

Zulfikar Ghose

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The Lost Son of the Punjab

By

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For Ayan

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INTRODUCTION

In over five decades of sustained literary activity, Zulfikar Ghose has avoided making an explicit response to the major events of his time. In most of his poems, stories and novels, there is scarcely any direct reference to the partition of India in August 1947, or to the 1971 break-up of Pakistan which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh, or the Cold War, or most recent of all, the 9/11 bombings and their impact on South Asians living abroad. As a human being he is touched by the events of the partition of India, but he does not take up sides in a political sense. He is sorrowful over the carnage in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and what is happening in Pakistan today saddens him even more deeply. More importantly, indeed strikingly, is the fact that Ghose is not, in the usual postcolonial studies sense, a political writer. In other words, he is not committed to any political ideology and/or resistance strategies. Yet, his work highlights, among other things, structures of authority, and exploitation of all kinds—religious, political, and economic. In sensibility, Ghose's work is full of reverberations, of a meditative kind, and finds expression in a style that is fastidious and scintillates the reader's mind with its brilliance and clarity. His genius resides in the creation of a language that is lyrical and full of vivid imagery. Capturing the beauty of the images of his native Punjab, and of the South American landscape, imbuing the air with the fragrance of the jungles of the Amazon, his prose excites a Nabokovian pleasure that sends a shiver between the 'shoulder blades.' In his experimentation with form, he (to use Pound's phrase) 'make[s] it new.' His literary journey from the mimicry of the nineteenth-century realism to the most experimental and ambitious works such as *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script* and *The Triple mirror of the Self* reflects his wide range of experimentation with form and style.

Ghose's experimentation with form and his struggle to find a unique style does not mean that he merely submits himself to novelty. Likewise, he does not succumb to the narrow, provincial ideas of nationalism and binary positions of the East vs. the West, colonial vs. colonized, center vs. marginal, so on and so forth. In fact, Ghose keeps himself away from all the usual modalities that are so avidly taken up by most writers in postcolonial contexts. What remains central in Ghose is, as we shall see in the subsequent pages of this study, his obsession with form and a struggle

to find a style for his provocative subject matter.

As suggested earlier, Ghose's work is still full of socio-political material. But, with the exception of his first two novels, he does not compromise his style at the cost of the content of his work. His paramount consideration remains 'how it is said' rather than 'what is said.' This study, among other things, investigates the structural patterns in the novels of Ghose that give each of his works its peculiar aesthetic design. Without falling into the temptation of the truthfulness of Ghose's work to geographical settings and autobiographical experiences, I have made an effort to show Ghose's negotiation between his style and the reality his works reveal. This study notes the author's correspondence between language and reality, highlighting his evolution as a writer.

Respecting Vladimir Nabokov's advice in his *Lectures on Literature* on showing "kindness to authors" (1), I respect Ghose's dismissal of nationalistic category and all other categories of literature. Therefore, I do not want to prove that he is an Indian, Pakistani, British, American, and/or a 'postcolonial' writer, or anything of that sort within standard definitions. I acknowledge that this study is simultaneously a reading of his novels in a "good old fashioned way" in which a writer is appreciated for his work only by exploring his achievement as an artist, both in terms of style and content. The emphasis is, precisely, on the author's negotiation between language and reality. More specifically, the focus is on the evaluation of Ghose's novels through the critical framework erected by the writer himself. But before elaborating on this argument, and given that Ghose is a relatively unknown author, it is pertinent to have a brief account of his life and work.

Life and Work: An Overview

Ghose was born to Muslim parents in Sialkot in 1935, now in Pakistan. As opposed to the violent and traumatic years of the 1940s, Ghose's early years in Sialkot were relatively placid. Sialkot, unlike Bombay (now Mumbai), where Ghose and his family migrated to it in 1942, was rural and agrarian, a typical small Punjabi town. It had not then developed into the booming post-1947 city, or undergone industrialization and modernization. In his autobiography, *Confessions of a Native-Alien*¹ (1965), one can feel and capture the slow pace of life there:

... an avenue leading out of Sialkot, gracefully lined with trees, which in my imagination look like poplars. A graveyard where an old man is

¹ From this point on, I will refer to this book as *Confessions*.

praying in the shade of a tree. The tall, profusely sweating peanut-vendors who chanted their presence in the streets. The potter's house which I passed every day, the potter at his wheel, his hands always in front of him, moulding clay. (21)

Ghose left Sialkot when he was seven years old, but this dreamlike vision, tinged with sadness, of Sialkot captures the routine life of the ordinary people there: the decrepit man praying, the peanut-vendors struggling to make their living by trying to sell peanuts, and the poor potter's back-breaking job who works every day suggests the plight of the people still true half a century later. This somber vision of the poor in the rural Punjab is translated at a larger scale in his second novel *The Murder of Aziz Khan*.

In 1942, he moved along with his family to Mumbai, where he attended a missionary school. The time in which Ghose was born and grew up was marked by the struggle for the independence of India, as well as the attendant Muslim League demand or movement for a separate nation-state. The movement resulted in the partition of British India into contemporary India and Pakistan. The period was characterized by brutal communal violence between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Ghose, at the time of partition in 1947, was living in a predominantly Hindu city, Mumbai. That was naturally a time of fear for a Muslim boy in the volatile milieu there. Remembering those moments Ghose says: "Walking down the street in the morning, one would find the hacked limbs of a man lying on the pavement. Lorries, collecting dead bodies, would pass by the streets as though they were collecting garbage cans" (*Confessions* 31). This reflects the tyranny, decadence and decay in human values on the eve of the partition.

Ghose and his family emigrated to England in 1952. The period in England, also unlike Mumbai, was marked by initial economic prosperity for his family, and later economic struggle for Ghose. This period, however, was intellectually rewarding for him. Ghose met with several established and acclaimed writers, and committed himself to a writing career. He graduated in English and Philosophy from Keele University in 1959. He edited *Universities' Poetry*, and also did a number of other jobs: he served as a cricket correspondent for *The Observer*, reviewer on *The Guardian*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and *The Western Daily Press*, and also taught high school students. Between 1952 to 1969, he published two books of poetry, *The Loss of India* (1964), and *Jets from Orange* (1967); a collection of short stories with his friend B.S. Johnson, *Statement Against Corpses* (1964); and an autobiography, *Confessions of a Native-Alien* (1965). He also wrote two novels during this period—*The*

Contradictions (1966), and *The Murder of Aziz Khan* (1967).

In 1969 Ghose migrated to the United States, when he was invited to teach at the University of Texas at Austin. He has been living there since. During this time he has published nine novels under his own name, in addition to *The Texas Inheritance* (1980), which was published under the pseudonym of William Strang. His nine novels are as follows: *The Incredible Brazilian*, a trilogy which comprises *The Native* (1972), *The Beautiful Empire* (1975), and *A Different World* (1978); *Crump's Terms* (1975), *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script* (1981), *A New History of Torments* (1982), *Don Bueno* (1983), *Figures of Enchantment* (1986), and *The Triple Mirror of the Self* (1991). He wrote critical works too, including *Hamlet, Prufrock and Language* (1978), *The Fiction of Reality* (1984), *The Art of Creating Fiction* (1991), *Shakespeare's Mortal Knowledge* (1993), *Beckett's Company* (2009), and *In the Ring of Pure Light* (2011). Poetry books include *The Violent West* (1972), *A Memory of Asia* (1984), *Selected Poems* (1991), and *Fifty Poems* (2010). He also wrote a short story book, *Veronica and the Gongora Passion* (1998). Ghose has a few unpublished novels, too, which are lying with the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas, Austin. The unpublished novels are *The Deccan Queen*, *The Frontier Province*,² *The Desert Republics*, and *Kensington Quartet*. In addition, he has an unpublished play called *Clive of England*, and an unpublished book of criticism *Proust's Vision of the Beloved*. There are a number of other uncollected poems, short stories and essays as well.

Ghose's Ideas on Art, Literary Criticism, and Colonialism

In order to evaluate Ghose as an English language writer, it is necessary to discuss, at least briefly, some of his controversial ideas on art and artists, teachers and learners, colonialism and postcolonialism. Ghose is probably one of the most accomplished English language writers today. But he is an enigmatic literary figure whose unflinching stance in favor of form as opposed to ideas and content has stirred dislike, if not hatred, against him in literary-critical circles. He has been accused of being an elitist who lives in a vacuum. Without doubt, very few writers from South Asia have labored so prodigiously for art, and this effort certainly deserves public gratitude and a fuller critical appraisal.

Unfortunately, the current critical practice, which is largely concerned

² Ghose says that there might be another version of *The Frontier Province* which he previously titled *Rajistan, Texas*. Message to the author. 6 April 2012. E-mail.

with the relevance of art to the society and important issues of the time, has cost him the readership that he otherwise deserves. In his book *The Art of Creating Fiction*³ (1991), he clearly establishes his vision of the parameters of great art. Ghose is a stylist, who, in his critical books, especially, *Art*, has acknowledged the example and critical thinking of Flaubert, Henry James, Proust, Nabokov and Virginia Woolf as being crucial to his own development as a writer. In his essays and lectures, Ghose has repeatedly emphasized what he calls the paramount importance of aesthetic design. Quoting a passage from Proust in a lecture at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, titled, "On Being a Native-Alien: The Question of a Writer's Identity," he reiterated two of Proust's phrases when he declared, "Quality of language and the beauty of an image are the heart of great writing" (12).

If a writer wants to have a unique voice in a work of fiction, Ghose suggests the creation of a language which should "essentially be a body of images" (*Art* 3). As he acknowledges in this book, this is not a new position on creating literature; many great writers, such as Marcel Proust, have propagated this notion. Ghose despises a piece of art which champions a cause or message at the cost of form and style. Therefore, he dismisses, for instance, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck and the likes for their search for subject matter to write a novel. Ghose has serious issues with Hemingway's style of writing, noting:

Early in the history of the English novel, there appeared a work called *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. In it, Defoe hit upon a fascinating scheme: take an Englishman, place him in a hostile foreign setting, and make him survive. Over two centuries later, you take that formula, replace the Englishman with an American (or a group of Americans), and you write *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *The Sun Also Rises*, and the idiotic public, never looking beyond subject matter and easily flattered by seeing images of itself, readily gobbles it up. (*Art* 107)

One may not agree with Ghose's point of view on Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, or indeed on Hemingway's work, but he raises an important question of self-absorption and sensationalism in approaching a piece of fiction in which "seeing images of itself" represents, in fact, a kind of narcissism.

Far from being narcissistic and self-centered, Ghose offers a detached involvement with a literary text. He shows us, for instance, how the "*Crusoe* formula" is used successfully both by Melville and Conrad. He argues:

³ From this point on, I will refer to this book as *Art*.

... with them [Melville and Conrad] the imagination seems compelled by some mythical force and the discovered imagery has an oceanic depth in the universal human memory, whereas with the lesser writers like Hemingway the formula is merely exploited in order to appeal to the taste of what Henry James called 'the great gossiping, vulgar-minded public'." (Art 107)

In these lines Ghose not only criticizes Hemingway, but also highlights how old subject matter can be successfully used to make a great piece of art. In other words, working in the "tradition" (in the sense T. S. Eliot uses the term) one can come up with an individual talent that could possibly create an original style. Furthermore, at the outset, at least, he argues for reflexivity, that a writer should not care about the reader, the general herd and its concerns. In other words, the writer's business is not to present what is interesting for the public but what is in the interest of art.

Ghose claims that a piece of art stands by itself. He highlights the "interior area of torments that is constantly in a beclouded, turbulent atmosphere" (Art 6). However, he demands a distinction between an art that stands for affliction and personal pain alone as opposed to the one that is not obsessed with personal anguish but still transforms that pain into an objective outer reality: less "I" and more camera eye. For sociopolitical concerns Ghose recommends: "leave the important issues of the time to journalism and television talk shows and if you're really enraged by an issue and feel a pressing need to be involved then take up politics" (Art 35). This does not mean that Ghose's work completely ignores sociopolitical concerns. But for him these concerns are incidental, they are 'by-products' of art, and do not drag the writer into the political quagmire of the postcolonial world. Still, a Marxist might argue that this sort of aestheticism is in fact complicity with the political domination because of the statement's seemingly arrogant indifference to the depiction of the societal problems in a work of art. However, Terry Eagleton's comments are thought provoking. He states, "the aesthetic as custom, sentiment, spontaneous impulse may consort well enough with political domination; but these phenomena border embarrassingly on passion, imagination, sensuality, which are not always so easily incorporable" (28). This is an important comment on the inherently subversive nature of art.

In this regard, Ghose is in line with James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, as opposed to T.S. Eliot. M. Keith Booker in *Literature and Domination* (1993) mentions that "Eliot's reaction to the breakdown of authority in modern society is to attempt to restore the authority of the past and thereby to reinforce structures of power that he sees as tottering on the brink of total dissolution" (2). Although Ghose praises Eliot for his idea of

'tradition and individual talent,' Ghose's own work, on the contrary, defies the structures of exploitation that are set to alienate human beings. This breakdown of society is effectively portrayed in Ghose's *Crump's Terms* and in a humorous way in *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script*. Such a phenomenon, according to Booker, "illustrates the central involvement of literature with issues of power, authority, and domination" (*Literature* 3). This sort of position, at least at the surface level, is diametrically opposed to Ghose's own critical framework. But Ghose also argues that "Language and reality appear in my mind as two figures in a courtly dance, reaching towards each other, coming into a momentary formal contact, then inevitably parting and receding from each other until the music gradually fades into silence" (Dasenbrock and Jussawalla, "A Conversation" 142). Thus, a complementary juxtaposition of language and reality gives literature what Booker calls "real subversive power" (*Literature* 3). And juxtaposition of language and reality is fundamental to Ghose's art. This is why I place an emphasis on Ghose's correlation between style and subject matter.

Nonetheless, Ghose's formulations about art make us ask the question of whether or not Ghose is really, fully aware of the postcolonial experience. I suggest that he is. The treatment of socio-historical realities in his Brazilian trilogy, for example, and some of his subsequent novels, is testimony to this. But he does not want it to be the determining factor of his writings. In other words, he has an awareness of history, but he does not want to (with the exception of his early work) make a statement about particular state of affairs in a country or a society. Therefore, Ghose's position in the postcolonial era today is problematic, for he negates both colonial and postcolonial politics in literature. This sort of politics in a work of art, in Ghose's view, is to seek equal opportunity employment in the USA, particularly, and elsewhere, generally. He asserts, "Art is not an Equal Opportunity Employer and literature cannot be expected to fulfill some Affirmative Action Programme" (*Art* 155). He further elaborates:

A group of novels by South African writers, for example, makes for a semester's package tour of racial guilt, moral outrage and historical enlightenment, and the eager economy class students, who are more anxious about their grades than about their culture, don't even realise that the ride they're being taken on has nothing to do with literature. (*Art* 58-9)

This is a remarkably bold statement to make, especially at a time when much of literary studies are confined within the post-imperialist guilt. There is no doubt that in the twentieth century some of the best literature was produced in the former colonial outposts. Thus, this is not to look

down upon the cultural production of the former colonies, and make them look inferior; but to admit that there are certain pressures on the critical minds and on critics in 'metropolitan' academia to accept and appreciate mediocre art on the basis of often rather narrow nationalistic categories, with overt stress on the 'political' agendas and frequently misleading generalizations inherent in such texts.

What is expressed in the above quotation is a glimpse of Ghose's contempt for contemporary critical practice in the classroom. What will follow now, let me accept at the outset, is an extremely unpleasant critique of a literary critic. Ghose asks:

You may follow what religion you like, that is between you and the idols on your private altar; but if you insist upon corrupting literature with your deconstructionist or feminist or any other ideological point of view then you are no different from the polyester-clad mums and dads who appear each year at the textbook hearings and insist that creationism be taught in the place of evolution, and what you do not realize is that, in spite of all your sophisticated jargon, you are essentially dumb and deserve the contempt in which writers hold you. (*Art* 34)

Here he criticizes the typical trendy jargon in a certain type of contemporary critical practice, which has become orthodoxy in itself. Ghose does not stop here; to further highlight his rejection of the contemporary critical practice, he quotes Flaubert who in a letter to his mistress Louise Colet states that "It doesn't require much brains to be a critic" (qtd. in *Art* 34). Although Ghose makes his point by invoking great artists of the past such as Flaubert, it is rather frustrating for a literary critic to be confronted with this sort of 'attitude' which is certainly not conducive to improving the relations between Ghose the artist and the critics of his art. But one must admit that nevertheless Ghose's critique of the contemporary critical practice is couched in a language at once pitying and sparkling. More important, it is also a fact that in contemporary critical practice, while dealing with ethnic writers in particular, there is very little attention to the artistic beauty of a work.

I agree with Ghose that critics ignore literary merit of a work, and focus on trendy issues of the time. But my concern against a certain type of postcolonial criticism, for instance, has another dimension. In spite of the critic's talk extending over the domains of identity, multiculturalism, and giving "voice" to the marginal, it is essentially superfluous; it is merely intellectual sloganeering and debate which conceals the society's real and practical subjugation at the hands of the few. Critical theory, as Aijaz Ahmad rightly points out, has become "a conversation among academic professionals" (*In Theory* 2). Coming from a former colony, I

believe that much in the critical practice is irrelevant to the former subjects, and creative writers in the once British India. Think about what, someone coming from South Asia, for example, has to do with an elaborate talk on multiculturalism and hybridity when a majority of the people in the region are suffering poverty, and, among other miseries, do not even have access to something as basic as clean drinking water. Ahmad argues, “a majority of the population [of the postcolonial world] has been denied access to such benefits of modernity as hospitals or better health insurance or even basic literacy; can hardly afford the terms of such thought” (*In Theory* 68-9). In his recent book, *The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power* (2008), Tariq Ali discussing malnutrition in Pakistan states that “60 percent of children under five [are] moderately or severely stunted” (1). Worse still, the exploitation of the local elite, feudal and industrial, military and civil accompanied with the politics of uniforms and dynasties, and religious fanaticism which is complicit with the power corridors is hardly ever discussed. Thus, the real issues of economy, greed, lust for power, and exploitation of the ordinary individuals are ignored by critics and criticism today, in favour of some limited 'pet themes'.

I want to emphasize further that though the literary critics generally seem concerned with cultures and societies, they do not really ask hard questions about gender, class, civilizations, and cultures. Perhaps this has to do with the much in vogue idea of ‘political correctness.’ This is not to suggest that Ghose, in his critical work, raises hard questions about different cultures and societies. He does not even pretend that he cares about the world. He sits in his ivory tower, and is proud to be an elitist. His creative works, in this case novels, do, however, portray the issues of exploitation but not at the cost of style.

However, Chelva Kanaganayakam, in his book *Structures of Negation: The Writings of Zulfikar Ghose* ⁴(1993), claims that “Ghose is hardly apolitical” (4). Indeed, as suggested earlier, Ghose’s work is full of socio-political matter. But the content, as suggested earlier, is not independent of his style. And Kanaganayakam, here, means that Ghose is political in a postcolonial critical sense. He further argues that Ghose is aware of the circumstances that led him into exile from his homeland to England. In support of his argument Kanaganayakam quotes Ghose as saying: “No one in the history of the planet has plundered, devastated and brutalized land and humanity more than did the Europeans from the time that Columbus

⁴ From this point on, I will refer to this book as *Structures*. I am grateful to the author for allowing me to quote from this book. I have benefited immensely from this work.

sailed looking for India in the wrong direction to the time the British went starboard home in the right direction" (4). Indeed this reflects Ghose's understanding of history and the major players in it. What precedes these lines which Kanaganayakam quotes is the harshest criticism of the English and their colonization of India. In *Beckett's Company* Ghose says, "the English had their own whore. The great cow India." He further adds that "second sons and unmarried daughters [of the English] went sailing to Calcutta ... for an easy change of fortune and to have their petty melodramas later chronicled by their third-rate novelists" (24). It requires no feat of imagination that Ghose here refers to E.M Forster, and his *A Passage to India* (1924). Ghose considers Forster a lesser novelist; however, it is worth mentioning that Ghose's first novel, *The Contradictions*, has much in common with *A Passage to India*.⁵

Nonetheless, going back to the issue of colonization, Ghose, at the same time, admits to the contributions made by the Europeans. Thus, after narrating the exploits of the Portuguese, French, Spanish, Dutch, and the English, he argues that "it would be foolish, if not stupid, not to acknowledge that the world is an infinitely better place because of the European than it would have been if it had been left to the Indians or the Egyptians or the Mayans" (*Beckett's Company* 27-8). This is a highly debatable argument. Especially, in the present day context, this is an extremely politically incorrect statement that can surely attract, among other things, adverse criticism on the "crime" of being non nationalistic. But, we have to remember that nationalism for Ghose and in his work is simply nonexistent. We can come up with the same parallel in one of the most prominent Urdu poets, Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869). Ghalib's diary, *Dastambooh*, records the brutality, and ruthlessness of the resistance movement that emerged during the 1857-58 rebellion, as well as reciprocal iron-handedness of the British against the locals. Aijaz Ahmad mentions that "Ghalib, like many other Indians of the time, admired British, and therefore Western, rationalism as expressed in constitutional law, city planning, and more" (*Ghazals* xiii). By extension, I argue that what is considered as a demerit of most of the English language writers from South Asia—their lack of militant ideological response to the colonization of India—from the local critics, in particular, is in fact a tradition—of keeping literature away from narrow nationalistic dilemmas—that can be traced within the writings of the vernacular writers as well.

There are certain hard facts about pre-colonial India, for example, that must be acknowledged too. Despite the Mughals' tremendous contribution

⁵ I will come to this aspect in chapter one of this book.

to art and architecture, for example, their rule failed to establish any children schools worth the name, any public hospitals or a variety of other social welfare services. Most left wing historians in the region such as Mubarak Ali and K. K. Aziz will testify to this assertion.⁶ There is no doubt that the British found India in a chaos and gave a sort of order to this world, yet it is another aspect altogether that they left it in a somewhat similar state of chaos at partition, a strange set of contradictions. Ghose seems awake to all these aspects and dimensions of the colonial experience and its pros and cons; but this does not mean that Ghose's work becomes 'political' in the sense of postcolonial studies' politics because of his realization of the 'plundering' and looting of the Europeans. He maintains, in my opinion, an honest sense of history yet is not a historical-propagandist by any means.

Apart from Ghose's sense of history, his conception of reality largely formulates the basis of his thesis about art. The search for reality in art, according to him, could lead one to despair. In his critical book *Hamlet, Prufrock and Language* (1978), Ghose, placing great emphasis on the word 'speak' in *Hamlet*, comments that the ultimate purpose of literature is "to test relationships between language and reality. If we could only hear or speak or arrive at the words which explained, we would know; and having the illusion that there is a necessary correspondence between language and reality, we are driven to despair when our words seem to reveal nothing" (8). Thus Hamlet's problem, according to this view, is his inability to find meaning in his existence because language explains nothing to him.

For Ghose reality does not mean the immediate socio-political reality only; rather he takes up the question of reality at a different level when he says that reality can be seen in diminished things. In 1991, Ghose visited Pakistan after twenty eight years, and described his experiences in his essay "Going Home." Talking about his visit to the Peshawar Museum, he states:

At the Peshawar Museum I was struck by the power of the incomplete statue of the fasting Buddha to fix the itinerant self in a timeless and bodiless space. The missing parts of the statue appear to have a vital

⁶ In recent times, this has become a contested argument. Interestingly, some Western historians like William Dalrymple are of the view that the Mughals contributed a great deal to the educational system in India. But we should not confuse maktabas and madressahs with primary schools and universities. Ismat Riaz's article, "The Mughal Legacy." Dawn: Pakistan, 27 Feb. 2011 underlines this controversy. <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/27/the-mughal-legacy.html>

presence ... that which is not there startles the mind with the certainty of its being; it is an image of amazing contradictions, and illustrates the essential ambiguity of all perception: reality can be composed of absent things, the unseen blazes in our minds with a shocking vividness. (15)

This is an interesting passage, for not only does it describe his stance on the issue of reality, but at the same time it reflects the collective amnesia of the nation, and the politics of narrow nationalism and tyranny. Interestingly, such concern is also addressed by the Pakistani poet Omar Tarin who, in his poem, “Gandhara, At The Taxila Museum” (in *The Anvil of Dreams* 1994), highlights the same issue with melancholy.

Gandhara, you are framed!
 Glazed
 And gazed at,
 Your terra-cotta soul
 Of ochre and bronze
 Is locked and contained
 By those who defaced
 You of your character; (1-8)

The power of the images of the “incomplete statue of the fasting Buddha,” and “terra-cotta soul” of the Gandhara civilization leads us to acknowledge the unseen, which is forgotten by the state. These images, thus, help to revise the buried past which is not acknowledged by the country. “The missing parts of the statue” become a symbol of the absence and distortion of the history of Gandhara civilization in Pakistan. The history text books in Pakistan reflect very well the general deceptions of so-called “truth” paraded by the state: its nationalistic obsession with preserving the one which only helps promote the state sponsored narrative.⁷ In effect, the ‘gaps and silences’ of this narrative are eloquent, just as the missing parts of the fasting Buddha and the restrained, contained soul of Gandhara speak out via their absences.

Yet, the essay “Going Home,” from where the passage on the “fasting Buddha” is taken, is not directly concerned with the political situation in Pakistan. The reason for discussing the image of “the fasting Buddha” is to

⁷ On the state of history and historiography in Pakistan K. K. Aziz wrote numerous books. He paid the price for writing objective history: he was continuously bullied by the Pakistani state machinery; eventually he had to leave the country under General Zia’s ruthless regime. My view on teaching of history in Pakistan is based on Aziz’s *The Murder of History: A Critique of History Textbooks Used in Pakistan*. Lahore: Vanguard, 1993.

establish that, if a writer pays attention to the details and creates images, provocative and much more subversive subject matter automatically follows. This is Ghose's inescapable, perhaps the most important, lesson for the reader.

To sum up, this section, I suggest that Ghose's views on art and literature are based on three things. First, his views are indebted to the masters, the ones mentioned earlier, of European literature: the literary question comes before the political. Second, Ghose's sense of history that the issue of exploitation is not new, and should not be seen in terms of East vs. West, colonial vs. colonized, so on and so forth. Third, the issue of reality should not be deliberately confined to the socio-political reality only.

The Argument

This section deals with Ghose's literary obscurity and critical neglect. And, finally, I make my case for the evaluation of Ghose's work on the basis of his achievement as a writer.

In 1963 Ghose received a special award from the E. C. Gregory Trust that was judged by T. S. Eliot, Henry Moore, Herbert Read and Bonamy Dobrée.⁸ A year earlier, in an issue devoted to the newly emerging Commonwealth literature, *The Times Literary Supplement* featured Ghose as a prominent poet from the former British colonies by conspicuously printing three of his poems spread across half a page.⁹ By the time he was featured in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (1989), Ghose had been accorded major status as a writer of international repute. As the editors of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* noted in their "Introduction," "Zulfikar Ghose has both ranked with and outranked several of the best English language writers in England and America." They went on to present him as "a unique figure in contemporary literature" whose "evolution across languages and national boundaries" was comparable to that of Conrad, Nabokov, and Beckett (108-9).

In spite of receiving such notable early attention, Ghose has remained by and large a marginal presence, and if I may use a word which sounds a little inappropriate, 'untouchable', in the critical practice where some writers are accorded a world-class status such as Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul. Of the several reasons advanced for Ghose's marginalization by

⁸ Note on dust jacket of *The Loss of India* by Zulfikar Ghose (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

⁹ *The Times Literary Supplement*: London, 10 August 1962.

scholars of world literature and post-colonial studies, the most significant one is that his oeuvre resists categories. Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock note that:

An expedition in search of Ghose's books in the library is an illuminating experience: for example, [in] the library of the ... University of Texas Austin, his books are to be found in four different places. Some of his earlier work with Asian settings and most of his poetry is to be found under South Asian Literature in English; his early collection of short stories written with B.S. Johnson ... is located in English literature; most of his recent work is found in American literature; but *The Incredible Brazilian* trilogy, seen perhaps as "adventure literature," is located in the PZ section reserved for adolescent literature and popular fiction. Each of these classifications—except for the last—is logical enough, we suppose, but the net result is that Ghose's work is dismembered and unavailable to readers as a whole. (109)

This passage clearly highlights Ghose's literary obscurity, and suggests difficulties in putting Ghose in a neat literary category.

Jussawalla and Dasenbrock, in the same introductory essay on him in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, noted pointedly that Ghose has "displayed little or no interest in the dilemmas of immigration and transplantation that have so occupied other South Asian writers." Although several of his novels are set in South America, "his use of that locale is sufficiently his own to distinguish himself from the South American writers," that, unlike other South Asian writers, he is engaged in "experimental modes of fiction," that "Ghose's work, in short, is *sui generis*, and he is a unique figure in contemporary literature" (108-9).

Sarah Brouillette, an academic at MIT, points out another factor that explains Ghose's literary obscurity, that "the stronger argument for Ghose's marginal position must emphasize the tendency of the market to promote writers who are easily identified with a political identity related to a specific nationality, who can then be marketed in those terms to a typically Anglo-American audience for literary fiction" (101). This "tendency of the market to promote writers" on the basis of political and national identity is successfully complemented by a certain, dominant strand of critical practice within the field of postcolonial studies.

Ghose's obscurity and critical marginalization can also be explained from another aspect which M. Keith Booker anticipates in his book *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* (1999) expressing that the " 'Rushdie's children' model of [South Asian] literary history will overestimate Rushdie's importance and obscure other important trends in Indian literature" (2). Of course, this model has overestimated Rushdie's importance as a writer.

And surely, it has obscured “other important trends,” such as counterrealism in South Asian Anglophone literature. Since Rushdie flaunts his Indian identity, he is given a great deal of importance by some popular literary critics of Indian origin in the West. It is also true, however, that the fatwa against Rushdie also played an important role in his prominence. Whereas, Ghose is not a mouthpiece of any culture or region, he is ignored.

But I must admit that ‘Rushdie’s children’ model is an interesting template to deal with many of the South Asian English language writers. There is no doubt that Rushdie has influenced many of them. But Ghose is not one of them. Thus, one cannot evaluate Ghose’s work in the light of the “Rushdie’s children model.” Highlighting the problems of this model, Booker states that “not only does it [Rushdie’s children model] lump together too many very different writers in a single category but it leaves out important English-language writers (such as Mulk Raj Anand, Manohar Malgonkar, and even R.K. Narayan) who simply will not fit in” (*Critical Essays* 2). Ghose, too, does not fit in. He cannot be placed under the rubric of ‘Rushdie’s children’ model, for, among other things, Ghose created complex works such as the Brazilian trilogy long before Rushdie became prominent on the world literary scene.

According to Booker, Rushdie’s remarkable reception by the critics has many reasons: he is a writer of genius; his work is complex, and addresses issues of cultural importance; his literary technique corresponds very well with the western critic. Rushdie’s use of irony, parody, and carnivalesque imagery made him an ideal postmodern writer (*Critical Essays* 2). All these traits, among other things, determine Ghose’s work as well. Ghose’s work, too, is full of irony, parody and carnivalesque imagery. But what obscures Ghose is that he does not deal with the subject matter Rushdie does. For example, as mentioned above, Rushdie, among other things, is concerned with South Asian history and the political events that have defined, and continue to do so, the nature of the region. More importantly, Rushdie’s rhetoric for India, and of Indianness, and his growing familiarity within the western capitalistic structures, earned him enviable popularity. Ghose, on the other hand, as already explained, is not a commentator on postcolonial issues. Therefore, not being involved in the South Asian cultural politics and not fitting in the ‘Rushdie’s children’ model, Ghose’s marginalization in critical circles and South Asian literary historians is to an extent understandable.

There is only one book length study on Ghose’s work so far. The study, *Structures of Negation: The Writings of Zulfikar Ghose*, by Kanaganayakam grew out of his doctoral dissertation that he completed in

1985 at the University of British Columbia. It is an admirable work, and I have acknowledged earlier that I have benefitted from this book. Broadly speaking, the book addresses the following fundamental questions: Ghose's experimentation with form, his significance as a postcolonial writer, and that the issue of 'native-alien experience' underpins his corpus of writing.

On the question of form, my study agrees with Kanaganayakam's claim that reading Ghose through form is inevitable (8). But his experimentation with form is not to explore 'native-alien experience.' I think Ghose's experimentation with form suggests his conscious decision to emulate the important writers of the west: the likes of Shakespeare, Chekhov, Joyce, and Beckett. When Ghose moved away from his two early realistic novels, form remained his major concern. However, I do not study all the novels through form except the trilogy. In *A New History of Torments*, *Don Bueno*, and *Figures of Enchantment*, for instance, my focus remains on the ideal of objectivity in these works; whereas, Kanaganayakam reads these works as magical realist. My focus, on the whole, as suggested earlier, is to study Ghose's correspondence between style and content.

As to the issue of Ghose being a postcolonial writer, I do not agree with Kanaganayakam. In his study, he highlights Ghose's significance as a postcolonial writer (9). Fawzia Afzal-Khan in her review of *Structures* argues that "the term postcolonial is never rigorously examined" in Kanaganayakam's work (641). To Kanaganayakam's defense, given the nature of the field of postcolonialism, this nebulous entity is hard to define, and, perhaps, defend on the basis of hard historical facts. Afzal-Khan points out another problem of the study that Kanaganayakam finds himself in the same paradox that he "discovers in Ghose's position—that is, to show that he both is and is not "political"... that he both is and is not a "political" writer" (641). Again, any critic dealing with an English language writer from a former colony finds himself in a dilemma. As a matter of fact, to briefly point out, any evaluation of a so-called Third World literature is highly problematic. To begin with, it is taken for granted, it seems, that the evaluation has to be political rather than aesthetic. The critical analysis has to deal with, one way or the other, the issues of nationalism and colonialism. In addition, broadly speaking, the metropolis critic is patronizing toward the English language literature from the former colonial outposts, ignoring the question of craft, which gives prominence to a certain type of writers. The local critic, on the other hand, finding the English language writings less nationalistic, is hostile and ethnocentric, chauvinistic and dismissive of these writings. Such a situation puts you in a paradox.

Therefore, in order to avoid dilemmas such as nationalistic pitfalls, I categorically maintain that my concern in this study is to discuss Ghose's experimentation with form, his subject matter, and to discuss how his style negotiates with his content.

Therefore, this study, as pointed out in the beginning, among other things, investigates the structural patterns in the novels of Ghose that give each of his works its peculiar aesthetic design. I observe that in his work, though the style of his expression gives what is expressed its special resonance, his subject matter, nevertheless, is not without relevance to contemporary socio-political dynamics. Above all, to put it again, I highlight success as well as failure of Ghose's negotiation between his style and content.

Ghose's development as a writer from his preoccupation with realism to the artifacts of language and the irrelevance of physical and geographical belonging is a very distinctive aspect of his writing. Ghose's preoccupation with form is a conscious one, for he does not believe in formulaic writing. That is why he looks up to the gurus of English literature as opposed to aligning himself with any specific cultural, political, or identity politics. He remains an artist who creates his art, and is not responsible to any political agenda of the postcolonial world. In this study, to reiterate again, I make my way between Ghose's solipsistic stance on art and aesthetics and the issues of exploitation, and the structures of authority that his work effectively reveals.

Finally, I am interested in Ghose's writing due to his unique voice, one that is not made paranoid by the so-called seriousness of the popular critics in postcolonial studies. In addition, I cannot think of any other writer from the postcolonial era who has defended the question of art so unflinchingly in the face of the onslaught of the politics of postcolonial studies, still highlighting very important issues of exploitation in a provocative way. Therefore, I acknowledge that this study, as pointed out earlier, is simultaneously a reading of his novels in a "good old fashioned way" in which a writer is appreciated for his work by exploring his achievement as an artist, for he finds his home in art. Adorno mentions that "writing becomes a place to live," but [i]n the end, the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing" (in Said n. pag.).

In this regard, I respect the writer's views on the issue of pigeonholing. At a time when literary criticism, in general, has a little place for an author's point of view, I take into account Ghose's position on the issue of categorization of literature. Therefore, I do not want to put him in a category, and let him live in his work. In an answer to a question by Dasenbrock and Jussawalla he acknowledged, "Yes, Nabokov and Conrad

would be my great companions in this. I aspire to their position in the world of letters where you are accepted for what you have done and not because you have conformed and put yourself into a pigeonhole” (148). So, this study will not put him into a category, but evaluate him for what he has achieved in terms of form, style, and subject matter.

On the whole, this study provides a foundational understanding of Ghose’s novels especially for South Asian students, and in Pakistan in particular, where Ghose’s works have been included in university syllabi and courses. Thus, an effort is made to give him a close reading which could be helpful to understand his corpus of writing. With this background in mind, I have devised chapters of my study to have an overall picture of his novels.

Chapterization

The five chapters in this study deal with Ghose’s published novels only. Chapter one deals with the first two novels, *The Contradictions* and *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. These two novels belong to his early mimetic phase of writing. They reflect the socio-political concerns in colonial India, India and Pakistan. The mode he takes up is realistic. He tries to highlight the important concerns appertaining to the society in those times. Both *Contradictions* and *Aziz Khan* operate in the nineteenth-century realistic mode which shaped much of the postcolonial novel. *Contradictions* deals with petty life of the British ruling elite in colonial India, and *Aziz Khan* deals with the failure of the promise of post-independence Pakistan.

Kanaganayakam, however, argues that the subject matter of these novels is to meet the certain demands of realism or realistic fiction that need to be adhered to. In other words, to justify the needs of the realistic form, the writer has to bring in socio-political subject matter. He records one of his personal conversations with Ghose. He says:

... his [Ghose] main focus was not British India in *The Contradictions*. Referring to *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, he says that the main intention was not to show how bad things were in Pakistan. The objective, which is not primarily sociological, is in a sense embodied in a narrative mode that is ideally suited for the portrayal of external reality. (38)

Despite Kanaganayakam’s defense of obvious referentiality in the novel, it is concerned with the socio-political realities in the newly born Pakistan. Ghose himself states that the novel was his response to a newspaper report that he had read during his visit to Pakistan in the 1960s.

The newspaper report was about a landlord who was forced to quit his land for the establishment of an industry.¹⁰

In *Aziz Khan*, the historical material is looked at thoughtfully, and the social milieu is treated very carefully. This novel is thus a greater achievement of the writer in his early career than *Contradictions*. Despite its limitations, the novel remains a major work of art; however, the historians of South Asian fiction in English did not pay much attention to this novel. Referentiality, as stated earlier, remains fundamental to this novel, which goes counter to Ghose's overall ideas about art and fiction writing.

In Chapter two, instead of dealing with *Crump's Terms* which was written before the trilogy but published later on, I take up the trilogy: *The Incredible Brazilian*. For one, *Crump's Terms* shares more with his later novel, *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script*. Second, the trilogy is in many ways a rewriting of his second novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. The title of the novel is strikingly referential. It clearly states that it is about Brazil. However, Ghose uses Brazilian history successfully to create an imaginative work that reminds us of works like *Don Quixote* and *Little Big Man*. I look into the historical material and the form of the trilogy to evaluate it properly. The trilogy comprises three big novels, and revolves around a central figure called Gregorio who undoubtedly reminds us of Don Quixote. Thus, here Ghose takes up a much older form known as the picaresque mode.

The trilogy, indeed, takes on the issues of the real world. I have focused on the trilogy through the picaresque form. The trilogy, as mentioned earlier, in terms of its subject matter, is a rewriting of Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan* on a larger scale. It has a canvas, and uses Brazilian history successfully. But, at the same time, it remains an authorial imaginative construct. Ghose has proven that he can create a work where the subject matter is not without relevance, but also a text which is of great imagination. Thus the trilogy has the appeal both for its historical treatment and form.

Chapter three addresses *Crump's Terms* and *Hulme's Investigation into the Bogart Script*. *Crump's Terms* was Ghose's third novel, but it shares affinities with *Bogart Script*; therefore, these two novels are put together for analysis. The former is a stream of consciousness novel, and highlights the issues of language and reality and ineffective communication: the failure of language that highlights the problem of existence. The latter is in a sense a postmodern novel, in which Ghose experiments with the meta-

¹⁰ Ghose, Zulfikar. Personal interview. 9 Aug. 2006.

fictional mode. Both these works are experimental, and draw attention to the writer's craft. In these novels, style and content successfully complement each other.

Ghose wrote *Crump's Terms* in 1968, just one year after the publication of *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. But it was only published in 1975. It is an unusual, experimental novel, one that the publishers did not expect from a writer of the postcolonial world. In this chapter I analyze *Crump's Terms* and explore what makes it distinct from Ghose's earlier two novels. The setting of the novel moves from Pakistan to Europe, and the mode he adopts is one that we might call stream of consciousness. Ghose consciously picks up the form that marks the break with his earlier experimentation with the realistic mode.

Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script was written in the 1970s after the completion of the second part of the Brazilian trilogy, *The Beautiful Empire*, and before the third part, *A Different World*. But it was published in 1981. Like *Crump's Terms*, nobody was ready to publish it. *Hulme's Investigations*, is fundamentally a fictional construct. It also addresses the issues of modern individuals who struggle against an exploitative socio-economic system. The issue of exploitation is highlighted through commercialization of female body and unreal human relationships. To highlight these issues Ghose uses camera-eye narrative technique.

Chapter four takes up *A New History of Torments* (1982), *Don Bueno* (1983), and *Figures of Enchantment* (1986). In these novels, one does not fail to notice the verifiable settings which are evident from the names of the places and the people in these novels. This could, as some reviews have suggested, lead one to read these works as straight realistic novels. However, Ghose's own point of view helps to establish the fact that referentiality is not his primary concern. About these novels Ghose states:

"Actually the setting has nothing whatsoever to do with anything. With these novels, I entered a phase of pure invention. There are images in them that come from direct observation ... But I am not concerned in them with common reality. I create the illusion of reality when in fact I have no reality at all, except that of the imagination." (qtd. in Kanaganayakam 138)

Ghose reiterates his stance on reality as mere imaginative construct. But, one still wants to know about the verifiable names of the places, Ghose asserts: "You could take *A New History of Torments* and change all the Spanish names to Indian names, substitute the Himalayas and the Ganges for the Andes and the Amazon, but the novel itself would not alter [in] the slightest" (in Kanaganayakam 138). If we do a close reading of the narrative strategy of these novels, this assertion is not necessarily untrue.

More important, these novels are characterized by the principle of objectivity, which is the main concern of this chapter. Despite some strong socio-political substance, these novels are truly objective narratives. This phase informs us of Ghose's imaginative powers. Again, in these novels too, Ghose highlights reality convincingly. Therefore, more than the question of referentiality, it is important that these novels portray the sexual politics, and other dynamics of exploitation which range from physical domination to gender exploitation completely objectively.

Chapter five deals with *The Triple Mirror of the Self*. Published in 1992, the novel proves a turning point in Ghose's literary career. It virtually closed doors for Ghose's subsequent novels. It is an interesting and complex work. What is distinctive about this novel is that it opposes the conventional norms of literature, and at the same time, thematically, is subversive of authority, tyranny, and power structures including the academic establishment. *The Triple Mirror* is an ambitious work in terms of setting, form, and style. The novel is set on four continents: South America, America, Europe, and the subcontinent of India. In its content and locale, form and style, the novel offers a blueprint of what Ghose has achieved in his oeuvre. The writer depicts a dreamlike world, complicated, and yet stunningly real, full of socio-political violence. Ghose presents his subject matter through vivid imagery. The novel's dense, imaginative prose keeps us conscious of its language; whereas, mindless violence depicted in the novel makes it a politically aware text. As he has done in his previous works, Ghose's narrative strategy is just as significant as the subject matter.

In this chapter, I try to highlight a complex relationship of style and content in the novel, and to respond to the issue raised by Kanaganayakam regarding the novel's opposition to Ghose's views expressed in *Art*.

In the end, these five chapters are followed by a conclusion.

