit. Grandfather built like that, to be like banyan tree in village”(Ghosh, *River of Smoke*, 2011). Here he becomes a transnational romantic who frames his own identity with Anahita, his ancestral ship, a marker of his genealogy. This frees him from the bounds of space and time, since identity for him becomes a frame of reference that itself floats.

The new Transnational middle-class is formed through modifications and transformations in

the Indian society mainly by the agent like East India Company and their handlers, the British rulers, who became the prime representative of modernization in India. This middle class, with all its characteristic contradictions, wanted to modernize Indian society, evidently patronizing the European or, more specifically, the Victorian English archetype of development. It was heavily influenced by the western liberal notions of progress and equality. The values cherished in England - materialistic and secular values as against Indian spiritualism, individualism as against traditional Indian collectivistic orientation, reason rather than faith, and utilitarianism or instrumentalism - were deliberately upheld. While acting as agents of change, they were under three major historical constraints: (i) the fact that economic and political power belonged to foreigners, (ii) the obduracy and resilience of tradition, and (iii) contradiction in their middle-class character. I do not conceive progress as a natural phenomenon. Development, for me, is not the same as growth, but a broader process of unfolding of potentialities signifying development of personality. (Chakrabarty, 2010) The basic precondition for personality development was freedom, which, in turn, was the essence of progress. Personality was 'free and spontaneous' in the sense that it was self-propelled, self-determined, and self-limited. Freedom could be understood in three senses: freedom from the constraint of time, from social interference, and from social control. A person has to be free from the necessity of remaining in social contact for every moment of his life. The narrator and Tridib, in the shadow lines, was a perfect imaginative, even sometimes, Rajkumar, totally surrenders himself to the freedom of exploring their Transnational selves. They may have a busy schedule for their everyday mundane working but that has not eclipsed the space of leisure from their life. Leisure was important, as it alone could conquer the tyranny of time. Ghosh and Basu explain how obstacles to leisure, including the demands of a busy social life, were often mistaken for progress.

In contrast to Ila and Tha'mma, Tridib's mode of self-fashioning is presented by the narrator of The Shadow Lines as the privileged position which can enable an effective engagement with the material situation within which post-colonial identities are constituted. Like Ila, Tridib's most dominant desire is also shown to be the effort to negate the entire network of his social relationships: He [Tridib] did

not want to make friends with the people he was talking to, and that was perhaps why he was happiest in neutral impersonal places ... (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 1988)

Unlike Ila, however, the narrator says that Tridib's desire to negate his sociality arises not from the stereotypical colonial fantasy of being appropriated into the metropolis, but has to be read as an effort to challenge imposed modes of knowledge and rearticulate the postcolonial self:

I [the narrator] tried to tell Ila and Robi about the archaeological Tridib ... The Tridib who said that we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try to do it properly. ... He had said that we had to try because the alternative wasn't blankness-it only meant. ... we would never be free of other people's inventions.(Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 1988)

Tridib's perspective, the narrator suggests, can critique the dominant cultural stereotypes as it presents to the post-colonial subject a choice to re-narrate his/her 'selfhood' according to his/her desires: Everyone lives in a story, he [Tridib] says, my grandmother, Lenin, Einstein... they all lived in stories because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you chose.(Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 1988)

The narrator here is unable to account for the critical limitation in Tridib's perspective-that the process of elaborating a new Transnational identity involves social action rather than being merely a product of an individual choice made autonomously of society. The narrator further suggests that Tridib's perspective can challenge the dominant stereotypes as it permits one to imaginatively reconstruct times and places and thus enables one to historicise his/her context. Such a historicity generates avenues for the Transnational subject, for instance the narrator, to resist the kind of dependency generated by a perspective such as Ila's that only engages with the immediately physical present. The narrator's implication here is that Tridib's idea of identity formation can successfully challenge the uneven power-relations(Sircar, 1991).He elaborates Tridib's concept of 'freedom': [Tridib] did know. ... how he wanted to meet her [May] as a stranger in a ruin ... He wanted them to meet in a place without a past without history, free, really free (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*,1988)

Thus, 'freedom' for Tridib involves a total negation of the social past. What is significant here is that 'history' for Tridib is considered as a homogeneous and monolithic entity. Consequently, for him, a re-definition of post-colonial identity involves not a re-evaluation of the biases of neo-nationalist historiography, but a negation of the situation in which the post-colonial finds himself/herself (Sircar, 1991). For Tridib, therefore, the re-narration of the post-colonial context has finally to be done at the level of individual imagination. Tridib's mode of self-fashioning is crucial in the text as the hero/narrator himself constantly attempts to 'see' through Tridib's eyes:

Tridib had given me [the narrator] worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with. She [Ila] who had been travelling around the world ever since she was a child could never understand what those hours in Tridib's room had meant to me, a boy who had never been more than a few hundred miles from Calcutta. (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 1988)

Through the narrator's endorsement of Tridib's perspective Ghosh seems to contest at one level the dominant ideology of the post-colonial metropolis which proposes the conscious 'self' to be the locus of all meaning. The narrator is presented instead, on numerous occasions, as actively trying to reconstruct the multiple determinants of his subjectivity:

I sat on the ... camp bed and looked around the cellar. Those empty corners filled with remembered forms, with the ghosts who had been handed down to me by time: the ghost of the nine-year-old Tridib, . . . the ghost of the eight-year-old Ila. They were all around me, we were together at last, . . . the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance. (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 1988)

Such a perspective allows Ghosh to account for the social determinations of the 'self'. The author can now address the question of subjective attitudes as they are overdetermined by a specific cultural context. Thus, Ghosh explains the differences in Tha'mma's and Tridib's attitudes to time, for example, as resulting from their differential class-positions. Tha'mma's obsessive work ethic which can only sanction a notion of time to be used in order to further one's career interests typifies an Indian petit bourgeois concern. In contrast, Tridib's tendency to 'waste' his time signifies a life of

leisure and a class-position which is free of immediate economic pressures, that is, the traditional elite classes of India. The narrator recounts: For her [Tha'mma] time was like a toothbrush: it went mouldy if it wasn't used.... That was why I [the narrator] loved to listen to Tridib: he never seemed to use his time, but his time didn't stink.(Ghosh, *The Shhadow Lines*, 1988)

The narrator recounts that Tha'mma has not been able to realize her ideal of 'freedom,' the middle-class dream of 'the unity of nationhood and territory, of self- respect and national power.. . (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 1988). He also shows Ila's active efforts to be appropriated into the West European culture which continues to impinge on the post-colonial along an axis of power. As with them, his own desire to be free is also ultimately ineffectual. The narrator's recollection of Robi's ideas of freedom may be read as describing his own position: Free. . . You know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of the newspapers at home now-in Assam, . . . Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura-people shot by terrorists . . . and the army ... you will find somewhere behind it all that single word, everyone's doing it to be free . . . why don't they draw thousands of little lines, through the whole subcontinent. ? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 1988)

Freedom is itself rejected as being an illusory socio-political condition. What is significant is that like Tridib's concept of 'history', 'memory' for the narrator signifies a homogeneous, monolithic essence outside discourse.

The obstacles of freedom should be removed for the development of inner personality of man. We may turn to Upanishads in search of the values like *shantam*, *shivam*, and *advaitam*, that is, values of peace, welfare, and unity(Chakrabarty, 2010). *Shantam* is the principle of harmony which sustains the universe amidst all its changes. *Shivam* is the principle of co-ordination in the social environment. And *advaitam* is the principle of unity which transcends diverse forms of state. The authors are successful in bringing about some changes in people's attitude to life and to others. Human relationships, tension in family affairs, problem of extramarital affair, plight of social marginal like widows, lascars, coolie and shipmen, which hitherto remained totally outside the

purview of any aesthetic pursuit, were, for the first time, brought into the forefront. The novels critiqued the colonial tactics of making Indians preoccupied with their past and thereby diverting their attention from the real problems of social life they faced everyday under the colonial rule.

Sometimes the national movement has been acclaimed as anti-intellectual in nature. Not only has there been much unthinking borrowing from the West, there had also emerged a hiatus between theory and practice, as a result of which thinking had become impoverished and action ineffectual. The next attempt to change India was initiated by the nationalists. It was again a middle-class pursuit. Initially pro-British in its attitude, the middle class felt being cheated by the British when it found that industry, trade, and commerce, and even government employment went out of their hands. Hence Indian nationalism was a by-product of frustration of the Indian middle class. Previously, a section of this class looked down upon Indian tradition. Its vision was then coloured by the colonizers' perception of Indian culture. And later another section of it started glorifying it. Ghosh's novels critiqued the colonial tactics of making Indians preoccupied with their past glory and thereby diverting their attention from the real problems of social life they faced everyday under the colonial rule. Just like the liberal view of reformers, the whole idea of nationalism was western in origin. Nationalism entailed an idea of national unity and Ghosh and Basu, making the Transnational middle class his mouthpiece, critiqued how farcical it is to develop an artificial all-India culture without giving honour to the specificity of various transnational cultures. The traditional Indian philosophy focused on a spiritual universe. What was required was a happy balance between the needs of regional cultures and those of the national and international culture thereby forming a transnational culture. After all the transnational culture was more a union than a unity; the higher levels of its unity could be reached through the union and not the fusion of the distinctive cultures of nationalities in different regions. Thamma in *The Shadow Lines* and Uma in *The Glass Palace* have exhibited direct association with the national movement. But many times their notions have been shattered. Their love, fellow feeling and sympathy were confined within the boundary of their nation, thus remained dissociated from the larger mass. Nationalism was basically a middle-class ideal that was

imposed on the common people without bringing any change in people's lives. Proof of the failure lay in the fact that, immediately after independence, there was gloom and despondency and the new state of India was facing the acute problem of nation building. The problem of communalism appeared as a major obstacle. The immediate danger was civil hatred. In the second section of *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh pays attention to communal strife in Calcutta and Dhaka caused by the loss of the Prophet's hair from Hazratbal shrine, Srinagar. Throughout this novel, Ghosh attempts to draw attention to the futility of political freedom and the creation of national boundaries. He raises objections against peoples' war-mongering attitude, the rushed partition, communal frenzies, intermittent violence and clashes that resulted in the snapping of ties between India and Pakistan.

Middle-class feudal and patriarchal nature, caste considerations played a different role in the lives of Ghosh's characters. Changes in the family life, status of women, village economy, caste system, etc. had no doubt occurred, though their pace was much slower than what the middle-class youth thought should be in the political domain. TO find the pluralist popular voice speaking from within the discourse of nationalism, to discover a site of resistance to the apparently homogenising ideology, to recover the diversity essential for a vital political existence, is the purpose of this essay. The portrayal of women and domesticity in the nationalist imagination has of late received scholarly attention in the form of critiques of the nationalist representation of women. Here I want to represent a popular imagination of woman that subverts the nationalist dichotomies (home/world, material/spiritual) with a more ambiguous positioning of, and therefore greater autonomy for, women.

The River of Smoke tells the story of Deeti, the matriarch of a large clan, which once a year gathers on the island of Maurities to celebrate its amazing history. Her decision to become a *girmityas* in order to escape the extreme torture based on caste and class hierarchy gave birth to a new class, where women, despite of being illiterate, practices free will. Deeti is the omnipresent narrator in her shrine in the cliffs of Mauritius, an elderly figure accompanied by the descendents of *La Fami* Clover Clan to celebrate 'Gran Vakans' and describing as a family ritual the fateful stormy night she faced on Ibis as a young pregnant woman with others on the board. At Deetiji-ka-smriti-

mandir she forms her own history, her laws, her own representation of patriarchy and religion. In Fami the culture and tradition centers around Deeti: “ Every child in Fami knew the story of how Deeti had learnt to paint: she had been taught by her grandmother when she was a chutki of a child , Back there in Inn dustan, in the gaon where she was born...When she moved to Narayanpur she brought the secrets and taraditions of madhubani with her: she taught her daughters and granddaughters how to whiten their walls with rice flour, and how to create vibrant colours from fruits, flowers and tinted soils(River of Smoke, 2011)

I do not believe in historical inevitability of synthesis of opposites, a self-conscious choice-making was necessary in this regard. Self-consciousness was the essence of a Transnational middle class. Its content was composed of nationalism, democracy, utilisation of science and technology for controlling nature, planning for socio-economic development, cultivation of rationality, etc. Ghosh called for social action to push on the dialectics of conservative forces of tradition and new forces of westernisation and asked the middle class to push it further consciously and collectively into the next higher stage of social development, where personality was integrated through planned, socially directed collective endeavor for historically under stood ends, that is, a transnationalist order of society. He appreciated diversification to the extent it led to the emergence of class consciousness, which would mark a new emancipation from primordial loyalties of religion and caste. Indian tradition was not a static reality. It continuously assimilated diverse elements within its fold and then traditionalized all these. Indian tradition was not a static reality. We may refer to Upanishadic principle of *charaiveti* or keep-moving-forward to denote the changes in the society.Each culture had its own mechanism of change. Indian tradition had *sruti*, *smriti*, and *anubhava* as the typical mechanisms. *Sruti* implied listening, while *smriti* meant memorising. *Anubhava* was the personal experience or realization of an individual, which gradually became collective experience or a feeling of larger number of people. These traditional indigenous means were utilised by Ghosh and Basu to project the formation of the Transnational middle class.

The idea of the middle class in 19th and 20th century India - its rootlessness, unproductive

nature, sufferings under colonial hegemony, and incapacity to play a historical role has been subverted by Ghosh and Basu. 'Each country has its own language', said *Bodhoday*, one of the earliest 'modern' children's primers written by the Vidyasagar. There Vidyasagar stated that the language Bengali's speak is called Bengali, the people of Kashi and the surrounding regions speak a language called Hindi, the people of Persia speak Persian, in Arabia the language is Arabic and similarly the language of the people of England is English. This awakening to a wider world, however, was qualified by the hierarchical view that was part and parcel of the concept of 'civilisation' itself. Literature produced in Bengali for consumption in schools also showed that long before the new colonial intelligentsia became 'Indian' in any geo-political sense, they had become ensnared in this competitive and hierarchical imagination of the world. In a book on morality, which Vidyasagar collaborated with his friend Rajkrishna Bandyopadhyay, being influenced by the civilizing discourse expressed himself in an essay on 'labour'(Chakrabarty, 2010). The essay explains that the Countries where people are averse to labour and live on the flesh of animals obtained by hunting or on fruit and roots, are uncivilized. The aboriginals of America and Australia as well as the Negroes are still in this state. According to Vidyasagar they live in great hardship without adequate food and clothing, and they do not save anything for bad times and as a consequence many of them die from hunger. On the other hand the Germans, the Swiss, the French, the Dutch and the English are the most industrious people of thereby enjoying the best circumstances among all nations. The promise of 'improvement', of being allowed into the tiny coterie of the 'leading' nations of the world - a possibility of which the essay speaks and to which it sees 'hard work' as the key - was, of course, what theoretically made the community of civilized nations look 'open'. It was also what drew, and has since drawn - as Ranajit Guha has shown - generations of nationalists to this idea of 'improvement'. As this civilising-cum-nationalist body of thought proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century to incorporate influences, the personal and the domestic came to be tied ever more closely to the idea of the nation. Bengali books on education of the young argued, that the individual was a physical embodiment of the nation and the latter improved only if the individual had undergone all-

round improvement. The Victorian fetishes of 'discipline', 'routine' and 'order' became some of the most privileged elements in Bengali writings on domestic and personal arrangements, constituting in them objects of desire and beauty. The internal 'discipline' of 'the European home' was seen as a key to European prosperity and political power. Bengali books on 'domestic science' extolled the 'attractive' qualities of 'the house of any civilised European' which was now compared to 'the abode of gods'. It was a place where *sri*khala [discipline] reigned; things were clean, attractive and placed in order. The Bengali/Indian home - itself a colonial construct, as we shall see - suffered badly in comparison. It was said to be like hell - dirty, smelly, disorderly, unclean and unhealthy. Order was thus linked to notions of cleanliness, hygiene, health and a certain regimentation of time expressed in the 'virtue' of punctuality. Several of the books on health and medicine written in the 1860s and 70s were concerned with the supposed laziness of the Bengali male body. Radhanath Basak's *Sarirtattvasar* was written to help the Bengali body grow strong. My attempt is to understand and reconstruct the domestic realm, how it has transformed with the transnational perspectives. Bahram or Barry Mody presents a total new rendition of the middle-class aesthetics. His relation with Seerinbai is something which has been propagated through ages as a perfect companionship. Seerinbai's whole hearted dedication for her husband and capability to maintain a long-distance relationship without any sign of complaint project her as an "adarsa grihini". But Barry was least interested in this sanctified, traditionally pure and virtuous exchange between him and Seerinbai. His indomitable fascination for the washerwoman of Canton, Chi-Mei, made him an aberrant in the framework of middle class aesthetics. His unexpected revival of grotesque love for Chi-Mei and the her dirty, narrow and dingy dwelling thousands of miles away from his home has presented a new definition of middle class love embedded in a transnational perspective :

The cramped space, the hard edges of the timbers, the rocking of the sampan and the smell of dried fish that percolated up from the bilges created an almost delirious urgency. Lovemaking with Seerinbai was a clinical affair and their bodies seemed hardly to touch except where necessity demanded. Bahram was utterly unprepared for the sweat, the stickiness, the slippages and mistaken

gropings, the sudden fart that burst from her when he least expected it(Ghosh, River of Smoke, 2011) Bahram himself admits that, “Never before had he taken so much comfort in being touched. Ghosh’s novel provided a place for the commonplace grotesque experiences of life. The description of Bahram’s first meeting with his child, Ah Fatt at Macau and its localization merge into one and the same thing; the shortcomings of the latter are thus masked by full adherence to the former. Bahram thus describes his first meeting with Ah Fatt :

And there was the baby, swaddled so as to leave the genitals proudly exposed: when she put the child in his arms he had hugged him so tight that a warm jet had shot out of the boy’s tiny gu-gu, wetting his face and dripping off his beard(Ghosh, River of Smoke, 2011)

Nevertheless, confusion can be a source of enrichment. Exiled from History-whether it is tradition or fashion-grotesques are thrust into the timeless regions of Transnational existence. However, clear-cut their contours, they fade out and become less distinct, announcing a metaphorical shift. Fantasy, liberty, and deliberate attacks on order and reason are played up; however, these easily invert themselves and become their opposites: violent denunciations of anything threatening the established order. The character of littleRajkumar has the full capacity to astonish the readers with explicit revelation ofhis voyeur fantasy. He was given shelter by Ma Chao, an elderly Burmese woman, owner of a roadside small stall restaurant. He was growing up under Ma Chow’s guidance and observation. She taught him how to serve food and to interact with the customers. She is also forgiving when Rajkumar committed any mistake. So, the relationship which Rajkumar shared with Ma Chao can hardly be described through middle class ethos. Ma Chao has provided Rajkumar with sustenance and shelter and apparently, the reader can draw a parental nexus existing between them. But the way of Ghosh’s presentation of the voyeur embodies both a promise of freedom and threatening clouds, foreshadowing chaos:

Rajkumar’s nights were spent under Ma Chao’s dwelling, between the stilts, in the space that served to sit customers during the day. Ma Chao’s floor was roughly put together, from planks of wood that didn’t quite fit. Well Ma Chao lit her lamp to change her clothes; Rajkumar could see her

clearly through the cracks in the floor. Lying on his back, with his fingers knotted behind his head, he would look up unblinking as she untied the aingyi that was knotted loosely round her breasts...She would cup her breasts and air them, fanning herself with her hands; she would run her fingers slowly through the cleft of her chest, past the pout of her belly, down to her legs and thighs. Watching her from below Rajkumar's hand would sneak slowly would snake slowly pass the knot of his longyi, down to his groin.

The very structure of grotesque calls attention to itself as ornaments they are both too noticeable and too expressive. They upset the organization of a figurative system and the hierarchy on which it is based.

The concept of ideal middle class housewife was almost always tied to the older patriarchal imagination of the mythical divine figure of the goddess *Lakshmi*. *Lakshmi*, has long been upheld in *puranic* Hinduism as the model Hindu wife, united in complete harmony with her husband in a spirit that combined submission with loyalty, devotion and fidelity. Her auspicious nature and her reputation for granting fertility, luck, wealth and well-being seem to attract devotees in every Indian village. *Lakshmi*, however, has a reverse side, *Alakshmi*, her dark and malevolent other. The innately heterogeneous *Puranic* literature ascribes the origins of this malicious mythical woman to diverse sources. However she originated, *Alakshmi* came to embody a gendered conception of inauspiciousness and the opposite of all that the Hindu law-givers upheld as the *dharma* of the householder. When she entered a household, she brought jealousy and malice in her trail, brothers fell out with one another, families and their lineages faced ruin and destruction, the highest misfortune that Hindu patriarchal minds could ever imagine. *Lakshmi* and *Alakshmi* were mutually exclusive categories. A house where the spirit of *Alakshmi* prevailed was said to be unbearable for *Lakshmi*, who always left such a household and bestowed her favours on others who, and in particular whose women, did not flout the rules and rituals that made them auspicious. What kind of women would be termed *Laxhmi* or *Alakshmi*'s in our new transnational domesticity? Perhaps they have merged into one or may have both perished. I see the birth of the transnational woman as a special feature with the

breakdown of middle class orthodoxy. Economic recovery, and then growth, allowed women to embrace new freedoms in both private and public spaces. For the first time, women were able to engage in the social sphere in new, much less restricted ways. They speak for themselves and also for the marginalized. Uma is at first shattered and repelled by the near slave-like treatment inflicted upon the coolie by the *sirdar* of Matthew when she first visits Morningside Estate:

Mr. Trimble kept attentive watch as the conductors took attendance. His manner varied between that of a strict headmaster and a snappish sergeant. Occasionally he would dart into the ranks with his rattan cane tucked under his arm. For some of the tappers he had a smile and a quick word of encouragement; with others he made a great show of losing his temper, gesticulating and pouring out obscenities in Tamil and English, singling out the object of his wrath with the tip of his pointing cane: 'You dog of a Coolie, keep your black face up and look at me when I'm talking to you . . . (Chitra , 2012)

Uma's was outraged at the treatment of the coolies and Dolly's big-hearted understanding of Rajkumar's secret life, which lead her to secure Illongo's future, bring us closer to the real experiences of the coolie lines. As the two experiences of the population meet: the elite and the subaltern, the realization of the unity and subsequent dispossession of the nation and the self-destructs us. Uma was concerned with restoring voice and agency to those classes of non-elite subaltern—peasants, industrial workers and so forth, acting assertively, even if unsuccessfully, on behalf of liberating them from the social, political and ideological snares of colonialism. The new Transnational middle class ethos enables the characters to express their free will to choose their husband, even they are not hesitating to speak about their premarital pregnancy to the world.

Amitav Ghosh contradicts the representation of the middle-class world as a collection of "countries," as in most world maps, sees it as an inherently fragmented space, divided by different colors into diverse national societies, each "rooted" in its proper place. He challenges the taken for granted theory that each country embodies its own distinctive culture and society that the terms "society" and "culture" are routinely simply appended to the names of nation-states, as when a tourist

visits India to understand "Indian culture" and "Indian society," or Thailand to experience "Thai culture," or the United States to get a whiff of "American culture."

The geographical territories that cultures and societies are believed to map onto do not have to be nations. The transnational middle class provides us with ideas about culture-areas that overlap several nation-states, or of multicultural nations. The transnational space never becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed.

Ghosh evokes an important question of transnationality: to which places do the hybrid middle class culture of transnationality belong? Does the multinational encounter create new middle class culture by destabilizing the notion that nations and cultures are isomorphic? as discussed above in my paper, transnationality further problematizes the relationship between space and culture. Ruptured landscape of independent nations and autonomous cultures raises the question of understanding social change and cultural transformation as situated within interconnected spaces. The middleclass notions of locality or community refer both to a demarcated physical space and to clusters of interaction, we can see that identity of place emerges by the interaction of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultured construction as a community or locality(Akhil Gupta, 1992).

Ghosh's transnational middle class has been mobile and identities less fixed than the static and typologizing approaches of classical anthropology would suggest. Today the rapidly expanding and quickening mobility of the middle class combines with the refusal of cultural products and practices to give a profound sense of a loss of territorial roots, of an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of places and of ferment in anthropological theory. In the world of diaspora, transnational cultural flows and mass movement of populations, old-fashioned attempts to map the globe as a set of culture regions or homelands are bewildered by a dazzling array of postcolonial simulacra, doublings and redoublings.

REFERENCES

- River of Smoke*. (2011). Noida: Penguin Books India.
- Akhil Gupta, J. F. (1992). Beyond "Culture" : Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference. *Cultural Anthropology*, 6-23.
- Chakrabarti, D. (2010). D.P. Mukerji and the Middle Class in India. *Sociological Bulletin*, 59(2), 235-255.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2010). D.P. Mukherjee and The Middle Class in India. *Sociological Bulletin*, 235-255.
- Chitra , S. (2012). *History, Narrative, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction*. New York: State University Of New York Press.
- D.P.Mukherjee. (1948). *Modern Indian culture: A sociological study*. Bombay: Hind Kitabs.
- Ghosh, A. (1988). *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher.
- Ghosh, A. (1988). *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers.
- Ghosh, A. (1988). *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers.
- Ghosh, A. (1988). *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers.
- Ghosh, A. (1988). *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers.
- Ghosh, A. (1988). *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers.
- Ghosh, A. (1988). *The Shhadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers.
- Ghosh, A. (2000). *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins.
- Ghosh, A. (2000). *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins.
- Ghosh, A. (2011). *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Ghosh, A. (2011). *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Ghosh, A. (2011). *River of Smoke*. Noida: Penguin Books India.
- Ghosh, A. (2011). *River of Smoke*. Noida: Penguin Books India.
- Sircar, A. (1991). Individualizing History : 'The Real Self' in The Shadow Lines. *Social Scientist*, 33-46.