Frames of Remembrance: Dynamics of Transnational History in Amitav Ghosh and Kunal Basu's Writings

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George Orwells Observation by now is a cliché, that the present controls the past has long been a central theme in the memory literature. Most conceptual assertion and empirical apprehension revolves round this kind of instrumentalist approach to memory. According to this theoretical approach the present socio-political interest and the dominant power structure of the nation-state project its ideological or rhetorical constructs onto the past.

Challenging the state-centric development of history, Amitav Ghosh and Kunal Basu draws on Michel Foucault's notion of counter-memory, paying attention to subnational entities like the socio culturally marginalized, economically diversified and specially fragmented subaltern groups with counter memory agendas. This conceptual orientation essentially considers political expediencies in the present as leading to the invention or construction of the past. For me the metanarratives of the future is not a matter of clinging to the past but primarily a response to the recent configuration of the nation state. The memory boom of the late twentieth century coincides with the various effects of Globalization & Transnationalism. The decline of nationhood as an overarching principle is mainly responsible for the 'fragmentation and pluralization of memory cultures' (Levy and Sznaider 657). The state itself misled the memory process and the historically situated understanding that interprets the intimate bond between the past, present and future. In Ghosh and Basu's memory literature, future goes hand in hand with the past. As Alasdair MacIntyre puts it "an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present. Living traditions, just because they continue a not yet – completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so as it possesses any, derives from the past" (MacIntyre 35). Here memory and its paraphernalia is not an impediment for the future but act as bridge over the present. A shared sense of past which is Transnational by nature becomes a meaning making repository framing the future aspirations. In this historical context of temporalities Reinhart Reinhart Koselleck in his book *Futures Past : On the Semantics of Historical Times*, points out that the present is situated

between past experiences which is 'present past', whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered and a horizon of expectations which refers to the future made present, points to that which has not been experienced or to that which can only be discovered. For Ghosh and Basu these 'past futures' becomes an issue of empirical investigation. In his framework of understanding the past which needs to be remembered have political principles in its core, which emanates the value for the future generations. Thus their memory literature becomes an empowering resource for a wide variety of Transnational groups.

The beginning of the twenty first century pioneered the Transnational fundamental transformations challenging some of the paradigmatic national assumptions and the underlining homology of history, memory and nationhood that have long underpinned sociology as a discipline and the study of memory. In this connection I have got influenced by Beck and Sznaider's idea on 'methodological nationalism' (Beck and Sznaider 23), which is bound by the remains of nationalism and nation-state encompasses the scholarly approach to collective memory, since the official memory discourse or the historical narratives and the unofficial, public memory remain within the container of nation-state. Ghosh and Basu can be read as a critique of methodological nationalism in the context of Transnational research. For Brown , Sodaro and Gutman, their writings hints on the idea that formation of a Transnation has arrived demanding a reflexive interrogation of the validity of a historically specific and thus contingent national figuration which has been instilled in the sociological imagination by the classical cannon. Indeed history contains the variations of the past and generates past in the context of new epistemological context. An analytical perspective must be formed that can elope from the national caging as well as grasp the emergence of alternative ontological models that is very reflexive towards the cultural parameters. It may also transcend the national caging of global memory paving the way for Transnationalism.

"What happens to the centrality of national memory when peripheral or marginal pasts penetrate into the center and discontinuities command legitimate attention?" (Brown, Sodaro and Gutman 66) - With the advent of twentieth century the territorial concepts of national culture has experienced an epistemic shift. The idea of culture as 'rooted' faced a critical questioning. Sociology understood the new symbols, common values, transmitted primarily through the consolidation of cultural memories by establishing links to foundational pasts as means of integration into new Transnationality. This perspective is triumphant in the way that nation-state has obtained the status of a natural entity rather than being a construct.

Transnational remembrance averts away from the territorialized nation state configuration which is frequently analogous with the perception of collective memory. Instead of presupposing the integrity of nation, territory and polity, the transnational memory is based on the transcending idioms eclipse territorial and linguistic frontier. The national is slowly being dissipated but that doesn't entail a total obliteration of it, but transformation. They sustained to survive with collective memories being embellished with familiar rhythms amalgamated with pre-existing constituent to form something new.

The huge transformation of memory cultures has given birth to fragmentation of memory making it a private entity rather than a national one. It has also led to the formation of memory history. The conventional historical narratives are generally instructive in nature. It speaks of particular temporal sequences, articulating the nature and form of national development, whereas memory rejoices the presence of multiple pasts. Memory dissolves the structure and sequence of organized history. Thus memory history moves away from the state supported versions of the past and poses a big question in front of national history. The endeavor to monopolize history has craved fragmented history out of it by implementation of individual, scientific, ethnic, and religious agents. Though the state continues to impose its own versions of history but now they have to share the field of meaning production with the non-state actors.

> "Works of literature signify history indirectly via the ways in which they signify the ideologies which mediate their relations to history" (Egleton 95).
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> - Terry Eagleton

While observing the forms of history and fiction, one may discover a similitude between them. L. B. Cebik in his book, *Functional Narrative and Truth* has rightfully observed that "extensive probing into historical narrative led to the conclusion that the features of narrative that were epistemically fundamental to that form of discourse were common to both its historical and fictional instances" (Davis 213). More than any other genre of literature, the novel possesses a clear link with the form of historical narrative. The eighteenth century English novel was replete with history, since it contained a large portion of social, political and cultural events within its fictional frame. Henry Fielding captioned his novels as the histories of their protagonists. For a historical novelist 'realism' is the central element of technique. The Twentieth century novels maintained these traditions thereby continued making history problematic. A postmodernist novelist looks beyond realism and also brings to focus the elements of fantasy, surrealism,

magic realism, grotesque, allegory, anachronism, and so on. Thus we may say that the new novelist dismantles the orthodox framework of both historical novel and historiography. Like novelists, critics too initiated questioning history while talking about its association with narrative. They soon discovered that narrativity is not only limited to novels, but also it is a major component of history as well. In the view of many structuralists and poststructuralists, history is nothing but the stories people narrate about their past. Such a view became common in the fictional practice of revisionist novelists. Thus it becomes a presupposition that plot paves a way for the idea of history. Naturally, then we are struck with a question about the nature of history. However it is E.H. Carr, who accurately defines history as: "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past"(E. H. Carr 50). There is an amalgamation of two affairs - the actual happenings of the past and their restoration by the historian. The task of the historian is to narrate, fictionalize & interpret the historical facts and this systematic delineation of the written past becomes historiography. The narrative becomes the sole important element for describing the past. Commenting on the aim of history, historian Carr remarked: "To enable man to understand the society of the past, and to increase his mastery over the present is the dual function of history" (E. H. Carr 55).

Like history, the novel is also concerned with the narrative of the past. Not all of but those novels that are engaged with the retelling of the past in fictional terms. Thus in the fictional re-writing of history, the characters and plot interweave with the actual historical actions and activities. A novelist has a definite vision of history which he projects in the fictional form of expression. So each novelist has a divergent and well-defined perception and representation of the past. In Shashi Tharoor's most celebrated novel, *The Great Indian Novel*, he remarks remarks: "For every tale that I have told you, every perception I have conveyed there are a hundred equally valid alternatives. This is my story of the India I know with its biases, selections, omissions, distortions all mine" (Tharur 114). Likewise, Milan Kundera in his book *The Art of the Novel* also illumines important differences between the role of the historian and that of a novelist: A historian tells you about events that have taken place. A novel examines not reality but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is a realm of human possibilities, Novelists draw up the map of existence by discovering this or that human possibility. If a writer considers a historical situation a fresh and revealing possibility of human world, he will want to describe it as it is. Still fidelity to historical reality is a secondary matter as

regards the value of the novel. For Kundera "the novelist is neither historian nor prophet: he is an explorer of existence" (Kundera 76). A novelist's function, however, of re-writing the historical content issues from his understanding that what an official historian offers is never adequate for knowing the past. He therefore embraces the imaginary but human dimension of history. Furthermore, different writers of fiction have their own purpose of re-telling history. No two novelists have therefore a similar version, though they may have employed the similar method or mode. This happens due to their aim of revisioning history with their own distinct purpose. Jonathan Culler, a renowned structuralist critic was preoccupied by the difficulty of differentiating narrative discourse from the story. Though, both non-fictional and fictional narratives give supremacy to story over discourse. He, therefore, concludes:

> The founding narratives are powerful and effective and that is all that counts, but it seems important also to preserve a critical awareness of the way in which groups, as a way of constructing an identity, produce fantasies of a lurid past, and ask what sort of signifying purposes or demands determine these stories. Another strategy is to construct a different story, a competing narrative of origins that would produce a different identity (Culler, Making History : The Power of Narrative 5).

Such revisionist historical narrative is most blatantly epitomized in the works of Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Qurrutulain Hyder and Kunal Basu. The present research aims at examining novels of Kunal Basu and Amitav Ghosh within the paradigms of contemporary theory, focus being laid on the nature of the narrative - both in history and fiction. It has been attempted to examine how the content of a historical text is decided by the method in which it has been furnished. In their attempts at telling or narrating historical facts, both history and fiction are governed and controlled by narrative laws. Examined thus, historical data become subordinated to the question/quest of narrative. It has been attempted to cogently argue how different authors look at history and use it in their fictional texts and by what modes and methods they re-tell history.

The motto of these postmodern, Transnational fictional narrative is to unwrap the power structures acting behind the mainstream truth and uncover its mobile army. Exercising its power and authority, the official version of history suppresses the plural voices that try to make themselves heard. The Transnationalist, revisionist historian strives to restore the

suppressed voices that are subaltern, marginalized and minorities, thereby imparting them a legitimate narrative space.

In order to understand an ongoing process of history, Amitav Ghosh and Kunal Basu endeavours to reassess its troubled antecedents and thereby come to terms with troubling present. In his findings, however, they realize the Transnational nature of all history which indicates that diaspora cultures are not only oriented towards lost origins or homelands, but that they are also produced by ongoing histories of migrations and transnational cultural flows. In the words of Robert Dixon, by historicizing such a diasporic space in its multiplicity and heterogeneousness, Ghosh & Basu clearly points out that similarity and difference simultaneously co-exist in any given history of diaspora. In Indian context, Ghosh & Basu explores such a "Transnational trajectory of history that at once dismantles and demythifies the rigid notion of nation and its boundary and re-narrates and re invents the smooth and uninterrupted flow of intermixed culture of diaspora that make up the relations between cultures" (Dixon 12)

Ghosh and Basu revisions history using disparate fashions, viz., historical reconstruction, magic realism and the narrative of third space. They also involve the narratives of personal history, memoirs and recollections which return to homeland. Underlying this historical concern they seek to frame a transnational identity, for defining different selves and locating sites of resistance. The novelists strive to fill gaps in metahistory by narrating alternate revisionist stories suppressed or elided by nationalism's dominant discourse. G. J. V. Prasad in his book, *Re-writing the World: The Circle of Reason as the Beginning of the Quest,* appreciates Ghosh as a cosmopolitan writer who creates a pluralistic and self-reflexive understanding of the world that challenges the smugness of accepted narratives. At times Ghosh & Basu also makes uses fantasy elements to provide propulsion to his narrative energy exclusive of Rushdie. Finally, in their own distinctive way, Ghosh & Basu devises the mode of the third space by going away from the moorings of homeland and the land of adoption. Doubtless, Rushdie's innovation, resourcefulness and fearlessness in re-visioning of history became a liberating force for a large group of Indian writers living at home or abroad. Many of those writers like Shashi Tharoor, Mukul Kesavan, Upamanyu Chatteerjee including Ghosh & Basu are known as "Rushdie's children", but over the years some different sect of writers with distinctive voices have emerged who possess only a indistinct family resemblance with Rushdie. Ghosh & Basu must be considered as one of these writers who have chronologically followed Rushdie in the history of the Indian novel in English. Despite a few occasional touches of Rushdie,

they have evolved accomplishing their desired aim in forming a distinctive voice of their own.

The Circle of Reason (1986), Ghosh's first novel tracks the fortunes of a juvenile weaver, Alu, who is brought up in rural Bengal and after a false accusation of being a terrorist; he escapes to a fictional Gulf state and later to Algeria. The novel weaves a Transnational trope transcending the national origins and uniting worlds that have habitually been viewed as discrete; and in this process it foresees Ghosh's subsequent argument in *In an Antique Land* that the medieval trade-routes acted like a motile Transnational network that was largely unaware of Western Oriental/ Occidental fornications. Like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Ghosh's *Circle of Reason* portrays collective realism embedded in fantasy. Thus *The Circle of Reason* travels through various portrayal modes and steers the trade-routes that fills up the gap between disparate countries and cultures. Such fluidity in the novel challenges notions of mainstream nationhood and other forms of identity. While it dramatizes a range of cultural conflicts but finally it calls for a humanist creed, which disrupts the range of stereotypes & binaries like- tradition and modernity, nature and technology, East and West in a manner that foretell the orientation of Ghosh's later work.

The Shadow Lines (1988) Ghosh's second novel, focuses on a very particular microcosmic history - experience that circulates round a single family - as a microcosm for a broader national and international experience. Critic Vinita Chandra observes *The Shadow Lines* with the eye of a revisionist historian and holds the view that Amitav Ghosh accentuates the 'minor riots' within the Indian subcontinent whose canceled memories form the foundations of the accepted historiography in the implicit consensus of historiographers to leave them unveiled. Neelam Srivastava also affirms that in his writing Ghosh "...is at pains to foreground the cultural syncretism of the Indian subcontinent in strategic opposition to the historicism of nationalistic discourse" (Jain, Structure As Symbol: Sahgal's Plans for Departure : A Mistaken Identity 79). The Bengal Partition and the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 leading to the creation of Bangladesh peremptorily changed the unnamed narrator's family life. The title "Shadow lines" signifies the borders and boundaries that split up people and Ghosh's novel focuses on the arbitrariness of cartographical demarcations. Towards the end, when members of the family are about to undertake a journey from Calcutta to their former home in Dhaka, the narrator's grandmother wants to know whether she will "be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane" (Ghosh, The Shadow Lines 167), a guileless rejoinder which unquestionably foregrounds the conceptual

absurdity of the political map makers. Meenakshi Mukherjee explains that in the novel personal memory and official metanarratives of freedom and nationalism are often fused together. She also proposes that Ghosh has incorporated maps and mirrors to understand the real nature of space and time in politicizing history:

> Just as cartography is the science of codifying space; history is the discipline of narrativising time. The public chronicles of nations are interrogated by highlighting the reality of the fictions people create around their lives...and, by recording the verifiable and graphic details of individual memories that do not necessarily tally with the received versions of history (Mukherjee 134).

In other words, she holds the view that the novel "…obviously questions the idea of nationhood that is consolidated through the baptism of wars or coercive state apparatus" (Mukherjee 134).

The narrator's family travelled to Dhaka, to save an aged relative who was struck amidst communal violence, but this rescue endeavor has taken Tridib's life. He was hacked to death by a rioting mob at Dhaka exposing the deadly effects of borders. Although he concedes that the political map-makers were well-intentioned, he is struck by the fact that the bonds that link Dhaka and Calcutta are closer than ever: "each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free - our looking - glass border" (Ghosh, The Shadow Lines 167). These semi-darkened contours however have deeper connotations, more than just being political demarcations , they also separates present and past, self and image, nation and Transnation. They are the signifiers of discrete identity imposed by the governments. It's a torment for the author to portray permeability/porousness of topographical borders and the artificial creation of cultural binaries hovering over human sub- consciousness.

This Transnational characteristic is overtly explained in his next novel, *In an Antique Land* (1992). The novels transcultural world of medieval Indo-Arabic trade, *In An Antique Land* challenges the stereotypical conceptions of 'purity' or political enclosure. In other words, Ghosh is absorbed with the plural universe of cultural multiplicity and alternate versions of fragmented history. The use of family connections and personal letters makes the sense of history intensely personal in the novel. The domestic oeuvre keeps a deliberate distance from the grand historical narratives. It is a natural space, where people interacts freely and make their own connections. The novel speaks about the Jews, Muslims, Hindus and

finds a way for their inter-relationships. The narrator of the novel is a Transnational historian who traverses diverse cultures and negotiates the Transnational space in various societies. He tries to interpret the present through a subtle comprehension of the past, proposing not to accept truth as fundamental since they are multifarious and variable, depending on perspectives and locations. Ghosh's narrator, therefore, sees history as the trajectory of events that causes dislocations, disjunctions, movements and migrations, eventually replacing solid markers with shadow lines, destabilizing one's notions of the past in the reverberations of the present. Instead of conflicting with other cultures, the narrator accepts the difference wholeheartedly. M.K.Naik the renowned historian observes that *In an Antique Land* "... demonstrates how history can be enriched by imaginative reconstruction of the past" (M.K. Naik 205). The novel narrates the connections between Egypt and India the way in which as *The Circle of Reason* tells us stories about the sub-continent, the Middle East and North Africa and The Shadow Lines talks about the unnaturalness of political borders that ruptures peoples, places and spaces.

Like the fictional character Ishmael in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Amitav Ghosh is attracted towards the oceans. And - like the crew of Captain Ahab's Pequod, a motley crew set sail in the Ibis thereby charting the histories of the crew and human cargo of this floating ark. The story sets sail on the metaphorical sea of opium, four hundred miles inside India, in Northern Bihar where 'for mile after mile, from Benares onwards, the Ganga seems like glowing between twin glaciers, both its banks being blanketed by thick drifts of white-petalled flowers ... as if the snows of the high Himalayas had descended on the plains to await the arrival of Holi" (Roy, Sea of Poppies : Amitav Ghosh). Already the reader is conscious of the structure and the agenda of the novel:

It is March 1838, a peasant woman named Deeti, is worried about the lateness of her crop. Like the others of her village, she has been forced to cultivate poppies to feed the ever-hungry opium trade that stretches from England in the west to Malaysia and China in the east. This forms a supply chain with enslavement at both ends. Unable to grow their own food, poppy farmers such as Deeti are bound by the harsh economics of cash cropping and indentured labour. And the final consumers are enslaved by their addiction to the drug.

In *The Glass Palace* it was Burmese teak extractions which constructed the railroad networks that amalgamated British India and framed the oeuvre of the novel. Here, in this novel it is the trade of poppy: 'In the

good old days people used to say there were only two things to be exported from Calcutta: thugs and drugs - or opium and coolies as some would have it' (Ghosh, Sea Of Poppies 5). Ghosh is totally comfortable in describing the 'coal face' of economic activity. The section of *The Glass Palace* that describes teak logging in the Burmese jungle, and the passage where Deeti intrudes inside of the opium factory cannot be forgotten easily. Ghosh's humanitarian politics propels him to concentrate not on the grand narratives of trade and empire, but also on the common people who comprised its base. The mixing room of the opium factory was grotesque from every angle and is vivid as a 'Hieronymus Bosch painting' (Roy, Anita Roy):

> No sooner had Deeti steadied herself, than her eyes were met by a startling sight - a host of dark, legless torsos was circling around and around, like some enslaved tribe of demons .When her eyes had grown more accustomed to the gloom, she discovered the secret of those circling torsos: they were bare-bodied men, sunk waist-deep in tanks of opium, tramping round and round to soften the sludge. Their eyes were vacant, glazed, and yet somehow they managed to keep moving, as slow as ants in honey, tramping, treading. When they could move no more, they sat on the edges of the tanks. These seated men had more the look of ghouls than any living thing she had ever seen: their eyes glowed red in the dark and they appeared completely naked, their loincloths. So steeped in the drug as to be indistinguishable from their skin. Almost as frightening were the white overseers who were patrolling the walkways - for not only were they coatless and hatless, with their sleeves rolled, but they were also armed with fearsome instruments: metal scoops, glass ladles and long-handled rake (Roy, Anita Roy).

Ghosh is neither a mediocre and disdained writer nor does he poses a simple sense of narrative form. Like his other works *The Ibis Trilogy* is about remolding the geographies by disrupting the markers of borders that have willy-nilly carved up the subcontinent. In *The Glass Palace* Ghosh revisited and connected the history of Burma to larger South Asian histories; in *The Hungry Tide* he revisited the role of the Sundarban archipelago and the 'maw of the tides' in sub continental history of modernity and urbanism. In *The Ibis Trilogy*, he assembles India, China, Britain, and North America together in the port of Calcutta and on the deck of the *Ibis*, a cargo ship travelling to Mauritius. This is the vibrant, polyglot, transnational world of Bengal Presidency that we scarcely see in contemporary historical scholarship.

Such incessant whirlpool— of language, identity, color, class, and religion— can only be visible in transnational histories. What I really admire about Ghosh's writings is that it represents Transnatioanl histories. The rambling description we thoroughly follow in *The Ibis Trilogy* crisscross distances small and large- throwing all kinds of people together. Deeti, Zachary, Bahram Modi, Rajkumar, Ah Fatt, Serang Ali—in these are fictional characters that historians posits their utmost interest. The lesser know stories of Transnational connection are very difficult to get as because of the scarcity of documentation, and especially the lack of those that permit us some access to the inner lives of coolies, ship hands, and the like. To be sure, historians have not given up in the face of such challenges. Jennifer Morgan tries to imagine what it might have been like for West African women captured by slavers and taken to Barbados and South Carolina in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Marcus Rediker has spent his life as a professional historian chasing the stories of commoners in the hidden history of the Revolutionary Atlantic. And Verene A. Shepherd's meticulous reconstruction of indentured Indians in a different kind of middle passage, from India to the Caribbean, alongside trial transcripts of the shipboard rape of a woman passenger—thus offers a micronarrative against the facts of law and history.

Ghosh's novels share the impulse of all these storytellers, which tries to capture poetics of transnational history, suggesting both the legitimacy and the urgency of relying on verse and fragments of evidence in order to "bring a historical moment to life, even sear it into memory.

Like Amitav Ghosh, Kunal Basu is also obsessed with history and it is well reflected in his writings. In an interview with Asha Chowdary of Times of India, Basu says that he is primarily driven by stories. When I think of one that's exciting to me, I go about researching it and bring it to life. It isn't a particular historical period or a set of themes that draws him into his writing, but the demands of a tale that keeps him awake at night. Basu is not timid about his intention to explore the heinous trade of opium. The Opium Clerk starts off with a quick tempo, where the hero, Hiranyagarbha Chakraborty is born amidst the turmoil of the Mutiny that builds him fatherless. The young boy progresses with a Bengali aesthete being educated a mission-school that enables him to mingle into babudom, as a clerk in an auction house, dealing with the opium, though popularly referred as mud. The auction house in Calcutta enables Basu to discover the complete ramifications of the opium merchandizing-through the visions of Hiran. It's a Dickensian realm occupied with Bengali characters. When Hiran come into sight for the first time before his colleagues at the auction

house, he looked like a David Copperfield in an ill-fitting jacket and serge trousers with a dot of sandalwood paste on his forehead stamped by his distraught mother, stricken by the thought that her delicate child must now become a clerk and not a Brahmin priest, the clerks give him the once over: "From desks piled high with files, the gentoos examined Hiran, polishing eye-glasses as if inspecting a letter from an unknown sender" (Doctor). Hiran tread on the heels of opium route that lay hold of the opium chests through several hindrances like cholera and sea storms, past Malacca, Macao and Hong Kong to Canton, where he understood the ruler's game of underhandedness, villainy and collusion. The novel in a sense makes a greater hold on microcosmic history and concentrates on Hiran and Douglas though sometimes the plot loses focus but ultimately retells and reframes Calcutta of that time.

Basu's another novel, *The Yellow Emperor's Cure* is the story of a Portuguese doctor — who brilliant surgeon, a lady killer, a venturer — According to his friends, he's "rock steady with the scalpel, but a prize idiot when it comes to women". The good doctor immediately leaves the Lisbon fiesta with the news that his beloved father has been stricken by the then-incurable syphilis. He plans travelling to China to find a cure for the "French Disease, Spanish Itch, German Rash or Polish Pox — it was the same old curse Dom Columbus had brought home from Hispaniola along with gold and talking parrots" (K. Basu, The Yellow Emperor's Cure 28). The novel speaks about how disastrous syphilis was during nineteenth century and how the protagonists father was being affected by it. As Antonio's teacher says, "No one even believes in a cure for syphilis anymore. In Naples they've built walls inside hospitals to separate the patients from the proxies, just as in Glasgow where the police have replaced doctors on the wards. In the lands of Calvin they've been left to die as punishment for their sins. The civilized world has simply given up" (K. Basu, The Yellow Emperor's Cure 28). There were numerous deceitful medical practices and experimentations around, but the doctor was up to the real medical diagnosis. The doctor has observed the fact that Chinese sailors seem to be free of syphilis and goes on an ocean voyage to China. Amid the pavilions and plum trees of the Dowager Empress's summer palace, he becomes the pupil of the Empress's private physician, Dr Xu, and his incomprehensible assistant Fumi. In one year, Antonio experiences a culturally peculiar and plural world of invisible royalty, eunuchs, new food and new customs. He learns to overcome his impatience so that he may get the opportunity learn the secrets of the Nei-Ching, the ancient medical canon that teaches a doctor to diagnose a patient simply by listening to the

pulse. He must replace sphygmograph and ophthalmoscope with a reading of the four seasons and the five elements, the twelve channels of the body and its eleven organs. In the process he learns Mandarin, falls in love, and finds himself as a doctor and as a human being. Dr Maria's personal frustrations and achievements are set in the cauldron of the historical Boxer Rebellion, the Transnational cultural movement that rose from the ashes of the Opium Wars. Basu's characters— including a Jesuit priest, merchants, diplomats and spies at the Foreign Legation, a flamboyant manuscript collector, and Dr Maria himself — animate the larger Transnational historical context. Basu creates a whole and absorbing world rich with detail, and peopled with characters that, despite a fair level of suspense, refuse to deliver a reformed and restructured Transnational history.

Basu's *The Miniaturist* frames a new historicist version of the history., where skillfully interweaves his story set in a historical situation- Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, under the rule and reign of Akbar. Basu begins his portrayal of the *Sahensah* from where the historians end their narration. Bihzad was ordered to describe Akbar's exploits, his court activities but instead he cajoles his brush and color to indulge in presenting the secret personal life of the king. Basu's utilization of history is invested in Bihzad's personal 'Akbarnama' – an artist's ability to provide flesh and an bone to the dry official narratives of the emperor's exploits, exercises and explorations. Bihzad is uncomfortable to art that narrates the mainstream official history thus he inscribes the rich, luxurious and grandiose Harem of Akbar with vivacity and minute graphic observations. Voyeuring into the secret chasms of Akbar's Harem is what Basu deliberately indulges in. As a voyeur, the reader delves into the imagined but least discussed harem of Akbar, as Zuleikha (the young foster mother of the protagonist) opens its doors for the readers' admission. She skillfully delineates the picture of Akbar's Harem, the hundred and more begums, their boudoir, the jealousy that ran high amongst them to be the Emperor's favorite, and more: 'A race was on .To become the mother of Akbar's son' (Banerjee 12). The emperor had more than a hundred begums, each a rival to each. They spend all day bathing and perfuming, braiding their hair, dressing up in robes and jewelry – only to be disappointed at night. The first to catch Akbar's eye, when he entered the harem, could be the lucky one. He'd go to her private chamber, spend an evening with songs and stories, but then he might leave with her slave girl! The next morning, the begums would call for the whip; each stroke to the slave's back would lash the emperor Akbar! The whole harem would be suspicious. What if the wretched carried the next emperor, their future guardian, in her wretched belly?' (K. Basu, The Miniaturist 37).

The harem was tremendously guarded making the inmates look like prisoners within its walls. The inmate's fancies were fulfilled within the bounds of the harem regulations, a strategy religiously maintained in order to protect the devoutness of the place. Their needs were fulfilled by female mercenaries for the inmates were denied the freedom to buy things for themselves. This secrecy was maintained since they were not permitted to be exposed to the sight of any other man, but him. Akbar was the master of his harem, and all his wives, concubines and the slave girls were only vassals to his desire. In the confined lonely world of the harem the sole desire of the inmates is to be their master's favorite aiming to draw his attention. Akbar was their god, and their motto was to serve him in the best of their abilities.

Glossing over the pages of the microcosmic personal history, the reader may gather idea about the history of harem and the eunuchs during the regime of Akbar. Referring to the plentiful and abounding harem of Akbar, Bamber Gascoigne observed:

> The screens of purity were already bursting at the seams – Akbar finally had more than three hundred wives- but the political advantages of this stream of presentation princesses, one of whom later came from as far away as Tibet, were incalculable…The actual number of women in the harem was nearer to five thousand. Many of these were older women, but there were also young servant girls, or Amazon from Russia or Abyssinia as armed guards, all with the status only of slaves. It was these who, if so required, were the emperor'sconcubines. The three hundred were technically wives, even though the Koran limits the number to four' (Gascoigne 73).

Basu thus constructs a supplementary history, not a new one, but complementing, rethinking the past, only to provide a clearer picture of the time. As Alex Rutherford would say, "Also because the chronicles cannot tell us everything – their writers would never have dared reveal certain things – I have used the novelist's freedom to imagine some incidents and of course to attribute motivation" (Rutherford 395). Thus Basu's The Miniaturist can rightly be considered as a chronotope.

Transnationalism involves almost an inharmonious, multiferous, and skeptical mode of interpreting history as opposed to the obedient & superficial approach of the traditional historicism. It has a spirit to critically examine the array of cultural and transnational linkups where from these artistic representations emerge. This hermeneutical aggression, wherein

culture is deliberately included as an important text – a prerequisite for the understanding of an artistic representation have led to the expansion of the range of objects to be read, interpreted or considered (Banerjee 12). Many a thing that has been lost in the alleys of metahistory on the basis of the fact that they were too minor to fascinate or hold the interest of the powerful, are now being incorporated. As Catherine Gallagher would say:

There has been in effect a social rebellion in the study of culture, so that figures hitherto kept outside the proper circles of interest – a rabble of half crazed religious visionaries, semiliterate political agitators, coarse faced peasants in hobnailed boots, dandies whose writings has been discarded as ephemera, imperial bureaucrats, freed slaves, women novelist dismissed as impudent scribblers, learned women excluded from easy access to the materials of scholarship, scandalmongers, provincial politicians, charlatans and forgotten academics – have now forced their way in, or rather have been invited in by our generation of cities (Gallagher and Greenblatt 9).

Thus we observe an incorporation of the marginal, the subaltern, the micro narratives and the fragmented memories with a definite objective. Ghosh and Basu's Transnational writings thus enables to reframe a significant part of history, which has been neglected and deliberately kept outside the mainstream discourse.

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