Chapter 1

An Overview of National Longings and a Search for Identity among Expatriates in *The Shadow Lines, In an Antique Land* and *The Namesake*

" . . . it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn
of strangers upon whom they see rich clothing, the brocades of continuity
and the eyebrows of belonging" (Rushdie, *Shame 64*).

As a continuum of post-colonialism, migratory tendencies gain momentum and
its impact is felt mostly in the countries of the third world. Issues regarding people who
travel across continents and cultures are major realms in the present society. Being in
the liminal space prompts expatriate writers to delineate their experiences to the world
and it is an outcry of their inner urge to be in a comfort zone, most probably their
ancestral land. Apart from the interest of expatriate writer in hybridity and migration,
the thesis focuses on the pangs of alienation and hybridity that degenerate them to
remain in liminal space. **Amitav Ghosh** with his vivid experiences in the four
continents delves deep into the problems like cultural displacement, chaos due to
partition and the desperate efforts of expatriates to find an identity.

Migration is a historical process and it has been around for a long time. The
study of transnational migration and religion provides an empirical window into ways
of being and belonging that cannot be encompassed by a nation state. Expatriation
studies prove that ethnic bonds are primordial, recurrent and sometimes inexplicable.
The ethnic bonds are constructed from social or political projects and are developed
over time through socialization as well as through myths and narratives passed on from

generation to generation. These myths act as the backbone of every ethnic group. These ethnies share symbols and myths of origin which hold them together. Most ethnies have a strong attachment to territory, but some have attachment to an "idea" rather than a piece of land per se. It is clear that most expatriate members have difficulties in assimilating into the host country because they see their current location as little more than a temporary home. Many expatriates disperse from an original centre to at least two peripheral places. They maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland. However much they are attached to their country, there remain an inner urge, a longing to return to the ancestral home. They are really conscious of their commitment to the maintenance and restoration of the homeland.

Ethnicity is a cultural concept centred on the sharing of norms, values, beliefs, cultural symbols and practices. The formation of 'ethnic groups' relies on shared cultural signifiers which have developed under specific historical, social and political contexts and which encourage a sense of belonging based, at least in part, on a common mythological ancestry. Ethnic groups are not based on primordial ties or universal cultural characteristics possessed by a specific group but are formed through discursive practice.

Ethnicity is best understood as a process of boundary formation constructed and maintained under specific socio-historical conditions (Barth 1969). When ethnicity is not about pre-given cultural differences but a process of boundary formation and maintenance does not mean that such distinctiveness cannot be socially constructed around signifiers which do connote universality, territory and purity, for example metaphor of blood, kinship and homeland.

Ethnicity is constituted through power relation between groups. It signals relations of marginality, of the centre and the periphery, in the context of changing historical forms and circumstances. Here, the centre and the margin are to be grasped through the politics of representation, for as Brah argues: "It is necessary for it to become axiomatic that 'margin' is not marginal at all but is a constitutive effect of the representation itself. The 'centre' is no more a centre than is the 'margin'" (Brah 226).

It has been proved that ethnic expatriate communities are not advocates of transnationalism. Many of them are more interested in nationalist projects that would bring space and identity together in their respective homelands. Whatever the perspectives of globalization are, expatriates still remain as "long distance nationalists" (Mahler 291).

Modern migration stems from improvement in quality and availability to a broader spectrum of people of communication and transport possibilities. When migrants return, many of them become marginalized in their ancestral homelands as ethnic minorities because of their alien culture, a product of their foreign upbringing. Though ethnicity is not the primary motive of ethnic return migrants, nor does it improve their immigrant reception in the ancestral homeland, it remains important in structuring diasporic return migration patterns, homeland governments, immigration, nationality policies, host society perceptions, and the ethno national identity outcomes of the migrants themselves. In fact, the presumed ethnic affinity between migrants and their hosts may actually magnify the ethnic impact of immigration because interaction with a similar ethnic group can have a more profound effect on ethnic consciousness than contact with a completely foreign group whose characteristic have no ethnic relevance. Because both migrants and hosts anticipate that the diasporic return of co-

ethnics will be less problematic than other types of immigration, the mutual ethnic and social alienation that results is all the more disorienting, forcing both migrants and hosts to fundamentally reconsider their ethnic identities. Migration is a complex decision and it does not happen suddenly. The choice to migrate depends upon many factors. It may be the decision of the expatriate or his or her household or community.

When used as an adjective to describe a literary aesthetic, the term transnationalism points to the aesthetic being located in various nations across the globe. The ties between place and identity are fundamental to the lives of individuals and groups. They shape the ways in which the relationships and social networks are created and maintained, how heritage is understood, reconceived and rewritten, how everyday life is anchored by a strong sense of self and how narratives and histories are located in time and space or written as Wendell Berry notes, "in order to know who we are, we must first know where we are" (*Tracing an Indian Diaspora* 14).

Identity implies our thoughts and feelings, our psychic presence, our place of habitation, and even our longings, dreams and desires. The individual identity, like the national identity, is formed through a series of random and frequently bizarre accretions. In the formation of the individual identity, several factors come into play. One is the cumulative offspring of all these diverse and divisive forces. A formative and not an innate product, one's identity is determined by three factors. Firstly, childhood impressions and aspirations play a vital role in deciding it. An individual has to break off most of his reliance on his parents, and become free enough to leave home and develop ideas and aims of his own which will give him a distinct identity. In the high mobility world of today, no geographical area is capable of staying culturally homogeneous and retaining its identity intact. Total cultural alienation from the

neighboring countries is practically impossible. Cross-cultural contact is bound to occur, either at the conscious or at the unconscious level. Identity is the projection of the self. Self-image moulds up and transforms self-identity. One's identity is rooted in the culture in which one lives, and hence alienation from the culture leads to the loss of one's socio-cultural identity. The urge to identify with the present stimulates one in the quest for identity, which operates at public and private levels. The individual's alienation from the society is the manifestation of his quest for the assertion of his identity. Things otherwise taken for granted appear bewilderingly paradoxical when we seek a rationale behind them. It is this urge to discover a rationale in the transitivity of the objects around us that leads the alienated self in its quest for identity. Self-identity is self-knowledge. Expatriates lose identity not through personal assessment, rather the society confers it on them. They cannot pinpoint to which culture they belong to. Culture plays a pivotal role in forming identity.

Transnational migrants are defined by an ambiguous mixture of identity references to the region region and the region of destination. The double identities and double loyalties of transnational migrants challenge the traditional nation state's role and understanding. Therefore, it has become a threat to the society. For example, criminals and terrorist groups take full advantage of transnational movements and dual citizenship. It is proven that transnational movements do not cement different social spaces; rather it acts as a corrosive agent in the society. Migrants imbibe culture and practice of their host country that challenge and threaten the fabric of their ancestral nation's traditional way of life. Pieterse argues:

> Relations of power and hegemony are inscribed and reproduced within
>
> hybridity for whatever we look closely enough we find the traces of asymmetry

in culture, place and descent. Hence hybridity raises the question of terms of the mixture, the condition of mixing and mélange. At the same time it is important to note the ways in which hegemony is not merely but refigured in the process of hybridization (Pieterse 57).

The second or further generation expatriates sometimes seem to be non-movers and settle in their host country. These people cannot fully assimilate the opted culture and what they undergo is a segmentary assimilation. They do not become equal citizens. Acculturation strategies refer to the plan or the method that individuals use in responding to stress in new cultural contexts. A four-fold classification is proposed that includes "assimilation", "integration", "separation" and "marginalization". Berry and Sam suggest that the assimilation strategy occurs when the individual decides not to maintain his or her cultural identity by seeking contact in his or her daily interaction with the dominant group. When the individuals from the non-dominant group "place a value on holding on to their original culture and seek no contact with the dominant group, then they are pursuing a separation strategy" (Berry and Sam 297). When individuals express an interest in maintaining strong ties in their everyday life both with their ethnic group and with the dominant group, the integration strategy is defined. The fourth strategy is marginalization, in which individuals "lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society" (Bhatia 215). The optimal acculturation strategy for immigrants is integration, which 'appears to be a consistent predictor of more positive outcomes than the three alternatives' (318). Integration implies both the preservation of, and contact with the home culture, or the 'country of origin' and an active involvement with the host culture, or the 'country of settlement'. Central to the theory of the integration strategy is the assumption of universality (Bhatia 194).

Inspired by Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's writings, concepts such as polyphony, heteroglossia, multivoicedness, and ventriloquation have been fruitfully employed to challenge the Cartesian, autonomic, bounded self to provide an alternative understanding of the self that emphasizes historical situatedness, cultural construction, and social interaction. Interpreting Bakhtin, Wertsch noted that one way in which dialogism comes into being is when one or many utterances of the "speaking subject" comes into contact and "interanimates" the voice of the other. The utterance is an important element of dialogism because of its focus on "addressivity", a concept which requires at least two voices: the author and the addressee, the self and the other (Wertsch 52). For Bakhtin the "other" as an addressee comes in many forms. One can "dialogically" engage with the addressee through the face to face, verbal communication as a participant or as an interlocutor in an ongoing conversation. The addressee, as the "other" can be a professional, specialist, foreigner, native, outsider, opponent, boss, employer, institution, or an "unconcretized" imagined other and so on (Bakhtin 95). When the self and the other and the addressor and the addressee come into contact with each other's voices, the self becomes multivoiced. When Bakhtin uses the term voice, he does not mean "auditory signals" but rather the "speaking personality" or the "speaking consciousness". In this regard, Wertsch noted that the real challenge of studying dialogicality is to spell out exactly how voices come into contact with each other and change each other's meanings (Wertsch 12).

A critical factor concerning migration is security. Leaving one's home in search of work and economic security is not transgressing the norms of the society. But expatriates need security more than an economic outcome. They should not face alienation and ghettozation. Their double consciousness always haunt them which keeps them away from the country of sojourn and many a time from their own ancestral

land as they have been pushed to a liminal status, the moment they accept their hyphenated existence. The asymmetrical relationships and social inequalities of expatriates prove that cartographical shifts push one to liminality which is rather a subaltern state. These asymmetries are rooted in ethnic and religious differences which are obvious in the case of Tha'mma, Jethamoshai in *The Shadow Lines* and the narrator himself in *In an Antique Land.* Amitav Ghosh's journeys through different continents prove that people of different nations greet migrants with skepticism and contempt.

Expatriation signifies a collective trauma, banishment, where one dreams of home but live in exile. Expatriation should not end up in suffocating and hampering ghettoes. Some expatriates keep close interaction with their motherland, others have to be contented with the images retained (Bhatt and Sahoo 144). Expatriates are emblems of transnationalism because they embody the question of borders. Expatriates while seeking assimilation in the host country and culture, relegate their previous cultural baggage to the past, thereby remain 'not belonging' to either countries. Their efforts to be one with the host country, is their desperate endeavour to mend up the rupture or trauma that formed while they are on their way to their land of sojourn. Their nostalgia of ancestral land reawakens expatriate's attachment and loyalty towards their parental culture. Sense of expatriation can occur and recur after several generations. This sense is a feeling that is characterized by shifting periods of latency and activism. Expatriates who return to their homelands are disruptive or traumatic due to the indifference and not welcoming attitude of the homeland politically, ideologically or socially. This makes them come to a feeling that "my home is where I can make a living" (Sahoo 34). Accusations of dual loyalty fears of oppression or discrimination are the main features that prompt expatriates to stay back. The ancestral country and the host country have the challenge regarding expatriates as the partial membership in two polities challenge

core aspects of governance in at least two ways. First, dual belonging calls into question the very notion of governance because it is readily obvious which state is ultimately responsible for which aspect of transnational migrant's lives. Alienated expatriates are estranged from themselves and the society. Social isolation is defined as a breakdown of the system's interaction with its environment: an inhibition of both inputs and outputs. Self-estrangement denotes a lack of internal communication within the system. It is the alienation dimension studied especially by psychiatry and psychoanalysis, where references are made frequently to phenomena like repression, loss of contact with the 'real self', etc. Self-estrangement takes place on a more or less unconscious level, as opposed to the different kinds of normlessness: they sometimes also imply a lack of internal communication, but then on a more conscious level, with the decisional variables.

In *The Shadow Lines,* the nameless narrator is transformed from a gullible youngster spell bound by the stories told to him by his cosmopolitan relatives (like Tridib and Ila) to a mature young man who has come to know much about himself. The unnamed narrator represents those who are onlookers of the lives of expatriates. From the glimpses of lives of expatriates, the narrator discovers his true vocation with the growth in his power of perception; he is a chronicler of the connections between people and places. Ghosh uses the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* as a mouthpiece of his ought to be self.

In *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh depicts how people are tantalized by the wealth of foreign countries and how it affects their lives. Rootedness is the main problem of expatriates and Ghosh successfully portrays the pangs that migration brings to expatriates. Hybridity and finding a new space cannot fill in the gap that makes expatriates mere cusps. Tridib firmly believed that his own people will not do any harm

to him. But once uprooted from his country, ignorance makes him a scapegoat in the riots. The dilemma of Tha'mma to find her true place depicts the helplessness of humanity before the gigantic gyre of cultural divide due to different religious beliefs.

Ghosh brings in the picture of 'transnational impacts' through the lives of a 12th century Tunisian merchant Ben Yiju and that of Nabeel of the 20th century. History is easily interwoven into the narrative frame work in *In an Antique Land* and Ghosh attempts to make a comparative study of Indian and Egyptian, Jewish, Islamic and Hindu cultures. *The Shadow Lines* is set in Calcutta of the 1960s and moves with an easy felicity across Calcutta, Dhakka and London. Time span of the novel is 1939 - 1974 with 1964 being a very important year for the characters.

In an Antique Land is apparently a travelogue, but underneath lies, Ghosh's minute discussion of the problem that his character faces due to migration. The story revolves around the research being conducted by the narrator Ghosh in the field of Social Anthropology. The conglomeration of facts and fiction, and different genres fetches new ambience to the novel. The narration begins in the 12th century and ends in the year 1991 at the commencement of gulf war, popularly known as 'Operation Desert Storm'.

The submissiveness of Bomma, the slave of Abraham Ben Yiju of the 12th century is repeated in Nabeel who subalterns himself for material gain in the 20th century. In both *The Shadow Lines* and *In an Antique Land*, Ghosh focuses on the indistinguishable intertwined lives of the Indian and the Bangladeshi, the Indian and the Egyptian, the Muslim and the Hindu and the Muslin and the Jewish. In these works, Ghosh uses a matrix of multiple points of view in which memory, mythology and history freely interpenetrates. Expatriates are compelled to leave their homelands in

order to explore new avenues of economic success and in the bargain, they invite alienation and hybridity.

Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri or **Jhumpa Lahiri** with her experiences in the three continents, delineates the themes of immigration, collision of cultures, conflict in relationships, crisis of identity , American / Indian, family portraits that unfold to disclose a social vision. As a child, Lahiri felt that she led two separate lives, which negated each other and did not begin to merge for her until well into adulthood. During her family trips to India, Lahiri occupied a unique position as neither tourist nor resident in the vibrant world of Calcutta. Issues of displacement, marginalization, identity crisis (as Gogol gets confused about his very name), and alienation are recurrent themes throughout the novel.

Lahiri has lived with a sense of homelessness and an inability to belong to any of the countries of her migration, and even to India, where her biological roots belong. She explains this as an inheritance of her parents' ties with India:

It's hard to have parents who consider another place 'home' ¨ even after living abroad for 30 years, India is home for them. We were always looking back, so I never felt fully at home here (the United States). There's nobody in this whole country that we're related to. India was different ¨our extended family offered real connections ("Immigrant Motherhood and Transnationality" 4.3 851-861).

Yet her familial ties with India were not strong enough to make India a 'home' for Lahiri; "I did not grow up there, I wasn't part of things. We visited often but we didn't have a home. We were clutching at a world that was never fully with us" (Interview Web). At a press conference in Calcutta in January 2001, Lahiri further described this failure of belonging: "No country is my motherland. I always find myself

in exile whichever country I travel to, that's why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile" (Web). Her whole works reveal her intense desire for holding fast to the convention of the homeland and equally intense pain at the failure to do so due to circumstances. Lahiri points at the extreme unease that globalization has thrown up for the second generation Indian-Americans and she wonders if globalization's reforms would tackle the challenges they give rise to India to them is a country of uncomfortable environment and unfamiliar surroundings.

Lahiri's child characters reveal almost every facet of their upbringing in the transnational cross cultural space;their acculturation, borderland inhabitation, formation of hybridized reality and, most significantly, creation of a new amalgamated culture. This new culture is one of the many cultures developing in the US. The ancestral rites incorporated in the American life are the result of their continuous experimentation, selection and rejection, adoption and discarding of their parents' habits.

Being herself an immigrant, she feels the significance of family and how it ties man to his homeland. In the words of Lahiri herself, "I went to Calcutta from Rhode Island, I belonged there in some fundamental way, in the ways I didn't seem to belong in the United States" ("*The Namesake*: A Mosaic of Marginality, Alienation, Nostalgia and Beyond" 121). As an expatriate writer, she deals with multi-cultural society partly from inside and partly from outside. She strives for her native identity and simultaneously endeavours to evolve a new identity in an adopted Anglo American cultural landscape. However, in this clash of cultures, she faces an immigrant's dislocation and displacement. She regards dislocation as a permanent condition of human existence. Hence her sense of belonging to a particular place and culture and at the same time being an 'outsider' to it creates an inner tension in her characters.

Lahiri remains a detached observer of the daily events in the lives of her fictional characters. She is a dispassionate chronicler of the lives in a global society, and delineates the mental void and ruptures in human relationships. She believes in existentialism and gives prime importance to the actual being of the individual and not to 'essence'. She writes about 'human predicament' and the crisis of identity in the alienated land of America though she made it her homeland. Marginality, alienation and nostalgia are the three chief features in her writings. In spite of this, she shares significant resemblances with the native literature enriched by historical connections, spiritual affinities and racial reminiscences. She writes with a sensibility about her family's ethnic heritage and the lives of South Asian immigrants in the United States.

It is to challenge the Cartesian, autonomic, bounded self that Mikhail Bakthin employs concepts such as polyphony, heteroglossia, multivoicedness and ventriloquation. Bakthin is of the view that dialogism comes into being when one or many utterances of the "speaking subject" comes into contact and "interanimates" the voices of the other. The utterance is an important element of dialogism because of its focus on "addressivity", a concept which requires atleast two voices: the author and the addressee, the self and the other (Wertsch 52). For Bakthin, the "other" as an addressee, comes in many forms. The addressee can dialogically engage with a person through a face to face verbal communication as a participant or as an interlocutor in an ongoing conversation. When the self and the other and the addressor and the addressee come into contact with each other's voices, the self becomes multivoiced. By 'voice', Bakthin mean: "auditory signals", but rather the "speaking personality" or the "speaking consciousness". The real challenge of study dialogicality is to spell out exactly how voices come into contact with each other and change each other's meaning (Wertsch 12).